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Preface

The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation or *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* (RJ) and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation have over the years collaborated modestly in a few activities financially supported by the RJ. This publication signals another form of cooperation. It came about as the result of an encounter at the World Social Forum (WSF) in Nairobi in January 2007, where the RJ Sector Committee for Research on Civil Society had organised a Panel on ‘Global civil society – more or less democracy?’.

For more than 40 years the RJ has been one of Sweden’s leading funders of research in the humanities and social sciences. It also sets up sector committees in research fields that are judged to be significant but have not yet been developed or given sufficient attention. These committees are tasked to assist in exploring and strengthening a particular research landscape. They investigate the need for research investment and promote the exchange of information in sectors considered of special significance. The committees are composed of scholars and representatives of other social agencies and institutional interests in Sweden.

The Sector Committee for Research on Civil Society was established in late 2003. It meets several times a year and collaborates with a wide international network, as illustrated by the contributors to this volume. Most of them participated as presenters or discussants in the panel at the WSF in Nairobi. In a subsequent meeting during the WSF to discuss further the common interests of the Committee and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, the idea for this joint collaboration emerged in recognition of the strong overlap in their networks and thematic focus. Since then the Committee has held a meeting at the Dag Hammarskjöld Centre in early June 2007 and the RJ approved a funding budget to cover substantial parts of production costs of this publication and its wider dissemination through the Foundation.

As a result, this special issue of *Development Dialogue* represents a noteworthy form of collaboration between Swedish researchers and civil society actors with an internationalist orientation and commitment, and also reflects the cosmopolitan perspective and strong concern for global justice of Dag Hammarskjöld himself. We would like to thank all members of the Sector Committee for being so enthusiastic about this arrangement, the editors and contributors who filled the following pages with substance, Wendy Davies for her once again meticulous language editing, and Mattias Lasson for another professional and creative lay-out. We trust that the results merit our concerted efforts.

Uppsala, July 2007

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DEMOCRACY?

Introduction

Mikael Löfgren and Håkan Thörn

As part and parcel of the modern discourse of democracy, ‘civil society’ is one of the essentially contested concepts of political modernity – in the context of political debates and struggles as well as in academic discourse. The 18th century liberal conceptualisation made a fundamental distinction between state and (civil) society. In the 20th century it was Marxists, under the influence of Antonio Gramsci, who made a distinction between the three spheres of the (capitalist) economy, the state and society.

Since the 18th century, up until its ‘rediscovery’ during the 1980s, when the concept of ‘civil society’ was revived in order to conceptualise developments in Eastern Europe and Latin America, the various definitions of civil society have been associated with the modern nation state. The recent discourse on a ‘global’, ‘international’ or ‘transnational’ civil society implies the emergence of a new global political space, distinguished from the world of inter-state ‘international politics’. Various and conflicting definitions of ‘global civil society’ are around – reflecting different interests, political identities and strategies. Institutions such as the World Bank, aid agencies, development non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private foundations use ‘civil society’ as part of a reformulation of North/South relations in the context of ‘development aid’. In a different context, at the meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle in 1999, 1,600 NGOs signed an appeal in the name of ‘international civil society’. ‘Civil society’ is also used in the defining document of the World Social Forum (WSF), the Charter of Principles.

According to some scholars and activists, the emerging global civil society represents a forceful and promising response to the ‘democratic deficit’ that has been one of the most problematic aspects of the globalisation process hitherto. However, criticism of the notion of a global civil society (and against the concept of civil society as such) and the various developments it represents is also frequently expressed. To put it simply, two contradictory views have been put forward. One is that the increasing importance of NGOs globally, and the policy/governance networks they are part of, represent a project through which political and economic elites, hungry for democratic legitimacy, compete in their attempts to colonise actual and potential spaces of popular participation. The most striking examples given are

related to the aid industry, where NGOs channel private or government funding, which arrives with particular conditions that impose certain (Western) values on the receiving context. This is in contrast to the second view, which sees global civil society as representing grassroots self-organisation of social spaces which have been colonised by the practices either of technocratic administrations or of private corporations (or an alliance of the two, promoted under the rhetoric of 'good governance'). Civic actors are here seen as potential carriers of democratic learning processes (widening the meaning and practice of democracy), initiators of public debates – through which marginalised issues and social groups are made visible globally – and guardians of human rights in relation to states and other powerful organisations, such as transnational corporations.

There is of course much to be added to these two positions. For this reason, the Committee on Civil Society Research in Sweden decided to organise a seminar titled 'Global Civil Society – More or Less Democracy?' at the WSF in Nairobi in January 2007, focusing on democracy and civil society in the context of contemporary globalisation. It was also decided to follow up the seminar with a publication, inviting additional contributors who were not part of the seminar in Nairobi, but who have a strong interest in issues related to global civil society. The key questions we asked were:

- What are implications for democracy of the increasing number and activities of NGOs, social movement organisations and private foundations globally – whether we choose to conceptualise these as 'civil society' or not?
- In what sense does (or can) global civil society contribute to further democratisation in an era of globalisation?
- In what sense can global civil society undermine democratisation processes?

These are of course very broad questions but nevertheless urgent ones. In order to clarify the background of the seminar a bit more, it is appropriate to say a few words about the Committee on Civil Society Research in Sweden, which consists of both scholars and representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Sweden. The scholars in the group have all carried out research about developments in Swedish civil society – both in a historical and a contemporary perspective – and some have also looked at the links with the emerging global civil society. This research has shown that in the Swedish national context, civil society has played a fundamental role in democratisa-

tion processes during the 19th and 20th centuries. This is not to say that civil society is all about democracy, or that by its nature it has some kind of 'inherent democratic potential' that is only waiting to be realised. But it can still be argued that no substantial democratisation has occurred without the participation of social movements and a strong civil society in any part of the world.

But what about democracy in the context of globalisation and global civil society? Those who have hope in global civil society may respond that a further developed and strengthened global civil society is a precondition for democratising globalisation. Many see the WSF as a driving force in such a process. The WSF is indeed a manifestation of one of the important formations of current global civil society. Gathering between 65,000 and 150,000 people (each individual representing networks, organisations or activist groups on all continents) in Porto Alegre, Mumbai and Nairobi, it is without doubt the largest gathering in human history of transnational political activists with global democracy on their agenda. But is it actually moving the world in the direction of a democratisation of globalisation – and in what ways? Does it practise democracy? And how does the Forum relate to other sections of global civil society? It was in order to find out more about this that we invited some of the 'movement intellectuals' of the Forum process to the seminar in Nairobi.

The first three contributions in this volume investigate some key concepts in the debate, namely civil society, globality, democracy, solidarity and civility.

Jan Aart Scholte examines the proposition that today's global civil society enhances 'rule by the people' in contemporary politics. He underlines the complexity of the question, and stresses that it depends on the ideas of civil society, globality and democracy that one adopts. Consequently, he scrutinises each of these concepts before drawing his conclusion: global-scale civil society activities can do much to enhance democracy in society today, although their potentials remain far from fully realised. Scholte argues that globalisation to date has involved considerable de-democratisation, in at least four important aspects: (1) citizen ignorance about global affairs and their governance; (2) flawed institutional processes (the lack of real public participation in policy-making); (3) structural inequalities due to country, urban/rural divides, class, culture, gender, race, caste etc; (4) the fact that national identities constructed in relation to a modern territorial state tend to squeeze out other kinds of collective solidarities (such as those among indigenous peoples or certain religious communities).

Reinhart Kössler and Henning Melber confront the notion of (international) civil society with that of (global) solidarity, thus reminding of a socialist internationalist tradition that goes back to the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, and further. They note that the *tiers-mondisme* of the 1960s and 70s has been replaced by a new wave of global mobilisation, which is characterised by a variety of different goals and intentions ‘without seeking to predetermine a concrete common denominator’. Kössler and Melber find a starting-point in international activist Peter Waterman’s list of six meanings of solidarity. There are, on the one hand, extreme differences between regions when it comes to consumption of limited non-renewable resources. On the other hand, we all have to pay the price for the excessive industrial production and consumption based on a model of (pseudo-) unlimited economic growth. This means, according to Kössler and Melber, that solidarity takes on a wider and more urgent meaning than that of a mere moral postulate: ‘In this sense, solidarity today is a political requirement, if not a pragmatic need.’

In his contribution Helmut Anheier reminds us that the debate on global civil society has been very conceptual, and not focused on the empirical research findings. Taking as his point of departure the six previous editions of the yearbook *Global Civil Society*, Anheier distinguishes a number of central characteristics in the emergence of a global civil society from the 1970s and onwards. Among them he notes: the shift in cultural and social values from material security to concerns about democracy and cosmopolitan values, a broad-based mobilisation in social movements, growing disillusionment with state-led multilateralism in the Third World among counter-elites, vastly reduced costs of communication, the changed geopolitical environment and economic downturn after 2002, new forms of organisation – the social forums and other transnational networks – and the resurgence of religion. Anheier also points out the shortcomings of our understanding of global civil society, for instance Western biases, the failure to address the relationship between global civil society, conflict and violence, and the neglect of the notion of civility. By including civility in the definition of global civil society, Anheier concludes, means that we do not focus solely on ‘what’ global civil society is but also address the ‘how’ and ‘why’.

Jai Sen, Teivo Teivainen and Patrick Bond all raise questions about the political possibilities and shortcoming of global civil society in general, and the WSF in particular.

While acknowledging the roles that national and global civil societies have played historically and continue to play in the democratisation of national and global societies, Jai Sen argues that in a larger perspective, and in relation to a wider and deeper democratisation that is today unfolding across the world with other sections of societies taking the lead, global civil society is in reality tending to play some rather negative roles. This, he argues, is on account of the dynamics and dialectics of civil society's historical project of building civility, and moreover because of the tendency to corporativism that exists within civil society during the present phase of neoliberal globalisation and the emergence of the leadership of international and transnational civil organisations as a transnational class. Finally, Sen offers some preliminary propositions for a shift to an alternative politics.

In his article Patrick Bond gives a picture of a twofold situation. On one hand he sees a 'down time' for global-scale social change work in the radical tradition. On the other hand, he notes constructive activities for advocates of global justice such as the WSF and its constituent movements, and the linking of social movements sector by sector across borders. Bond argues that the WSF stands at the crossroads. He notes that at the Forum in Nairobi in 2007 there were several critical viewpoints expressed concerning the lack of democracy, transparency, equality and political action inside the Forum itself, as well as tendencies towards commercialisation, privatisation and militarisation of the Forum space. Bond describes four positions in regard to politics in the WSF: (1) the Bamako Appeal, presented by Samir Amin and others at the WSF 2006 in Mali, which combines the traditions of socialism, anti-colonialism and (national) development; (2) an anti-privatisation activist standpoint, arguing that local responses to neoliberalism face more urgent needs to turn everyday survival into sustained confrontations with an increasingly repressive state; (3) a classical socialist, party-building approach; (4) a position that seeks the 21st century's anti-capitalist 'manifesto' in the existing social, labour and environmental movements that are already engaged in transnational social justice struggles.

Teivo Teivainen notes that there has been surprisingly little systematic analysis of how the political is manifested in the actions and articulations of the globalisation protest movement – in spite of all the general attention it has gained. Teivainen declares himself sceptical about what he calls 'the civil society blah-blah-blah', so often heard from both academics and activists. Rather than relying on any predefined concept of civil society he focuses on 'practices that are shaped in its name' and the politics behind them. He argues that the WSF is by no means what it claims to be: a space open to all organisations.

On the contrary, the Forum has various geographical, sectorial, ideological and civilisational limitations. He stresses that the road from politicising protests to transformative politics is filled with dilemmas. Teivainen considers the political not only in relation to state and government, but also in other kinds of social relations including articulations between social movements. He also argues that politicisation is a key aspect of democratic struggles. It is a vital task to make the WSF process itself more democratic.

The history and meaning of civil society depends on the regional context. The experiences of Latin America, Eastern Europe including Russia, and Africa differ from those of Western Europe or the USA – a fact that Moema Miranda, Steve Ouma and Alla Glinchikova remind us of in their contributions.

Moema Miranda takes her starting-point in a book by Amílcar Cabral, the leader of the anti-colonial struggle in Guinea-Bissau, and his theoretical efforts to make this struggle fit the Marxist scheme of class struggle – despite the fact that his people was not organised in classes, but in groups or tribes and according to other parameters than that of a capitalist order. Miranda concludes that we have to be conscious about the words we are using. After given some characteristics of the globalisation, both of capital and civil society, Miranda notes the de-politicisation of economic and social relations. She regards civil society not as a homogeneous space, but as a dense and intense field of contradictory relations. Miranda warns against regarding global civil society as some kind of engine of history – a mistake that has been made before. Many of the groups that confront capitalism most strongly today, and whose intention is to radicalise democracy world wide, are more or less excluded from the concept of civil society, traditionally understood. Miranda refers, for example, to the indigenous peoples of Latin America, who declare themselves as ‘peoples’ not as ‘part’ of another people. Consequently, they cannot be perceived as civil society actors. They are advancing radical proposals for re-arranging the state and social relations. They affirm that the indigenous agenda is only one contribution to the struggle ‘for everybody’s liberation from every kind of exploitation and oppression’.

In his article Steve Ouma argues that the spatial conceptualisation of civil society is based on the very notion of an ‘imagined community’ of the nation state. He further postulates that globalisation has put to the test the cohesive forces of the nation state. Moreover, it has made the state very porous. In addition, the institutions and mechanisms of international governance have caused human rights violations and

social injustices that are not under the control of the nation-state. Consequently, civil society organisations have been compelled to organise themselves to deal with this new centre of power and oppression. In pursuing this argument, the author gives an illustration of the emergence of human rights CSOs in Kenya and the organising of the CSOs around the World Trade Organization (WTO). This parallelism illustrates that what has changed are the spaces where organising takes place. The tools, contradictions and ideology remain largely the same. As is illustrated by the Seattle protest, civil society organisations have moved into this new space with their twin traditional agenda of being the vanguards and mobilising popular participation in governance. In conclusion, Ouma suggests that this new centre of organising must be utilised without repeating the mistakes that CSOs have been making in the national context.

According to Alla Glinchikova there was not much talk of civil society in Russia during Soviet times. Civil society first became an issue when the communist system collapsed. Together with free elections and free press, among other things, civil society represented the new-won freedom. Now, more than 15 years later the Russians have realised that the so-called West is not in a hurry to accept them into its civic family. Glinchikova argues that the best definition of civil society is a special space of activity where people discuss and deliberate on their problems and develop their autonomous activity. But, she adds, this definition works only for countries which already have civil society and are preoccupied with searching for a new social space. For a paternalistic society like Russia's, where a civil transformation never took place, this is a word without content. This means that all talk about a global civil society must take into consideration the huge differences that exist between different parts of the world.

The last three articles examine three key actors in today's global civil society: NGOs, corporations and social movements with democracy at the top of their agenda.

Lorenzo Fioramonti argues that civil society is not only a fuzzy notion, but also an inherently heterogeneous and often contradictory reality, as extensive research on un-civil society and democracy has revealed. He argues that the same contradictions affect the new phenomenon of global civil society and its fight to democratise global governance institutions. Not only are various actors within global civil society often influenced by international institutions and multinational corporations, but anti-democratic practices, abuse and oppression exist and persist within global civil society. In this regard,

it is crucial to acknowledge that issues such as lack of accountability, transparency and democratic participation haunt global civil society as much as multinational corporations and international institutions and affects its legitimacy. In light of that, Fioramonti maintains that the contribution of global civil society to global democracy is dependent upon its capacity not to replicate the same aristocratic and oppressive patterns it is purportedly fighting against.

In their article Christina Garsten and Kerstin Jacobsson examine the role in the globalisation process that is being played by corporations. They observe that the current economies of scale mean that corporations are increasingly operating across and beyond borders, and that ideological shifts in the 1980s provided more leeway for global corporate activity. The authors argue that attempts to regulate the market forces are increasingly characterised by a belief in the possibility of consensus. The trend towards voluntarism means that political conflicts are transformed into moral frameworks, like for instance the Corporate Social Responsibility standard. Garsten and Jacobsson focus on global regulation and governance, which they find increasingly post-political in nature. They question whether these new post-political forms of regulation and reliance on market mechanisms contribute to a strong sense of democracy on an international level.

Håkan Thörn takes as his point of departure the debatable question of whether the present globalisation process has meant more or less democracy. More countries than ever before proudly declare themselves as democratic because they have established procedures for free elections. At the same time the power of national political institutions has been weakened under the pressure of transnational capital and hollowed out by a significant withdrawal of citizens' interest in and commitment to party politics. Thörn defines global civil society as a space of struggle over the rules that govern the world, and over the control of material resources and institutions. It is neither an inherently 'democratic' nor a neutral space. Think tanks, forums and interest groups like the Bilderberg group, the Trans-Atlantic Business Dialogue and the World Economic Forum are significant parts of an influential formation of contemporary global civil society. The social movements for global justice have often focused on, and mobilised against, the influence of these groups. The anti-apartheid movement provides an important historical case for enhancing our understanding of the links between post-war and current global civil society mobilisation.

So what is this volume's answer to the title's question about global civil society and democracy? Does global civil society mean more or less democracy? Or neither? Or both more and less?

As always, what you see depends on the beholder and the perspective. All four answers are possible and relevant. Though they differ in many respects, the contributors agree on one thing: the globalisation process hitherto has not mainly been characterised by its democratic achievements. On the contrary, the democratic deficits in terms of lack of popular participation and public transparency on almost all levels of decision-making should be a concern for everyone on this planet, not only for the élites.

No one in this volume argues that global civil society is the answer to all problems. Democratisation is not a singular, continuous, one-dimensional endeavour. It takes many forms and works through a variety of channels and on several levels: local, national, regional, continental, global. Many features indicate that the economic integration of the globe has left social and ecological considerations behind. Global civil society can and most likely will play a role in catching up in these aspects. It is crucial that that happens. The time at our disposal is not endless. Humanity faces huge challenges to which there are no long-term solutions other than more democracy.

In reference to the world-wide demonstrations on 15 February 2003 against the awaited and feared US invasion of Iraq, the New York Times labelled global civil society the world's second superpower. It is highly questionable whether the world needs more superpowers, if any at all. But if so, global civil society – and a manifestation of it like the World Social Forum – has still to prove to the world that the way it wields its power is truly democratic with regard to both goals and means.



Global civil society

– Opportunity or obstacle for democracy?

Jan Aart Scholte

Introduction

Is civil society activity, scaled up to global dimensions, an antidote to the failings of democracy in politics today? A number of leading scholars from highly diverse theoretical positions have advanced such a proposition. In practitioner circles, too, countless activists and officials have argued similarly. But is it actually the case that global civil society enhances ‘rule by the people’ in contemporary politics? If so, in what ways and to what extent do these democratising effects occur?

A complicated question does not permit of a simple answer. So many variables are in play that the general conclusion regarding global civil society’s impacts on democracy can only be: ‘it depends’. Conceptually, it depends on the ideas about civil society, globality and democracy that one adopts. Empirically, whether and how far global civil society advances democracy depends on the contextual circumstances of each concrete situation.

The following article elaborates this argument in four main steps. The first section considers notions of civil society and indicates that different conceptions yield different answers to the question of implications for democracy. The second set of remarks specifies what is ‘global’ in global civil society and notes that considerable expansion of this political space has occurred in recent history. The third section elaborates an understanding of democracy and identifies the main shortfalls of ‘rule by the people’ that have accompanied contemporary globalisation. The fourth section suggests that global-scale civil society activities can in principle do much to enhance democracy in society today, although these potentials remain far from fully realised.

By design, this article is a summary, and therefore simplified. For more extended analysis, including many examples from civil society campaigns around the world, readers may turn to longer treatments of these issues that I have undertaken elsewhere.¹

¹ Scholte, J. A. (forthcoming), *Civil Society and Global Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity; and ‘Democratizing the Global Economy: The Role of Civil Society’, available in seven languages at www.csgr.org.

Civil society

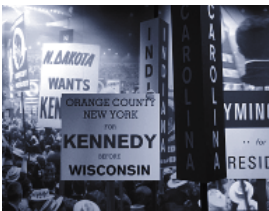
Like any key analytical notion, ‘civil society’ has multiple and deeply contested definitions. These conceptions have also varied widely over time since the Latin term *societas civilis* first appeared more than two millennia ago. Aristotle, Locke, Hegel, Gramsci and other political theorists have meant very different things by the concept. Thus no definition of civil society can be final and conclusive. Each student of politics must arrive at an understanding that they find most suitable.

When making that choice, four main contemporary usages of the term ‘civil society’ might be distinguished. First, for some analysts civil society refers to a quality of a given human collectivity. From this perspective a ‘civil society’ is one where people relate with each other on a basis of tolerance, trust and non-violence. A second type of definition identifies civil society as a political space, an arena where citizens congregate to deliberate on the actual and prospective circumstances of their collective life. This conception overlaps considerably with notions of the public sphere. A third general approach treats civil society as the sum total of associational life within a given human collectivity. In this case ‘civil society’ encompasses every non-official and non-profit organisation outside the family, including bodies like recreational clubs that lack an overtly political character. A fourth formulation, invoked widely in policy circles today, talks of ‘civil society organisations’ and tends to equate them with so-called non-governmental organisations (NGOs). On these lines ‘civil society’ involves a ‘third sector’ (alongside the state and the market) of formally organised, legally registered and professionally staffed non-profit bodies that undertake advocacy and/or service delivery activities in respect of some public policy issue.

Clearly assessments of the extent, causes and consequences of global civil society will vary depending on the notion of civil society that one adopts. All too often disagreements about the existence or otherwise of global civil society arise because parties to the argument start from different definitions of the subject and as a result talk past one another. To avoid such confusions it is crucial that commentators always indicate as clearly and explicitly as possible how they are conceiving of civil society in a given analysis.

Adhering to that principle, it can be specified that the present article draws primarily on the second type of conception distinguished above while giving it a particular kind of associational emphasis. Civil society is taken here to entail *a political space where associations of citizens seek, from outside political parties, to shape the rules that govern one or another*

area of social life. As understood here, then, civil society activities are an enactment of *citizenship*, that is, practices through which people claim rights and fulfil responsibilities as members of a given polity. These initiatives are also *collective*, involving citizens assembling in groups that share concerns about, and mobilise around, a particular problem of public affairs. As self-consciously *political* actions, civil society operations are steeped in struggles to affect the ways that power in society is acquired, distributed and exercised. However, civil society efforts to shape governance do not – in the way of political parties – aim to attain or retain public office.



Civil society efforts to shape governance do not – in the way of political parties – aim to attain or retain public office.

Beyond these broad distinguishing features, civil society activities as conceptualised here vary enormously in size, form, duration, geographical scope, cultural context, resource levels, constituencies, ideologies, strategies and tactics. The wide spectrum of civil society associations encompasses anti-poverty movements, business forums, caste solidarity groups, clan and kinship mobilisations, consumer advocates, democracy promoters, development cooperation initiatives, disabled persons' alliances, environmental campaigns, ethnic lobbies, faith-based associations, human rights advocates, labour unions, local community groups, peace drives, peasant movements, philanthropic foundations, professional bodies, relief organisations, sexual minorities' associations, think tanks, women's networks, youth groups and more.

Although the definition of civil society is open to choice, that choice needs to be justified both intellectually and politically. Indeed, some commentators reject the very term 'civil society', finding it analytically vague and/or politically suspect. Regarding contemporary globalisation in particular, a number of radical critics worry that hegemonic elites have promoted 'civil society' (particularly in the sense of an aggregation of depoliticised NGOs) as a way to discipline dissent and promote a false legitimacy for an oppressive Western-dominated capitalist and imperialist order.

The present author is not as ready to dispense with a notion that has in many contexts across many centuries deepened analytical insight and advanced democratic practice. To be sure, ideas of 'civil society' must be used precisely and consistently to obtain the prospective knowledge. Moreover, notions of 'civil society' must be employed carefully and critically so that the practices in question are not captured for hegemonic ends and on the contrary advance counter-hegemonic forces. Thus 'civil society' as deployed in Eastern Europe during the 1980s often empowered the oppressed, whereas 'civil society' as invoked in World Bank programmes of the 1990s often acted as a political an-

aesthetic. The particular definition laid out above is analytically helpful in respect of present-day contexts, highlighting and discerning a logic in significant activities of current politics. Moreover, as defined here, the notion of civil society can – if used with vigilance against cooptation – be politically opportune for many subordinated circles in contemporary globalisation, helping them to gain recognition, resources and influence.

The globality of contemporary civil society

To assess how the concept and substance of global civil society does or does not advance democracy today it is necessary to clarify the first adjective. What does it mean to speak of ‘global’ civil society? As with ‘civil society’ in general, notions of ‘global civil society’ in particular also vary widely.

Broadly speaking, ‘global-ness’ refers to a scale of geography. Global spaces are social realms of planetary extent. Thus global communications, global finance, global disease, global war, global consciousness and so on are phenomena that interconnect people located anywhere on the earth. In this vein global civil society spans the planet (hence is ‘transplanetary’) and interlinks persons at sites across the various continents and oceans. ‘Global’ citizen actions are not confined to a given region, country or locality.

This broad notion of globality in civil society could be specified along any of the four lines distinguished earlier. Thus, for analysts who follow the first type of definition, global civil society exists to the extent that tolerance, trust and peace prevail in social relations on a planetary scale. Most assessments of this kind of ‘global civil society’ are sceptical and pessimistic. In contrast, those who adopt the fourth sort of definition usually take ‘global civil society’ to refer to the sum total of internationally organised NGOs (INGOs). Accounts in this vein are generally enthusiastic about a major proliferation and growth of INGOs since the 1960s. On the third type of definition, ‘global civil society’ would encompass the aggregation of all non-official and non-profit associations that operate on a planetary scale. However, this Toquevillian perspective has not figured much in current literature on global politics.

In contrast, the present analysis gives a global turn to the second type of conception. Thus global civil society is understood here as *a transplanetary political space where associations of citizens seek, from outside political parties, to shape the rules that govern one or another area of social life*. Glo-



What does it mean to speak of ‘global’ civil society?

bal civil society is therefore an arena of planetary proportions where people in groups practise a prototypical global citizenship in efforts to uphold or change the regulations and structures that mark the reigning social order.

The transplanetary quality of global civil society can be manifested in a number of ways. In part, global civil society activities occur when these citizen groups adopt a transplanetary organisational form. This institutionalisation might take shape in a unitary body like the World Economic Forum, or a federation like Friends of the Earth, or a loose coalition like the Campaign to Ban Landmines. In addition to INGOs, however, global civil society organisations under the second type of conception also include transplanetary social movement bodies like *Vía Campesina*, faith-based associations like the Jesuit order, and informal groupings like the mainly web-based People's Global Action against Free Trade and the WTO.

Yet the globality of global civil society can also lie in attributes other than the geographical scale of the citizen organisation. For example, the civil society activities can be global in the sense of aiming to affect global-scale rules. Even when the organisational parameters of a civil society association are regional, national or local, the group could concern itself with global laws, global regulatory institutions and global social structures. Indeed, sometimes civil society organisations themselves undertake global governance activities: examples in this regard include the International Fair Trade Association (IFAT) and the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC).

Civil society can also have a global character in terms of the issues that are addressed, such as climate change, debt crises, HIV/AIDS or other planetary challenges. Likewise, civil society activities can be global when they utilise global communications (like air travel and internet) to conduct operations. Or these citizen groups could tap global finance (like various foundations) to obtain resources for their efforts. In addition, civil society can be global when it involves non-territorial identities and associated transplanetary solidarities. For instance, many civil society campaigns concerning diasporas, sexual minorities and disabled persons have taken inspiration and strength from global bonds among the affected people, even when a particular action might be highly localised.

So the globality of civil society can be appreciated in a multifaceted sense, rather than in terms of organisational framework alone. Considering all the global rules, global issues, global communications, global

finance and global solidarities that are involved as well, the extent of global civil society in contemporary politics is much larger than the already impressive count of INGOs alone would suggest. The early 21st century may not enjoy much tolerance, openness and peace on a planetary scale, as a type-1 definition of global civil society would demand. However, a global political space of citizen initiatives to mould societal rules – as per the type-2 definition – is amply in evidence.

By no means is this to suggest that civil society has become completely globalised today, in the sense that regional, national and local arenas have ceased to be important for citizen mobilisation. On the contrary, the various scales are each significant and in practice deeply interconnected as well. In other words, every global civil society activity simultaneously has regional, national and local aspects. The global qualities never exist independently of – and are always filtered through – regional, national and local contexts. Conversely, it is also difficult to find civil society operations today that do not have a notable global quality of some kind. Purely local, national or regional civil society, hermetically sealed from global spaces, is no less an impossibility than a discrete global sphere. Thus citizens neglect at their peril the many global opportunities and global obstacles that now deeply affect civil society operations.

The increased globality of civil society has mainly developed since the middle of the 20th century. Of course nothing is ever completely new; hence one can find in earlier times notable instances in civil society of global organisation, relations with global governance, global issue focus, global communications, global finance and global solidarity. However, the scale, range, frequency, intensity and impact of globality in contemporary civil society dwarfs anything that came before.

(Global) democracy

Having now hopefully clarified a concept of ‘global civil society’, one can proceed to consider the implications of this phenomenon for democracy. Before examining the relevant evidence, though, a third definitional excursion is necessary, namely, to clarify a conception of democracy and to specify indicators against which one could assess the degree to which global civil society does or does not have democratising effects.

What is democracy? Literally, governance is democratic to the extent that it entails ‘rule by the people’. Democracy is understood here in a generic sense as a situation and a process where the people affected

by a given circumstance determine the policy decisions vis-à-vis that circumstance. The ways that ‘rule by the people’ is pursued has varied considerably over time and between cultures. Thus national self-determination through a territorial state (with accompanying bills of rights and elected representative institutions) is only one historical and cultural expression of democracy. Changing contexts – including possibly the current move to a more global world – call for different kinds of democratic practice.



National self-determination through a territorial state (with accompanying bills of rights and elected representative institutions) is only one historical and cultural expression of democracy

Whatever the particular context, though, ‘rule by the people’ could be said always, in one way or another, to manifest the following five general qualities. First, democracy prevails when a given public (the *demos*) takes decisions collectively, as a group. Second, democratic governance exists when all persons equipped to participate in politics (that is, excluding young children and the mentally incapacitated) do so on an equal footing, with equivalent opportunities of involvement. Third, democracy engages people as autonomous agents. In a democratic condition no one is coerced to participate or to take certain positions. Fourth, democracy is conducted in an open and transparent fashion, where all people affected can see what decisions are taken and how. Fifth, democracy is both a right *and* a responsibility. It combines opportunities with duties, liberties with accountabilities. In sum, then, democracy prevails when members of a relevant public decide – collectively, equally, non-coercively, openly and responsibly – the policies that shape their joint destinies.

In the more global world of the 21st century, the relevant *demos* often has planetary dimensions. Thus, for example, global diasporas have been deeply involved in autonomy struggles in Ireland, Palestine and South Africa. Internet users across the planet – as well as those excluded from cyberspace owing to digital divides – form a global *demos* in respect of new information and communications technologies. The affected people in global finance include a planetary *demos* of savers, lenders and borrowers, as well as millions of others who suffer the economic and social fallout of currency volatility, debt crises and other systemic problems. Global epidemics, global ecological changes, global migration and global governance regimes likewise implicate global-scale publics. Note from several of these examples that a global *demos* need not be universal, in the sense of encompassing every person on earth. It is enough to involve some people spread across the planet.

Global publics at present almost invariably suffer severe shortfalls of global democracy. Rapid globalisation in other areas of social life has not been accompanied by an equivalent globalisation of democracy. As

a result globalisation to date has on the whole involved considerable democratisation. The problem has four main interrelated aspects.

First is the problem of widespread citizen ignorance about global affairs and their governance. An effective democracy rests in part on knowledgeable citizens. A *demos* that is not sufficiently aware of its situation cannot exercise meaningful collective self-determination. When it comes to contemporary globalisation and the policies that shape it, levels of public understanding are on the whole very low. Schools, mass media, official institutions and other channels of public education have all generally failed to provide people with adequate information and analytical tools to make well-grounded decisions regarding global affairs.

A second broad source of democratic deficits in contemporary global politics relates to flawed institutional processes. It is not enough, in a democracy, for publics simply to be knowledgeable about the governance problems at hand. To exercise collective self-determination people must also be able to access the sites of decision-taking and involve themselves, directly or indirectly, in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public policy. Yet none of the governance institutions that currently operate in global affairs – whether states, supranational agencies, substate bodies or private regulatory mechanisms – has come close to fully engaging all affected people in its policy-making processes.

A third general democratic shortfall arises from the structural inequalities that pervade current regulation of global affairs. All members of affected publics clearly do not have equivalent chances to shape the governance of transplanetary issues. Moreover, these inequalities relate largely to historical accidents of how, where and when persons were born. Anti-democratic arbitrary hierarchies of power in global politics fall along multiple lines, relating variously to country, urban/rural divides, class, culture, gender, race, caste, generation, (dis)ability and sexual orientation. In other words, citizens who emanate from Northern countries, major cities, middle classes and modern Judeo-Christian cultures, and in addition are male, white, middle-aged, able-bodied and heterosexual have major inbuilt advantages over others when it comes to shaping governance of global relations. As a result, rules and regulatory institutions in today's incipient global polity tend to reproduce, if not exacerbate, embedded structures of domination and subordination.

In a fourth sense contemporary governance of global affairs suffers large democratic shortcomings owing to insufficient recognition of



Together, these four problems – citizen ignorance, institutional failings, structural inequalities and marginalised identities – have created enormous gaps of democracy in today's increasingly global world

various political identities. The *demos* takes multiple forms when it comes to global spaces, but relevant governance processes tend to bypass and silence a number of these ‘peoples’. Indeed, present arrangements accord by far the largest voice to a single type of political community, the state-nation. That is, national identities constructed in relation to a modern territorial state tend to squeeze out other kinds of collective solidarities. This privileged recognition for the state-nation is seen particularly starkly in official definitions of citizenship and in the membership criteria of most global governance agencies. By comparison, currently prevailing processes for regulating transplanetary affairs give little if any recognition to indigenous peoples, religious communities and other forms of *demos*, even though such alternative identities might for many citizens hold significant and sometimes also greater meaning than a state-nation.

Together, these four problems – citizen ignorance, institutional failings, structural inequalities and marginalised identities – have created enormous gaps of democracy in today’s increasingly global world. These aspects of the problem are, moreover, interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Thus, for example, conventional school curricula and mainstream mass media generally manifest and perpetuate arbitrary social hierarchies and cultural non-recognitions by marginalising these issues. Likewise, undemocratic institutional processes tend to reflect and reproduce embedded inequalities and exclusions. The dynamics of ‘de-democratisation’ thereby run very deep indeed in contemporary global politics.

Global civil society to the rescue?

If globalisation on the whole has brought significant de-democratisation, can the more particular globalisation of civil society promote re-democratisation? Having completed extensive preliminary steps of conceptualisation, one can return to the core question of this article: in what ways and to what extent does global civil society enhance rule by the people in contemporary politics? In a word, the current situation is one of considerable but also largely unfulfilled potentials. The degree to which these potentials are realised is substantially dependent on context.

On the positive side, there is much evidence (elaborated in the publications cited earlier) that a globalising civil society can help to counter all four of the main types of democratic deficits identified above. First, to tackle citizen ignorance, numerous civil society initiatives have advanced public education and public debate on global affairs.

Second, to improve public access to institutional processes of governing globalisation, countless civil society campaigns have provided channels of participation, increased the transparency of the regulatory bodies, and secured greater public accountability of those agencies. Third, to counter structural hierarchies of opportunity in global politics, many civil society associations have highlighted these inequalities, undertaken projects to empower subordinated groups, and advocated policies for a more equitable distribution of planetary resources. Fourth, to increase recognition of marginalised identities in global affairs, multiple civil society activities have given alternative ‘peoples’ spaces for voice that are not generally available through conventional party politics centred on the nation-state.

On the other hand, these important civil society contributions to a democratisation of globalisation need to be qualified in several ways. For one thing, the overall extent of these benefits has remained fairly modest to date. Civil society activities could achieve much more in this area. In addition, not all civil society initiatives in planetary politics are equally committed to building democratic governance. For example, many business forums accord this objective relatively low priority, while some other civil society circles like fundamentalist and racist groups pursue an unabashedly anti-democratic agenda. For the rest, civil society contributions to global democracy are often limited by democratic deficits in the operations of the citizen associations themselves. In this vein civil society interventions in global politics can suffer from within: in terms of ignorance and lack of critical debate; shortfalls in transparency and accountability; structural inequalities of access for all citizens; and non-recognition of marginalised political identities.

Hence the record to date of civil society impacts on global democracy is impressive as regards many creative and committed initiatives, but also disappointing as regards many promises not yet realised and in some cases actively frustrated. Why are the possibilities realised better in some contexts than in others? An astute diagnosis of the main circumstances affecting success and failure could point the way to future improvements.

When assessing causality in social relations one usually does well to consider conditions associated with social structure on the one hand and actors on the other. Key agents and structures combine in what the sociologist Anthony Giddens has dubbed ‘structuration’ processes to generate outcomes. What, then, are the main structural qualities and main agent attributes that, in complex interrelations, influence



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how and how far global civil society does and does not advance democracy in contemporary politics?

Taking the macro picture first, there are several major ways that social structures can, depending on the circumstances, either favour or frustrate global civil society efforts to enhance democracy. One of these types of structural forces, political culture, involves the established general ways that people engage with the regimes that govern their lives. For example, the political culture in contemporary republican France tends to be more supportive of global democracy campaigns than the more authoritarian political culture that has prevailed over centuries in Russia.

Also important in structural terms is the degree to which social hierarchies (on lines of country, class, culture, gender, race, caste, etc.) are entrenched or unstable. For instance, owing to differential degrees of patriarchy, civil society groups in the urban North tend to have relatively less difficulty to promote women's involvement in global politics than citizen initiatives in the rural South. Similarly, global civil society promotion of democracy hit greater obstacles of racism in apartheid South Africa 30 years ago relative to multicultural Canada today.

Alongside these various axes of dominance and subordination is the structural tendency of capitalist relations of production, if left unchecked, to generate highly unequal distributions of resources and consequent highly unequal opportunities of political engagement. Thus global civil society activities to democratise contemporary society need to be assessed in part according to the degree that they tame or possibly even transcend the dynamics of surplus accumulation. In addition, the rationalist structure of knowledge that predominates in contemporary governance of global affairs tends arbitrarily to marginalise and silence non-rationalist life-worlds, as found for example in various conservative religions and among many indigenous peoples. Hence the relationship between global civil society and democracy must also be considered partly in terms of the extent to which these citizen mobilisations expand space for a constructive coexistence of plural knowledges in a more global world.

Important though these various structural forces are, they do not tell the whole story of global civil society and democracy. Social structures delineate the frame of likely action, but agents decide what steps are actually taken within the range of possible steps. It is therefore important also to examine multiple features of the actors involved

that can either help or hinder civil society promotion of democratic governance of global affairs.

For example, a number of actors outside of civil society can affect the abilities of global citizen groups to further democracy. Particularly key are the attitudes and behaviours of regulatory agencies, including national governments and supranational bodies. For example, an enabling legal framework overseen by sympathetic officials with a sensitive awareness of civil society can hugely enhance citizen efforts to increase 'rule by the people' in global affairs. Conversely, however, restrictive laws applied by hostile and ignorant bureaucrats can considerably undermine the democratisation of globalisation through civil society.

Also pivotal in shaping the fate of global civil society efforts to build democracy are mass media organs. Substantial and supportive press reporting can give a major boost to global citizen campaigns. In contrast, media neglect and/or denigrating press coverage can substantially undercut civil society initiatives in planetary politics.

In addition to official and media actors, an analysis of civil society and global democracy must also consider the role of funders. In some cases the donors who underwrite many civil society campaigns can be highly supportive of efforts to democratise global politics. In other instances, however, financial sponsors can neglect or even positively discourage civil society promotion of global democracy.

Next to civil society relations with other players, one must also consider attributes of the civil society actors themselves. A key consideration in this regard is the resources that global citizen initiatives can and cannot mobilise in support of their efforts to bring greater public participation and public accountability to contemporary governance. Although many civil society groups that promote global democracy make impressively effective use of limited means, the general picture is one of severe resource constraints. Sometimes networking among groups – across countries as well as constituencies – can avoid duplications of effort and create larger coalitions for action. Often, however, civil society associations do not fully exploit the potentials for collaboration, and in certain cases campaigns are undermined by internecine rivalries. Another key resource issue concerns the levels of competence that civil society actors can tap to promote the democratisation of globalisation. In some instances global citizen advocates bring to the table impressive expertise, including information and insights that are largely missing in official circles. On other occasions, however, civil society interventions can

suffer from the sorts of citizen ignorance that have undercut democratic global politics in general.



How can civil society remedy structural hierarchies in politics at large if it is itself steeped in those same inequalities?

Finally, one must assess global civil society contributions to democracy in the light of the democratic credentials of the citizen groups themselves. With regard to participation, some civil society bodies make concerted efforts to include a wide range of affected people in their campaigns on global issues, but many others tend to perpetuate (sometimes quite inadvertently) inequalities of access along country, class, culture and other lines. How can civil society remedy structural hierarchies in politics at large if it is itself steeped in those same inequalities? In very many cases, civil society associations engaged in global affairs are sites of lively open debate, but in certain other instances civil society actors can enforce notable degrees of internal censorship. Concerning transparency, many groups in global civil society do not make themselves as open to public scrutiny as democracy might demand. Similarly, important exceptions duly noted, civil society associations operating in global politics generally have poorly developed mechanisms of accountability, especially vis-à-vis subordinated social groups (in some cases even when the organisation proclaims a specific goal of advancing the interests of these circles). In sum, if agents of global civil society do not maintain high democratic standards themselves, they are not likely to attract the trust and support they need from the general public in order to fulfil their promise of democratisation in politics at large.

Taken in sum, the above analysis indicates that global civil society is not inherently either a democratic or a counter-democratic force in contemporary politics. The critical issue for the future is this: how can civil society associations and other actors handle the opportunities and obstacles that face them in ways that maximise the contributions to a democratisation of globalisation? This question cannot be answered in terms of universally applicable 'best practices'. Given highly diverse cultural, economic, political and social circumstances across the world, every global civil society initiative must chart its own way to greater democracy. It might be hoped that the conceptual clarifications and analytical framework laid out in this article can be helpful on those journeys.



International civil society and the challenge for global solidarity

Reinhart Kössler and Henning Melber

'Historical experience must be our lamp.

But love must be our flame.'

(Sanbonmatsu, 2004: 227)

In a way, the ascendancy of the watchword 'civil society', which came to provide something like the flavour of the 1990s, can be juxtaposed with the seeming demise of another watchword that had been important throughout the 19th and 20th centuries: 'solidarity'. It was no coincidence that this happened in the wake of the growing resistance to – and final collapse of – Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe, mainly with reference to the movements that successfully challenged the satellite regimes in Poland, the ČSSR and the GDR 'from below', and articulated themselves as 'society' in contradistinction to (state) 'power[s]' (that be). However, as tends to happen with terminology that is in vogue, the notion of 'civil society', like the former concept of 'solidarity', remained largely vague and had multiple meanings. Some of the meanings and definitions are even contradictory amongst themselves.

Regardless of the iconisation of the slogan '*Solidarność*', the equally varied and often ambiguous meanings and definitions of 'solidarity' were not tested against the trends of the time. This also meant an obscuring of the perspectives on solidarity that had been powerfully voiced in earlier decades: by Frantz Fanon in 1961, quoting the opening words of the *Internationale*, in support of the 'Wretched of the Earth' and their struggles; by Jean-Paul Sartre in his preface to Fanon's book; and (for all their differences) by iconised figures of Third World internationalism such as Che Guevara, Amílcar Cabral, Ho Chi Minh and, indeed, Mao Zedong. It may be argued that with the discarding of a heritage that was as fascinating as it was deeply ambivalent and therefore burdensome, 'civil society', along with the likewise unspecified notion of 'good governance' (see Abrahamsen, 2000) seemed to present a benign and clean slate and, therefore, could set the terminological tune for the 1990s and beyond.

In the 21st century, however, discarding the notion of solidarity in this way has emerged as an equally problematic proposition. It there-

fore seems timely to look at the possible interrelationship between the two notions. Within the limitations of this article, we will not be able to discuss rigorously the meanings and implications of the two notions, or to present fully our previous efforts to give them substance.¹ Instead, we would like to explore possibilities for a political positioning of social movements on a global scale, against the background of a rather sketchy conceptual discussion.

In this we would like to stress that in contradistinction to widespread normative approaches concerning ‘civil society’ – both as a space within a particular society as well as in its international dimensions – it is crucial to see it neither as something ‘good’ nor as something ‘bad’. It is a vitally contested terrain (in the sense of arena) for social forces, with many – at times mutually completely opposite, intentions and motives, representing conflicting, contradictory and indeed antagonistic forces. The notion of civil society therefore militates, on the one hand, against the stifling implication of political and organisational monopolies while it addresses, at the same time, the hegemonic processes implied in the manufacture of (transient) consensus within societies marked by inequality and power differentials. For this reason, too, we do not go along with the frequent conflation of civil society with NGOs, but advocate a much wider notion, which at the same time harks back to Antonio Gramsci’s concept of civil society as a vital part of the extended state, and thus as a field where hegemony is centrally played out but also challenged. Without expanding any further on this, our concern here is with a discourse that might link ‘international civil society’ with a notion of ‘global solidarity’. In our view, this might serve as a motivation and agency for social struggles against those in power and responsible for various forms of oppression and inequality both within regional/local societies and in the global context.

From internationalism to global solidarity

The decline of *tiersmondisme*² from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s was in part a result of the sobering experiences under the post-colonial governments of erstwhile liberation movements in East Asia, Latin America and – particularly – Africa. Thus, campaigns that had mobilised large followings under the flag of international solidarity

1 For our common understanding on which parts of this essay are based, see Kössler and Melber (1993 and 2002). See also the concepts and interpretations offered by other authors in this volume and, especially, the further work of Jan Scholte.

2 *Tiersmondisme*, translating somewhat clumsily into ‘Third-Worldism’ denotes a political orientation premised on the idea that (revolutionary) political dynamism must be expected primarily or solely from the Third World.

petered out (for a West German case study see Kössler and Melber, 2006). However, this did not result merely in resignation and pragmatism. A new wave of global mobilisation was triggered off by, *inter alia*, the Zapatista movement operating from the Mexican state of Chiapas, which since the mid-1990s has used innovative means of communication to project itself on a global scale. Further, the protest organised in connection with the World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in Seattle in 1999 marked the appearance and momentum of a new 'alter-global' movement, one striving towards an *alternative* globality, rather than being 'anti-global'. This movement represents a new form of solidarity and organised resistance to globalisation under an institutionalised hegemonic coalition of governments advocating particular state interests, as represented in the G8 and other forms of corporate governance.



Since the turn of the millennium, the periodic meetings of the powerful – whether at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, or at the G8, EU or WTO summits in various host countries – have been targeted by international mobilisation

Since the turn of the millennium, the periodic meetings of the powerful – whether at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, or at the G8, EU or WTO summits in various host countries – have been targeted by international mobilisation. Over and above such forms of protest, the new 'movement of movements' spawned its own parallel structures in the sense of a global counter-movement. Its most well-known articulation has been the World Social Forum (WSF), since 2001 organised annually in Porto Alegre, along with intermediary and complementing regional and local fora. By now, the 'alter-globalists' have established themselves as a counter-force to be reckoned with, even though serious internal differences persist (see CACIM and CCS, 2007; Waterman, 2007).³ New mosaics of NGO networks and other social movements – often with very diverse motives and agendas – have formed coalitions to mobilise jointly and visibly against the forms and consequences of unabated globalisation by (capitalist) market forces (Waterman, 2001). By doing so, they are also using the virtual space of the electronic sphere that has contributed decisively towards that globalisation, but still, as an efficient communication form and operational tool, offers subversive, albeit subaltern, chances of protest and resistance as well as of articulating alternatives (Castells, 2001: Ch. 5).

In contrast to earlier forms of mass mobilisation, the new global movement rallies behind a variety of different goals and intentions without seeking to predetermine a concrete common denominator, beyond the

3 Earlier on often referred to erroneously as 'anti-globalists', there is hardly anything more global than this counter-movement to the dominant forms of globalisation. Indeed, as not only *attac* and other globally operating initiatives document, the interventionist discourse (and actions) have no intention of retreating into local operational spheres.

general belief contained in the WSF slogan ‘another world is possible’. Significantly, by its very vagueness this slogan also refrains from giving a clearer idea of what ‘another’ world should look like. A similar vagueness has been observed in the pronouncements of the Zapatista movement that so adroitly used the new means of communication to rally international support for a strategy that has eschewed the strictly military means employed by the former liberation movements. The common ground such slogans appeal to is the shared concern that ‘another world’ is needed, as well as the urge and desire to see it come about, even though the forms and content of solidarity requiring or resulting in joint mobilisation and action are left largely undefined. Obviously, any attempt at such a definition would foster considerable controversy.

Himself a life-long activist in global forms of internationalism (in his case, mainly rooted in labour movements), Peter Waterman (2001: 236) identifies – inspired by the Dutch moral philosopher Henk Vos – six different meanings that are covered by such solidarity:

- ‘identity’, meaning common interests such as those represented in the classical example of the international worker or labour movement;
- ‘substitution’, meaning the commitment and action on behalf of those unable to protect themselves or resist (this kind of advocacy includes forms of benevolence and development cooperation);
- ‘complementarity’, meaning the exchange of experiences and assistance of various and diverse forms;
- ‘reciprocity’, meaning the exchange of equal or similar forms of experiences and assistance;
- ‘affinity’, meaning common values, emotions, ideas, and concerns, for example among pacifists, socialists, environmental activists, representatives of indigenous minorities and so on;
- ‘restitution’, meaning the recognition of historical injustice as a basis of action.

Such a list of diverse dimensions of solidarity documents not only the variety of potential links and motives but also potential difficulties. This applies particularly to the identity postulates. To illustrate the problem, one may think not only of the forms of (and obstacles to) solidarity among workers but also within the feminist movement. This underlines the challenge implied in mobilising across diverse socio-cultural realities, even on the basis of a specific agenda. Still, the experience of the women’s movement over several decades dotted with world conferences has also shown what can be achieved. One instance is the campaign against female sexual mutilation that to a



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large extent has been indigenised and today can no longer be considered an imposition from outside as it was once denounced as being.

Such experiences underline that it requires hard, sustained and imaginative work to achieve more than a diffuse feeling of being pitted against common adversaries who may appear clear enough as a mere target for protest. To move beyond that towards some positive action requires first of all working towards solidarity in the sense of a common understanding among those who are seemingly similar but actually, at the same time, different. Hence, the seeming or general possibility of creating contexts of solidarity does not in itself tell us much about the actual scope in which such solidarity may be achieved and realised as a social practice. Such a practice in itself would be the outcome of prolonged cycles of deliberation and conscious political action, which in turn can foster experiences of commonality and joint purpose. In this intricate process, conclusions that individuals and groups draw from their analysis and experience may be translated into goals for action and may, ultimately, transform social reality.

Solidarity, in this sense, is more a process than a state of mind or an achievement once and for all. It has to be debated and even fought over, in an ongoing effort to investigate and define common ground and goals, or to hammer out possible forms of joint action. In this way, solidarity as a process resembles in many ways what has briefly been said about civil society: such a process may well be conceptualised as being predicated on a field of debate and struggle over societal goals and priorities, and epitomised specifically by civil society on various scales, including the international or global scale. At the same time, this constitutes one more pointer to the problems of the content of such solidarity. This may imply widely diverse priorities and goals, depending not only on different perceptions of problems but also, more fundamentally, on different concerns.

From such a perspective, ‘substitution’ in particular has the potential to be seriously problematic. Not only do advocacy and, more generally, action ‘on behalf of others’ – even if for some jointly agreed common good – in themselves reflect inequality and, more specifically, a differential in the potential for action; when projected on a global scale, this precarious relationship almost inevitably, and certainly in many cases quite inadvertently, tends to reproduce international hierarchical orders in various ways – be it that northern NGOs impose on their southern counterparts rules of accountability, or that advocates just ‘know’ what is in the best interests of their charges. It should be stressed that this is not just an outflow of thoughtlessness or hubris; rather, these hierarchical relationships reflect the global social

structure that forms their indispensable background and, thus, may be considered as almost unintentional and even unavoidable.⁴

Almost classic historical examples of this ingrained hierarchical relationship, particularly for substitutionalist initiatives with considerable impact, are the abolitionist movement in the 19th century and the Christian missionary societies. Both pursued broadly humanitarian goals, the ending of modern slavery and the spread of the Good News to those amongst God's children who had not yet been reached by it. Yet both also included clearly paternalistic advocacy roles. They denied the role of acting, self-conscious subjects to 'the others', whether they were slaves that had to be delivered by the intervention of enlightened Europeans, (including the notorious king Leopold II of Belgium who used the abolitionist cause for his own design to secure for himself a huge chunk of the African continent as a private realm for savage exploitation), or whether they were unredeemed heathens who, to save their souls, had not only to be baptised but thoroughly transformed and disciplined. Countervailing examples such as famously the 'black Jacobins' in Haiti/Santo Domingo (James, 1980), who demanded their rights and successfully fought for them, constituted a particular challenge to such sentiments. Again, the Communist International, based on Bolshevism, which within the workers' movement is the classic substitutionalist conception, similarly assumed a patronising agency position, claiming to act on behalf of those considered devoid of the potential to act as historical subjects in their own right.

Common consequences, dangers and liabilities

As such, 'globalisation' is not entirely new. Rather, we observe the latest thrust of a process that since the onset of the Spanish *Conquista* in the Americas and the transatlantic slave trade, along with West European military and commercial outreach to the East Indies, has known a number of phases in which most of this world's people have been integrated into one overarching socio-economic nexus – in most cases, to their disadvantage. Still, this newest thrust makes it more obvious than previous ones that anonymous, global forces well beyond their control are determining people's conditions through the forms and regulations of global competition and the allocation of wealth among and within local and regional societies. This world context not only features as omnipotent towards the individual but

4 The critical discourses following the last WSF of January 2007 in Nairobi illustrate the manifold unresolved contradictions, reflecting heterogeneity of interests and orientations under the umbrella of a global social movement (which strictly speaking, remains in the plural).



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also goes hand in hand with extreme and increasing inequality concerning the opportunities for the individual and his/her personal life perspectives. In addition, the grave and universal risks of the nuclear age, and environmental damage with its global consequences, not least the increasingly visible effects of climate change, have created an awareness of existential threats to the living conditions of all humankind across all diversities of cultures and social forms. This also illustrates that, ultimately, there is little protection for the more privileged members of the species.

Within the present world, the most diverse social as well as environmental contexts have been brought into ever-intensifying contact and interchange. There exist vitally important connections that link people in all regions of the planet, even though they may not know of these interrelationships and are even less able to shape them. Still, this connectivity increasingly allows people to become aware of the extreme disparities that shape global social reality. Emblematically, there is widespread hunger in times of abundance: people are starving although the whole world could be fed were it not for the prevailing rationale of profit-making rather than the satisfaction of needs. Equally, the extreme differences in the 'ecological footprint', such as the consumption of limited non-renewable resources or the related creation – in sites that are part of the global commons – of dumps for the leftovers of such consumption and production, underline the interrelationship between maintaining a particular lifestyle for the privileged and denying a decent living to most. In the end, however, it is not only the abusers but everyone who will have to pay the price for excessive industrial production and consumption based on a model of (pseudo-)unlimited economic growth. This structure of hierarchical privilege and gross inequality is not changed in substance by the current momentous growth of the emergent capitalist economies in South and East Asia, with China and India increasingly in the lead. Rather, hierarchy and inequality are reproduced across the great social and regional diversities of these countries (see, for example, Lau 2006).

Against this background, in the context of an emerging world societal nexus, solidarity takes on a wider and more urgent meaning than that of a mere moral postulate. Today, equity, an ethics of sharing, and the safeguarding of at least a minimal level of social cohesion worldwide increasingly appear as preconditions for long-term human survival within a world of newly intensifying global interconnectivity, which so far has also reproduced a new version of international as well as regional disparities. These postulates may be condensed to a notion of solidarity in its wide range of meanings.

In this sense, solidarity today is a political requirement, if not a pragmatic need. It may be noted that this notion of solidarity, related to the current existential crisis (which exists in spite of an economic boom), leads back to the original meaning of the term which in medieval and early modern Europe denoted a community of liability where all members were obliged to stand up for the debts and duties incurred by, or imposed upon, the collective or individual members. It is one of today's vital issues that this predicament should not be 'securitised' into emergency powers of individual states or alliances such as NATO (cf. Buur, Jensen and Stepputat, 2007: 14–18; Herborth, 2007: 163–165), but rather be translated into collective efforts based on activities and debates, not least within an increasingly globalising civil society.

Otherness and empathy

However, the dimensions of this existential need for global solidarity are not exhausted by those listed earlier from Peter Waterman's seminal work. This list has to be supplemented by a further postulate, 'empathy', meaning the conscious effort to 'understand' the 'other' and in this way to actually constitute potential addressees of, or partners in, solidarity.

Claiming the need for a spiritual dimension of solidarity, Sanbonmatsu (2004: 205ff.) bemoans the reluctance of the Left to consider itself as a moral movement, which seeks to establish an ethics of its own. As he insists, 'socialism cannot give us our ethics; our ethics gives us our socialism. That is, because our foundational moral beliefs and commitments define our perceptual objects for us, they play a crucial role in shaping the specific forms of action that we end up with' (*ibid*: 206). Based on this understanding, the personal exposure to forms of oppression and experience of exploitation, or acquaintance with forms of un-freedom, provides an indirect causal relationship at best between one's ability to understand and act and one's own social position. In accordance with feminist and critical race theories, neither one's 'objective' position within a social hierarchy nor one's personal experience of oppression is in itself a sufficient condition for political awareness and action.

As Sanbonmatsu (*ibid*: 210) argues further: 'One's location in a subordinate position is in fact not even a *necessary* condition for critical insight; because solidarity, the phenomenological "glue" that holds together every movement, is constituted not only through "first order" experiences of power, but also through "second order" experiences – viz., through *empathy for those who suffer*'. Empathy, therefore, is a constitutive factor in political identity. While empathy does not automatically translate into solidarity (nor into ethical behaviour), it can serve as a compass: 'When



Suffering in its variety of forms requires empathy and solidarity by all and transcends a politically correct ideology

we wilfully deny empathy as a mode of access to human experience, we also blind ourselves to the outcomes and catastrophes of our own political judgements' (*ibid.*: 210ff.). Given the diversity of movements in the global coalitions of today, such empathy is also a prerequisite for the ability to listen to one another and for permissiveness and openness towards 'otherness'. Suffering in its variety of forms requires empathy and solidarity by all and transcends a politically correct ideology. An empathic response as a moral force contributes to political alliances on a global scale among a coalition of the concerned and aware, no matter where and how they live – as long as they are able to follow up on their insights and turn their empathy into practical action.

Solidarity – with whom?

On the other hand, actors within the global social movement can experience and testify that a politically 'correct' radical movement still holds out no guarantee of sensitive anti-racist or anti-sexist practices, to mention just two particular important elements among a whole array of vital postulates. Instead, this movement remains vulnerable to patterns of internal domination, if not discrimination. As two activists who base their critical account on their own experiences point out, 'capitalism itself is just one system of domination among many; it is insufficient simply to oppose capitalism whilst remaining silent over the domination that has underwritten, and continues to underwrite, other social systems' (Subbuswamy and Patel, 2001: 537).

One central problem concerns precisely the first item in Waterman's list: identity. This 'can be spelled out in many ways, but when identity is clearly related to collectives, it is also generally related to claims and rights that such collectives – or rather, their leaders and exponents – raise and defend. In a world-historical situation, where the perspective of redistribution has at least for the foreseeable future been expunged from the repertoire of effective political action, rights have become a vital stand-in for those who want to attack excessive privilege or even simply to ensure survival for the mutilated and downtrodden (see Andrews, 2006: 63ff.). This rights discourse tends actually to reinforce boundary maintenance and exclusionism – unless it is accompanied by a strong and pervasive insistence that such rights, above all human rights, are universal and indivisible, while they can only be pursued and defended through respecting the individual, and responding to her/his suffering and needs (cf. Narr and Roth, 2007).⁵

⁵ Human suffering should in fact be a notion that ultimately includes the suffering of creatures *per se* and the degradation of other forms of life through human action in its currently dominant forms of exploiting nature on an excessive, industrial scale with devastating consequences and disrespect not only for human life but for life in general.

This brings us to the final point, the need at times to make painful and (self-)critical choices about who to opt for, and with whom to act in solidarity. If human suffering is among the guiding principles in such choices, loyalties to regimes and/or representatives of power and its structures can claim only limited relevance and ought at any time to be examined with suspicion and circumspection. As history shows, too often victims, once cast as liberators, turn into perpetrators themselves. This requires the liberty – if not the need and obligation – to redefine solidarity in every concrete context. At the same time, not all forms of resistance against oppression justify solidarity.

Challenges of this type can be documented by means of a few current examples – not completely randomly selected – to illustrate the point. Support for an anti-hegemonic policy like that of Hugo Chávez, clever and inspiring as this may be, meets its limitations where he is willing to enter into problematic alliances such as those with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko or the Iranian government under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (cf. Sarkhosh, 2005: 431ff.), or turns to massive armaments investment. Global solidarity does *not* function according to the principle that those who are the opponents of our opponents (we deliberately avoid the term ‘enemy’ here) are our friends. Global solidarity with people would have to accept the tension resulting from the ambivalences of the Chávez policy. It should resist the temptation to idolise him (thereby learning from past experiences, when role models – like those referred to at the beginning – were later reflected upon more soberly and seen in a slightly, if not completely, different light).

As a result of similar concerns, one should refrain from endorsing the complaint of, among others, Walden Bello (2005) about the reluctance of the international peace movement to legitimise the currently practised forms of resistance in Iraq. Instead, one needs to ask what this ‘resistance’ actually stands for, who is affected by it and in which ways. Equally misguided as such short sightedness in taking uncritical sides with any forms of action against occupation regimes would be acceptance of internal repression of the kind executed by the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe, which claims to be ‘anti-imperialist’ – as if the suffering of millions of people in the former British colony would be the ultimate responsibility of Tony Blair’s policy alone (or in Iraq’s case, of George W. Bush and his falcons). Abstinence from such over-eager ‘solidarity’ does not of course imply any complicity with or even acceptance of British or US policy.

Looking at both sides of the coin in this way, however, does not mean refraining from taking sides or shunning complex decision-making about who to practise solidarity with (and at times, facing the risk of



Global solidarity does *not* function according to the principle that those who are the opponents of our opponents are our friends.

not getting it right). The *Communiqué* of the Extraordinary Summit of the SADC Heads of State, held on 28-29 March 2007 in Dar-es-Salaam provided a classic example of the ambiguities, which clearly signal abstention where intervention is needed, when it 'reaffirmed its solidarity with the Government and people of Zimbabwe'. In this case, obviously, one cannot have it both ways. Put differently: At times, not to take sides is the worst form of neglect and contrary to the requirements of global solidarity in practice.

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SHAKE
WHEN
REQUIRED

Bringing civility back in – Reflections on global civil society

Helmut K. Anheier

Introduction

The debate on global civil society has become very conceptual and over-focused on the issue of definitions relative to empirical research findings. At the same time, there is a need to evaluate the contributions of empirical studies of global civil society thus far, and to make improvements or modifications if necessary. As will become apparent below, there are indeed several areas of concern, the most significant being the neglect of the concept of ‘civility’.

At one level, the conceptual debate is about the intellectual heritage of the term. There are learned exchanges about what is included or excluded from civil society, in particular in relation to the treatment of markets and political institutions (see Keane, 2001, 2003). To some extent, such debates are useful ‘stock-taking’ exercises in the sense of a history of ideas, in particular for a term that has been invented, fallen into disuse and re-invented several times in the course of its long intellectual and political career.

At a deeper level, the debate about definitions is ultimately about the normative foundations and implications they might have. Clearly, including market institutions such as transnational corporations in global civil society leads to a very different research agenda than would emerge were they excluded. Likewise, including all non-governmental entities subsumes hate groups, criminal networks and even terrorist organisations under the umbrella of global civil society.

Indeed, where to draw the conceptual boundaries of global civil society and what they imply for the normative content of the definition has become a critical issue, in particular in relation to alleged Western, liberal biases: Munck talks about the ‘slippery path’ when researchers fail ‘to consider...perspectives that do not see the world in the same way as predominantly Western liberal advocates of global civil society do’ (2006: 9). Calhoun (2003: 93) argues that ‘the cosmopolitan ideas of global civil society can sound uncomfortably like those of the civilising mission behind colonialism’. Baxi (2002: 41) makes similar points in assailing the ‘Euro-enclosed imagination’, as

do Petras and Veltmeyer (2001) and Chandhoke (2002) in relation to NGOs as agents of Westernisation.

Thus, global civil society is seen both as part of an ongoing Western modernisation project *and* as a deeply biased term that fails to achieve a high level of purity in terms of value-free social science. Hence, Munck (2006) and others (see contributions in Glasius et al., 2004) suggest that we need to find a definition that is less tied to Western expressions of civil society and that is more truly global. How could such aims be achieved, and could a look at empirical findings help in this context?

Contributions

To answer that question, we briefly summarise some of the key findings presented in the previous six editions of the *Global Civil Society*¹ yearbook as they relate to the discussion here. The yearbook defines global civil society as the sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organisations, networks and individuals located *between* the family, the state and the market and operating *beyond* the confines of national societies, politics and economies.

- The growth and expansion of global civil society as a phenomenon seems closely associated with a major shift in cultural and social values that took hold in most developed market economies in the 1970s. This shift saw a change in emphasis from material security to a concern for democracy, participation and meaning, which involved such cosmopolitan values as tolerance and respect for human rights (see Inglehart, 1990).
- These values facilitated the cross-national spread, particularly in Europe and Latin America, of broad-based social movements around common issues that were outside conventional party politics; the women's movement, the peace movement, the democracy movement and the environmental movement are the best-known examples of what became an increasingly international 'movement industry' (Diani and McAdam, 2003; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001).
- The 1990s brought a political opening-up and a broad-based mobilisation of previously unknown proportions and scale (i.e., the *Idea of 1989*, which implied that civil society would continue to benefit from favourable political opportunities and circumstances – see Kaldor, 2003), which coincided with the reappraisal of the



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¹ The *Global Civil Society* series is an annual publication whose lead editors are H. K. Anheier, M. Glasius and M. Kaldor. The yearbook series is published by Sage Publication, London, and is now in its seventh edition.

role of the state in most developed countries, and growing disillusionment with state-led multilateralism in the Third World among counter-elites (Edwards, 1999).

- In addition to this broadened political space, favourable economic conditions, vastly reduced costs of communication and greater ease of organising facilitated the institutional expansion of global civil society in organisational terms (Anheier and Themodo, 2002; Clark, 2003).
- By 2002, the changed geopolitical environment and the economic downturn challenged both the (by now) relatively large infrastructure of global civil society organisations and the broad value base of cosmopolitanism in many countries across the world, in particular among the middle classes and elites (Held, 2003).
- As a result, new organisational forms and ways of organising and communications have gained in importance, with social forums (Glasius and Timms, 2006), internet-based mobilisation (Clarke and Themudo, 2006), and transnational networks (Katz and Anheier, 2006) as prominent examples.
- These developments, as the expansion of global civil society generally, are accompanied by a resurgence of religion in some parts of the world and a change in state-religion relationships (see Jürgensmayer, 2007; Inglehart and Norris, 2007), creating a more conflict-prone, and highly diversified, complex sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organisations, networks, and individuals.

Issues

While much has been achieved in improving our understanding of global civil society, more remains to be done. Shortcomings that require proper attention and correction include: the failure to take into account other civil society traditions; the failure to address the relationship between global civil society, conflict and violence; and, closely intertwined, the neglect of the notion of civility.

Western bias. Recent work has begun to address the first shortcoming. Ezzat and Kaldor (2007) and Said (2005) examine differences and commonalities in the concept and constitution of civil society in Europe and the Arab world; and Glasius *et al.* (2004) offer an overview of civil society in a broad cross-section of countries. While one wishes for the existence of a more systematic, comparative analysis of differences and similarities in concepts, patterns and trends, the prospects of this happening are good, particularly civil society research has taken root in many non-Western countries.

Conflict and civil society. The second shortcoming, too, can be addressed, and this time through a greater recognition of the sociology of conflict. Researchers such as Min and Wimmer (2007) and other students of conflict have shown that violent conflicts have pronounced institutional path dependencies and desensitising effects at the individual level. Conflict behaviour is learned behaviour, as are non-violence and – as suggested below – civility. While wars might be fought in the name of free society, such is their intrusion into rights and behavioural patterns that, in their aftermath, democracy and civility have to struggle to emerge again.

Sociologists like Dahrendorf (1994) remind us that conflicts are manifest tensions that arise from perceived disagreements, as opposed to latent conflicts where parties may be largely unaware of the level of threat and power capabilities. Once conflicts are manifest, the conditions for communicating, mobilising and organising are critical for the process and outcome of conflicts. It is precisely the wider availability of information technology such as the Internet, combined with a steep decline in communication costs, that facilitates the transformation of latent conflicts into manifest conflicts. Political entrepreneurs, activists and ideologues of many kinds find more and easier access to mobilisation than in the past. What is more, with the end of the Cold War and a weakened system of international governance, many conflicts were ‘freed up’ and became re-energised, and new ones were engendered, while the capacity to keep movements in check and free of violence has not kept pace.

Modern societies are conflict-prone. They are also adept in seeking ways and means of managing – or institutionalising – conflicts (through panels, hearings, political parties, social movements, the judiciary, etc.) rather than seeking settlement through power domination alone (Dahrendorf, 1994), including violence. Such institutionalised conflicts are seen as creative conflicts that reduce the tensions that could otherwise build up along major societal cleavages. Such tensions could seriously threaten the social fabric, while managed conflicts contribute to social stability and ‘tamed’ social change.

Could we think of global civil society as a means of institutionalising conflicts and preventing them from becoming violent? However, over-institutionalisation of conflicts can create inertia and stifle social change and innovation, whereas under-institutionalisation can lead to a spreading of the conflict into other fields and the generation of unintended consequences. Moreover, deep-seated core conflicts (such as labour–capital, value or ethnic conflicts) have the tendency

to amass complicating factors around them that in the end can make some conflicts intractable. Such basic insights into the sociology of conflict are useful as they allow us to probe deeper into the changing relationship between violence and civil society.

Institutions that mitigate violence within states are strengthened by the state's successful assertion of a monopoly of the means of legitimate violence. But the international system of sovereign states has also developed mechanisms to reduce the likelihood of war. Alliances, security pacts and a framework of law for the settlement of disputes, in addition to an American hegemony in conventional armed forces, have reduced the incidence and likelihood of international disputes culminating in war.



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At the same time, a new challenge has arisen and threatens state institutions and hence civil society. In part it arises from, and is assisted by, the same set of globalising forces that favour the rise of civil society, and this affinity is sufficient for many to discredit the 'civilising power' of civil society altogether. Terror groups operate across borders, employing all the newest means of communication, transportation, media, messaging and weaponry, including smart weapons. They appeal to values that are beyond the nation-state and at the same time exploit the freedoms of movement, association and speech that the democratic state serves to protect. They attack non-military targets and the civilian population. They are indeed an even greater challenge to civil society than they are to the state.

Civility. The third shortcoming is closely related to the second, but unlike the former, it cannot be addressed by taking advantage of relatively well-developed social science modules such as the sociology of conflict. The failure to take adequate conceptual and empirical account of civility resulted first and foremost from it even being taken for granted, via the adjective 'civil', that civil implies civility; and second from the dominant focus on organisations as observable elements. To remedy this neglect requires a revision of the definition of global civil society that makes the concept of civility explicit, and a refocus – indeed, a broadening – of the empirical approach taken.

The descriptive definition revisited above is silent on the distinction between civility and incivility, or the civil versus the uncivil, which has caused as much confusion as the inclusion and exclusion of certain organisations, networks and activities under the umbrella term 'global civil society'. It is this silence that prompted Taylor (2004: 3) to ask how far the analysis of global civil society can 'proceed within a

normative vacuum'. Not much further, I suggest. Taylor is right when he points out that 'theoretical advance requires that empirical social research must be combined with moral and political understanding' (*ibid.*). Indeed, a revised definition of global civil society invites such moral and political understanding by making *civility* explicit:

Global civil society is the sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organisations, networks, and individuals that are based on civility, located *between* the family, the state and the market, and operating *beyond* the confines of national societies, politics and economies.

Transnational terrorist networks, violent activists, hate groups and criminal organisations would thereby be excluded. They are part of transnational society, but not of global civil society. Of course, adding civility to the definition requires that we define that term itself. Like civil society, the term has a long history in the social sciences (see Boyd, 2004) and the humanities (see Carter, 1998) that reflects different uses and changes in meaning over time. The term also overlaps with concepts such as cosmopolitanism (Archibugi, 2003) and civic engagement; and like civil society, it is a complex concept that can easily become normatively charged.

This complexity and normative attraction aside, Billante and Saunders (2002), having surveyed the growing literature on civility, suggest three elements that together constitute civility. The first element is respect for others, or in Shils' words (1997: 338): 'Civility is basically respect for the dignity and the desire for dignity of other persons.' The second element is civility in public behaviour towards strangers, or in Carters' terms: '[C]ivility equips us for everyday life with strangers...we need neither to love them nor to hate them in order to be civil towards them' (1998:58). The third element is self-regulation in the sense that civility requires empathy, putting one's own immediate self-interest in the context of the larger common good and acting accordingly (Billante and Saunders, 2002: 33).

Civility is learned behaviour, embedded in the social and cultural codes of society, and requires positive reinforcement. Like social capital, in particular interpersonal and institutional trust, civility requires enactment, acknowledgment and maintenance in actual social life. Civility is not a constant, but can be learned as well as unlearned, and increase or decrease over time. Understanding civility as learned public behaviour demonstrating respect for others, while curtailing one's immediate self-interest when appropriate, leads to the next issue: what is the role or function of civility?



Civility equips us for everyday life with strangers...we need neither to love them nor to hate them in order to be civil towards them

Here a look at history is very instructive. Elias (2000) suggests that the modern Western notion of civility began to form in the late Middle Ages, and emerged more fully in the 16th century. It involved a complex process of behavioural and institutional transformations, triggered by a demand for greater stability and predictability in social and political relations, including conflict management, as economic ties across localities and regions expanded. This civilising process for creating and protecting non-violent, institutional spaces began in the aristocratic court society first, trickled down to the emerging urban middle classes and bourgeoisie next, and increasingly encompassed larger and larger segments of society. ‘Polite society’ became the norm. One could make similar arguments for other parts of the world, such as China, Japan, Persia or Turkey, where political and economic development demanded violence-free zones and greater routinisation and institutionalisation of behaviour, including conflict management.

Civility, therefore, is important, because it helps social cooperation, and is vital for bridging social capital to operate in modern society to connect different groups and people that would otherwise be isolated from each other. For Shils (1997) civility serves to locate different human beings as equal members of the same inclusive public, whereas incivility is a device of exclusion. Yet, there is a deeper purpose that civility serves in modern pluralist societies, as Rawls (1993) and Hayek (1976) suggest. This purpose has to do with the relationship between means and ends or methods and objectives in diverse societies where people primarily follow their self-interest. Hayek (1976: 3) argues that the relative peace and non-violence of diverse societies becomes possible because ‘individuals are not required to agree on ends but only on means which are capable of serving a great variety of purposes and which each hopes will assist him in the pursuit of his own purposes. Civility is one such method of collaboration.’ Similarly, Rawls (1993: 147–9) sees civility functioning as the *modus vivendi* for reducing the collision of ‘unrestricted liberties’ in modern, diverse society. One could make similar references to the notion of the public sphere as a violence-free and equal space of communication (Habermas, 1991).

In the transnational arena, civility, consisting of often tacit, culturally embedded ‘agreements to disagree agreeably’, allows for routinisation of collaborative behaviours that may involve actors who are different in a variety of respects. Civility creates predictability, and builds social capital through successful encounters across national, cultural, political, economic and linguistic borders. It creates the non-violent, stable and predictable zones for institutions, organisations and individuals to operate and flourish in transnational contexts. Global civil society is one

important sphere in which such zones can be established, maintained and grown, though it is not the only one. Businesses and governments can also serve as agents of the wider ‘civilising process.’

Yet civil society actors have a special duty in pointing out civility failures and taking corrective action accordingly. Ezzat and Kaldor (2007: 36–7) call for ‘pre-emptive civility’ that tries to create the mechanism and opportunities for communicating respect for one another. They write: ‘If global civil society is to have a mission at this historical moment of humanity, it would be to recapture the power of language and to regain its ‘civilising’ role, providing a forum for deliberative democracy, re-rooting legitimacy in civil society, and highlighting the importance of politics of presence, not merely representation’ (2007: 36). In other words, global civil society is to establish, defend and build zones of non-violence and social as well as cultural predictability to encourage debate and dialogue.

The previous definition of global civil society focused on the ‘what’ in terms of its constituent elements. It said nothing about the roles, contributions or functions of global civil society. Adding civility to the definition and making it explicit, we are not only addressing the ‘how’ – for example, Rawls’ *modus vivendi* or Habermas’ public sphere notion – but also the ‘why.’ In other words, the field of global civil society research now has an explicit ‘independent’ and ‘dependent variable’: to what extent, under what conditions and how is global civil society able to create, maintain and grow zones of non-violence and predictability?

Conclusion

It becomes clear that such an understanding of civility and its role in global civil society involves more than the correction in the descriptive definition suggested above. Research activities must follow suit and ‘map and measure’ civility in terms of non-violent zones for communicating respect, the range and depth of the *modus vivendi* that Rawls identifies, and the pre-emptive capacity of global civil society suggested by Ezzat and Kaldor. So far, global civil society research has little to show when it comes to these issues, and the future empirical research agenda should address this deficit.

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The power of civility

Jai Sen

*'We need to both define and
dispute global civil society.'*
(Waterman, 2005)

The note from the editors inviting this contribution asks a provocative question:¹

The key question that we would like to address is: What are [the] implications for democracy of the increasing number and activities of NGOs, social movement organisations and private foundations globally – whether we choose to conceptualise these as ‘civil society’ or not?²

In this article, I try to engage with this question by looking critically at two issues: one, the dynamics of power relations in the building and exercise of civil society, especially in relation to social movement and alliance; and two, the dynamics of global civil cooperation. I hope that this discussion can contribute to finding answers to some aspects, if not all, of the question, and perhaps also to building a vocabulary for doing so.

Because I ask hard questions in this article of civil society and civil organisations (I prefer to use this term rather than the more conventional ‘non-governmental organisation’ since I see no reason to describe a category by a negative, and moreover defined only in terms of government), I start with an open acknowledgement that they have played key roles in history in the democratisation of local, national, and global societies. The very emergence and process of crystallisation of civil societies from feudal and pre-capitalist societies was itself a major step in this process (and is continuing to be, in some parts of the world), and equally, in a world ravaged by war and by violence,

1 This is an edited version of the full, comprehensively revised, but abridged version of a rough paper prepared for the Nairobi seminar. I thank Håkan Thörn and the Committee for the opportunity to think through my original ideas, and Jane Duncan, Henning Melber, Jan Aart Scholte, as well as some members of the audience whose names I forget, for their comments and questions, which helped me sharpen my thinking about certain points. For the full version, see http://cacim.net/twiki/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=61.

2 Committee on Civil Society Research, Sweden (undated; c. January 2007).

civility has a crucial role to play. Notwithstanding this, however, and as I will explore in this article, I suggest that this process, and the power of civility, has also always been structurally suffused with what in effect are profoundly anti-democratic undercurrents; and that today – at a time when the world is dramatically changing, with new actors on the stage, and even though civil organisations continue to play important roles in many fields – this power threatens to undermine processes of a deepening and widening democratisation that are opening up.

The contribution of civil societies and civil actors range from the role of the bourgeoisie in the 19th century in the abolition of the slave trade and in other major social reforms in societies both of what is today called the North and the South, to the great democratic breakthroughs of that century in Europe (Nimtz Jr, 2000), to the beginning of the gaining of equal rights by women in the early part of the 20th century, to their many contributions to national liberation struggles across the world during the 19th and 20th centuries. More recently, it has included their contributions to the articulation of the historic Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the mid-20th century; and it continues today with the contribution of countless civil organisations at local, national, and global levels, in so many fields, and in large part devoted to deepening the realisation of rights and freedoms won over this past period.³

Largely as a function of changing material conditions over the past three decades (since the 1970s), including the development of radically new and globalising information and communication technologies and far more affordable international travel, we have also seen the thickening of regional and civil alliances at regional, transnational and global levels, the emergence of new, more complex forms of civil alliances, and also of more open-ended processes of *association* such as the World Social Forum and People's Global Action.⁴

The gradual but progressive articulation of strategic alliance across borders since the 1970s has in fact been a remarkable phenomenon, in many ways beautiful to behold. Often emerging from and struggling against the most brutal and dehumanised circumstances, human beings



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3 For an ongoing and sometimes critical anthology of the role of civil organisations at a global level, see the *Global Civil Society* yearbook produced by Mary Kaldor and her colleagues at the Centre for Global Governance at the London School of Economics. Most recently: Glasius, Kaldor and Anheier, eds (2005).

4 For a discussion of the influence of new conditions, see Keck and Sikkink (1998) and Nunes (2006 [2005]).

have found ingenious ways of reaching over the walls that have imprisoned them (and that imprison us all in our various ways and contexts, but some much more so than others), and their call has found resonance in other parts of the world. Sometimes it has also happened the other way round, when individuals such as anthropologists have uncovered the most grotesque circumstances taking shape, such as in the Amazon in the 1960s and 1970s, have brought this to world attention, and have thus brought about linkages. Think of almost any field now, and you can see this happening. It is an extraordinary phenomenon.

This process has now reached a stage where political scientists are suggesting that these processes – these civil organisations and formations, separately but taken collectively, and in coalitions and alliances – are contributing to nothing less than the restructuring of world politics (Khagram, Riker and Sikkink, 2002). Another image, which some civil activists seem to enjoy revelling in, is the much-quoted suggestion in the New York Times in 1999, after the Seattle demonstrations around the WTO, that the emerging global social justice movement now constituted ‘the other world power’.

In this article, however, and while acknowledging the many contributions of civil societies, I look critically at the question of power relations *within* such processes and at the contradictions of civility. The question of the power in our times of conventional market corporations, and of (market) corporativism, has been well explored, as has the question of the corporate State (Korten, 1998). But for some reason, when we talk of ‘power’ we automatically refer to the state or the market. What I want to do here is to attempt a parallel exercise, to look at power not among and between state and market, and their power over society, but *at power within the non-state world and among and between non-state actors*. In particular, I look at how non-state, civil cooperation is today tending towards global *corporation* and hegemonic *corporativism* – and away from cooperation; and I argue that this tendency is linked to the historical role of civil society.

I do this at two levels. First, I look critically at the *dynamics* of the power realities in civil society, through interrogating the question of ‘civility’ – which I argue is central to (though not alone in) the exercise of power in the non-state world (and also the state, but that is another story).

Second, I reflect critically on emerging global civil cooperation, alliance and networking – in other words, what is loosely referred to as ‘global civil society’ – in terms of power relations, taking the World Social Forum as an example.

By addressing these questions, I try to reflect critically on the democratic options that global civil society is in reality offering us. I offer this article and its questions as a challenge to practitioners and theorists both in the civil world and in what I term here the incivil world.

Civil and incivil

In this section, and in order to understand the roles being played by what is called ‘global civil society’, I try to deconstruct the term ‘civil society’ and to comprehend it in terms of the meanings it holds for the struggle for building other worlds. While, as above, I acknowledge the historic roles of civil societies in democratisation, and while I agree with Peter Waterman and Jan Aart Scholte (2007) that the term and concept of civil society is too useful to be just discarded, I believe that the social and political reality of civil society is riddled with power relations that need to be clearly read, and that only on this basis can we begin to assess ‘[the] implications for democracy of the increasing number and activities of NGOs, social movement organisations and private foundations globally’, let alone define the basis of a more emancipated civil politics.

I first suggest that ‘civil society’ is *not* what the textbooks say it is, that neutral (and neutered) ‘space between the individual (or the family) and the state’, but rather just what the term says it is: *civil* society – a society or community that is ruled by norms of ‘civility’; a section of society that has become – in its own terms, and by its own definition – ‘civilised’. In such societies, there is – by definition – little or no room for deviants, for sections that do not follow the rules of being civilised, which is a rule that is in turn also set by those who consider themselves to be civil and civilised. To the contrary, the civilised feel threatened by those who do not conform (and who they therefore term ‘anti-social’, ‘deviant’, ‘wild’, and ‘uncivil’) and by the very existence of the uncivil, and so they seek to subjugate it, convert it, tame it, civilise it; if it becomes sufficiently docile and domesticated, then to ignore it; and on the other hand, if it is too assertive, to attempt to destroy it, exterminate it. (Only in the most civilised of ways, of course.) In short, it is – in their understanding – the historical task of those who arrogate this term to themselves, to ‘civilise’ society and to establish a civil order – which most centrally means to establish hegemony over all those who (and all that) they consider to be uncivil.

In my earlier writings on cities, I used the term ‘unintended’ for a phenomenon that is somewhat related, in an attempt to describe and denote the dynamic tension that exists between different worlds in



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cities and to argue that the unintended are today in fact building separate, parallel societies and ‘cities’ of their own, but through a complex dynamics of relationship with the intended world (Sen, 2001). But given the new and contemporary resonance of the term ‘civil society’, the terms civil and uncivil – and as I will argue, *incivil* – become far more relevant.

Some of the most infamous examples of this are the treatment of the Indians of Latin America, the Aborigines of Australia, and the First Nations in Canada and the USA, in the course of civilising them in ‘the great cause of civilisation’.⁵ But this behaviour is not only a function of what we understand as colonisation; it is equally true of the behaviour of civil societies within their own societies – such as the manner in which the civilised gentlefolk of, say, The Netherlands ‘treated’ and ‘processed’ the Dutch peasantry and working classes in special ‘homes’ even as recently as the early 20th century, teaching them reading, writing, dressing, table manners and bathroom manners in their attempt to ‘civilise’ them into ‘proper’ citizenship (Datta Chowdhury, 1993; de Regt, 1986). As others have shown, all so-called ‘civil societies’ have historically emerged through intensive processes of imposed by the civilising of societies, in particular through the establishment of enforcement agencies such as the police and also through the establishment of homes and institutions where these ‘unruly elements’ were ‘civilised’. But this is identical to the treatment which aboriginals across the world have been subjected to (*ibid.*). Colonisation, and the process and treatment of ‘civilisation’, is thus not something restricted only to the domestication of other lands.

In this narrative, the ‘civil’ are those who are otherwise referred to as the middle classes and above, and earlier as ‘the gentlefolk’ (and where in English we still use the term ‘gentleman’); and in the part of India I come from, Bengal, we have the term *bhadralok*, the ‘proper’ or ‘well-mannered’ people. But beyond this, the ‘civil class’ is a class that sees itself as permanently in power. (In Bengal, this has not changed, notwithstanding having a government of the Left in power for the past 30 years continuously, and who might otherwise have been expected to challenge such an order. This record itself speaks for the power, reach and resilience of civility.)

The norms that are established (read *imposed*) by the civil to define and enforce civility of course vary from context to context, and are also mediated by other processes – ranging from insurrection to glo-

5 Wilmer (1993), especially ‘The Great Cause of Civilization’, Chapter 4, pp. 95-126. See also Churchill, W. (2004) and Furniss (2000 [1992, 1995]).

balisation – but I suggest that in all cases the term ‘civil society’ most meaningfully refers to *those sections of society who are considered by some self-appointed guardians to be ‘civil’, or ‘civilised’, and who struggle to impose this order of civility on others, both those immediately around them and in other contexts that they are attempting to colonise and domesticate.*

Civil society does not act alone in exercising this power. In order to do this, it invokes the power of the state, with which it is umbilically linked. Contrary to the popular impression of so-called ‘non-governmental organisations’, and perhaps because of the term itself – that they tend to be independent of, and often even critical of, the state – civil society needs the state in order to maintain order in society, very much to protect and promote its own existence; and as seen so clearly in our own times, the state also woos civil society in order to do its – often dirty – work; both in the North and the South.

As explained by Martin Shaw, civil society is thus not only ‘a sphere of association in society in distinction to the state, involving a network of institutions through which society and groups within it represent themselves in cultural, ideological, and political senses’, but crucially also where, in the terms developed by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, ‘the institutions of civil society [also form]...the ‘outer earthworks’ of the state, through which the ruling classes [maintain] their ‘hegemony’ or dominance in society’ (Shaw 1999: 1 and 3). In terms of power and the exercise of power, civil society and the state are therefore interlinked.

In addition, the process of ‘civilising’ and domestication is not only directed at the incivil and the uncivil; it is also a process of internal domestication within societies, more generally, that is used by nation states, imperial states, and the sections of civil society that stand with them to shock, awe, and bring into line the populations that they believe it is their right to rule over. In contemporary times for example, the so-called ‘War on Terror’ post 9/11 has been widely used as a means not only of stigmatising and then waging war on particular peoples and nations but also of creating and cultivating a climate of fear and suspicion within national societies and in global society in general, so that all those less brave – and all those more dependent on the state – are cowed into silence and submission and/or a flag-waving nationalism.

Along with this, however, buried prejudices about ‘the others’ – read ‘the incivil’ – are today tending across the world to surface and to



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be reinforced, and what were earlier touted as great historical experiments in liberal, tolerant multiculturalism are collapsing (Vieru, 2006; Tripathi, 2006). In a sense, therefore, the dark side of civilisation and domestication is not only the imposition but also the implosion of civility. Civility tends to devour itself.

These processes are in turn being accompanied by another phenomenon that is domesticating us in other ways, and again making us suspicious of ‘outsiders’ and of others with other ways of living. Increasingly, we are today faced with world alarms around pandemics – but accompanied by the demand that subject populations must accept lower levels of civil liberty in exchange for their greater ‘security’ (Das, 2005). Far from being resisted, these steps and the repressive and divisive political and social culture that is implied are also being widely internalised within and propagated by civil societies across the world.

Let me now explain why I use what might seem to some to be derogatory terms but which in any case are clearly provocative: ‘incivil’ and ‘uncivil’. I purposely use these terms, in an insurgent manner: first, in order to focus on the dialectical reality of civility; second, in order to make clear how ‘we’ see not only ‘them’, as ‘the other’, but also ‘ourselves’, and to make ‘us’ constantly conscious of this; third, in order also, by contradistinction and opposition, to signal the resistance of such peoples to the singular and hegemonic norms of the civil – and indeed, to implicitly suggest that there are many civilities, many different forms and modes of civilisation; and fourth, to politicise the term ‘civil’ and to draw out what I suggest is its political reality. The distinction I will draw in a moment between ‘incivil’ and ‘uncivil’ is also with this same dynamic in mind, and while not suggesting that these divisions are permanent and unchanging or that these terms should be cast in stone, I believe that using them is useful in order to achieve these objectives.

In support of my usage, I cite the example of my experience of using this term with Dalit activists in India. As is now fairly widely known, the term ‘Dalit’ means ‘oppressed’ and is one that that Dalits themselves use in preference to, say, Gandhi’s term *harijan* (‘children of god’). But whereas I have found that Dalit activists easily grasp the meaning of the term ‘incivil’ and also its dialectical meaning and usage, ‘civil’ activists and researchers tend to object to it – as indeed, do some Dalits calling themselves oppressed. To use North American slang, they just don’t seem to get it. But this is precisely the struggle: to see the world from the other’s point of view, and especially from that of the oppressed.

As I see it, in reality this dynamic plays out as a function not only of class but also of *caste* (occupation determined by descent), in those contexts where this applies (right across south Asia, reaching deeply into southeast Asia, covering a billion and a half people); of *ethnicity* and *race*, which need no explanation; of *faith* and cosmology; of *sexuality* and sexual preference; and also of *language*.

So in short, those who constitute 'civil societies' are in general middle or upper class, middle or upper caste, white (or at least, 'fair', and where in many societies 'fairness' of complexion is something that the upper castes and classes aspire to), and male, actively or passively practising the dominant religion in the region and speaking its dominant language; and people of colour and of other differentiations and preferences who are *allowed* by such sections to join them. And those who constitute the 'incivil' – as perceived and stigmatised by the civil – are the lower classes, the lower castes (and the outcastes), and in general people of colour, especially the black, and all those with languages, faiths and preferences other than those of the successfully domesticated and 'civilised' – but where such people are often also then left hanging in a tragic middle world, as second-class denizens.

In these terms, the *gender* division and discourse is less obvious, and perhaps needs a more nuanced discussion than I am capable of. But one could easily say that it also applies here, in the same and in many other ways. Think, for instance, of the (male, civil) association of 'the feminine' with 'the wild', the uncontrollable, in so many cultures and in so many religions; the systems put in place to 'husband' and control this nature; and in particular the structure and ideology of patriarchy that is so widely prevalent across the world, South and North, where women are seen only as property and as vehicles for reproduction of the (hu)man species, therefore justifying the system of 'husbanding' and domestication, and – just as the ideology of the state dominated by civil society does – giving men the license to inflict domestic violence on them, as and when they feel it is required (Butalia, 2005; Menon and Basin, 1998).

Having put forward my larger point, I want now to also draw a line between what I am referring to as the 'incivil' and the 'uncivil'.

As has been widely recorded and we will perhaps agree on without problem, a large proportion of the ordinary people of the world who 'civil societies' see as 'the incivil', are in all societies forced by prevailing social and economic conditions to resort to taking part in what are termed (by civil society and the state) as being 'informal', 'illegal',

and ‘unauthorised’ activities. This includes having to live in often sub-human extra-legal settlements or practising extra-legal occupations, or migrating ‘illegally’. But this happens only because social and economic exclusion, persecution, and devastation leaves them with no options – but where they are then criminalised and stigmatised by state and civil society for their actions.⁶



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Beyond this, however, but interacting with it and sometimes overwhelming it, lie other worlds of exploitation, such as child prostitution, bonded labour and other slave trades, trade in organs, the drug trade, and religious fundamentalism; broadly, where the criminal, the mafia and the criminalised lumpen rule – those who in India are referred to as the ‘anti-social’ but who in more analytical language are the people who are involved in activities that constitute what Deepak Nayyar and Julius Court refer to as the ‘public bad’ (Nayyar and Court, 2006). (As these authors point out, just as there are ‘global public goods’, there are equally ‘global public bads’ – and racism, militarisation and the arms trade, and war should surely also be included in this list.)

On the other hand, however, all over the world we are now also seeing these sections, the incivil, who have been historically oppressed and marginalised, organising themselves – and where in contexts such as Bolivia and India, where they constitute the majority of the population, they are slowly not just accumulating but also asserting power, often (though not always) in insurgent ways that challenge the ruling civil society. As I see it, these historically unintended worlds are new societies in the making – and of their own making and on their own terms (Alfred, 2005; Crosby, 2006). This also includes building ‘NGOs’ very similar in nature, structure and perspective to civil organisations, but imbued with their own values.

This is of course not a linear process, nor automatically successful in emancipatory terms. There is plenty of evidence already available of inversions and implosions, in particular on account of the leadership of such sections adopting and reproducing the laws and customs of their former oppressors. But these are hiccups; there is surely no question that we are today at a new threshold of human history, a historic deepening and widening of democratisation of local and national societies and of global society that is being undertaken not by civil so-

⁶ For an early discussion of this stigmatisation, see Sen (1984). For a less pointed but more comprehensive discussion, see Hardoy and Satterthwaite (1989). And more generally about the worldwide ‘No one is illegal’ campaign: type in the words “No one is illegal” on Google.

cieties but by the incivil of the world.

Without elaborating further here on this complex point, I suggest that we need to make a distinction between these two realities, incivil and uncivil, and that this is of vital strategic consequence to the task of building other worlds. It seems to me one of the shortfalls of academia that although there are now countless publications in this broad area of civil society, there seems to be little attempt to look structurally and politically at this phenomenon and to develop terminology that can distinguish such realities; and equally, and although they are constantly surfacing, those of us more in social and political movement also tend to easily to gloss over these issues.

As a contribution to this rethinking, I would like to propose that we adopt the terms 'incivil' and 'uncivil', using 'incivil' for those who are oppressed, victimised, but building insurgent societies, challenging earlier power structures dominated by the civil; and 'uncivil' for those, though also resisting civil society and subverting it, whose motives and work are far more limited, material, and in general criminal and exploitative. It is also the case that for people in such situations, the dividing line between 'incivil' and 'uncivil' is often blurred – but I believe and suggest that we need nevertheless to recognise that there are at least three worlds, and crucially, that they co-exist in dynamic tension.⁷

In other words, I suggest that we need to find other ways of looking at what we call 'civil society' – other lenses; that we need to recognise that it is a political concept charged with meanings; and that we need to use it as such.

Many of us have worked and struggled with these questions for many years, without a clear approach as yet.⁸ It is perhaps difficult to people belonging to civil societies, and especially to civil societies in the North, to stand back and see it dispassionately; but we need to. When asking the question a decade ago as to what could be an alternative to the kind of assault that the state and civil society had once again unleashed on the unintended in Kolkata, I myself phrased it in terms of how one could achieve a '*civilised* transition' to another future (Sen,



It is perhaps difficult to people belonging to civil societies, and especially to civil societies in the North, to stand back and see it dispassionately; but we need to

7 I am aware of the very specific use of the term 'uncivil' in the North, by influential civil theorists, to indicate what in India is popularly referred to as 'anti-social': see, for instance, Howell, J. and Pearce, P. (1998). I urge those who use the term 'uncivil' in this way to think about its wider resonances, and to shift to using it in the way I use it in this article.

8 For a discussion of this issue in a symbolically important situation at a very local level – the struggles for survival of hand-rickshaw pullers in Calcutta (now Kolkata) – see Unnayan (1982).

1998). I now realise that I have to rethink my language, and what I actually meant to say – because the achievement of a ‘civilised transition’ too often signals not emancipation but domestication and subjugation.⁹

At the very minimum, I believe that we should look closely at and draw from the concept of *transcommunality*, which has been developed and put forward by John Brown Childs, and examine his proposal that we need to move from working with a politics of conversion to an ethics of respect – an ethics that recognises and respects the diversity of the world and the integrity of the self-image of ‘the other’ (Childs, 2003).

The role of NGOs: Globalisation from below?

Certain further points come out of this, for the purposes of this article. One, it is in these terms that we therefore need to take a deeper look at the roles of NGOs, or civil organisations – the vast majority of which belong to civil society and are led by males of middle and upper caste or class – and at the critical roles that are today attributed to them not only by private foundations, which is more understandable, but also by so many analysts. Taking only as an example the work of Muto Ichiyo,¹⁰ while it is clear from the writings of this visionary thinker and political strategist that he is by no means celebrating them without qualification, as some authors do, and to the contrary is challenging them to review their role in society, on the other hand we need, I believe, to look far more critically at the proposition that he and others put forward, namely that NGOs can and will play the role of helping ‘the people’ come forward, towards a ‘steady but systematic replacement of NGOs with people’s organisations as the representation in the global arena’ (Muto, 2004: 11–12).

While I would like to share this hope, my experience and research into transnational civil politics suggest that, in practice, the reverse of this has been happening and will continue to happen.¹¹ While one result of NGO mobilisation is greater participation by ‘the people’, another is that such organisations, and their leadership, tend also constantly to

9 I develop these arguments to some extent in another paper: Sen (2002).

10 Muto (June 2004). For a discussion of this paper and its proposals, see Sen (2005).

11 For a detailed discussion of the dynamics and politics of the representation of CBOs (community-based organisations, a UN term) on ‘national civil committees’ established towards democratising the preparations for and agenda of Habitat II, the second UN Conference on Human Settlements in 1996, see Sen (1996); and for the dynamics in a major transnational civil campaign see Sen (1999), as above.

move to more powerful positions, often behind the scenes, at national and global levels. We therefore need to be more aware of the structural dynamics involved in such situations – and to be sceptical about the possibilities of this happening without much greater mobilisation on the ground, among ‘the people’ – and by the people themselves, such that they are capable of challenging civil tendencies.

In particular, and flowing out of the arguments I have placed above about their roles, we need to recognise that civil organisations – as a sector or category; there are always exceptions – are not disinterested actors but agency in history for the introduction and installation of civil values. This is, and will necessarily remain, their agenda.

Second, and perhaps most fundamentally, I believe we need to stand back and look at civil organisations in perspective, at a time of dramatic social change – and to assess their role and contributions in this perspective.

We live today at a time when the incivil – and the uncivil – are, more than ever before in history, themselves independently and insurgently building their own organisations and their own transnational coalitions and alliances within and beyond ‘national’ societies (but where in many cases, they also reject the concept and project of the dominant ‘nation’ within which they find themselves located and which they seek now to transcend). In some cases these initiatives are emancipatory and progressive, and in others, regressive – just as in the case of civil society. But in relation to the much celebrated phenomenon and thesis of ‘globalisation from below’, therefore, in which civil organisations have been projected as playing the key role, I believe we need to recognise that this is not globalisation from below (GfB) but globalisation from the middle; but more importantly, and beyond this, that the real globalisation from below is taking place in very different ways and largely quite independently from the celebrated version.¹²

I am speaking here not of a single parallel world, or a simple or single parallel process of building other worlds. I believe that we need to shift our gaze and bring into focus the reality that the world is changing (and has always changed) in myriad ways, and not only through and as a result of (and in reaction to) neoliberal globalisation (which GfB is largely focused on). We need, I suggest, to recognise



The real ‘globalisation from below’ is taking place in very different ways and largely quite independently from the celebrated version.

¹² Brecher, J., Costello, T. and Smith, B. (2000). The *Global Civil Society* yearbook produced by the London School of Economics, as above, also tends to celebrate ‘global civil society’ as GfB, but in a carefully muted way. See, for instance, their covering letter to the 2006/7 Yearbook, as above.

that myriad globalisations have taken place in history and are today taking place – and crucially, that both incivil and uncivil societies all over the world are taking part in this drama, both independently of and also interdependently with yet other actors such as institutions of faith. The world-changing role of former African slaves over the past two centuries, in so many arenas, is just one example (Segal, 1995).

In making this assertion, I openly acknowledge my admiration for the idea of a globalisation from below, as first put forward by Richard Falk and then developed and elaborated very substantially by Jeremy Brecher and his colleagues in their landmark books on the subject (Falk, 1993a; Falk, 1997; Brecher, Costello and Smith, 2000). But I asked precisely these questions of Jeremy and his colleagues back in 2000, while commenting on the manuscript for their book (Sen, 2000).

Their reaction was that, while they accepted my point, it would take another book to achieve this. In my understanding, this work remains urgently to be done, and it is only by engaging with and relating to this issue, and with the other issues I have tried to raise here, and in the terms proposed by Childs as mentioned above (Childs, 2003), that civil organisations can begin authentically to take part in the larger, wider processes of democratisation that are now opening up. Unless they do this, they will in effect compete with them, and thereby – and precisely on account of the power of civility – undermine them, however valid their own concerns and articulations might otherwise be.¹³

Equally possible is the well-established practice of civil organisations co-opting (and thereby civilising) incivil movements and tendencies. As just one example of stark differences of praxis, there is a world of difference in the manner in which many dalit organisations perceive neoliberal globalisation – of potentially being one more force to blow open the caste structure that has imprisoned them for a thousand years, and which they regard as their primary issue – versus the formal ideology of the WSF and the alter-globalisation movement; although the WSF never objects to their presence, despite the contradiction, and in fact celebrates it. This can be compared to the difference that arose in the independence movement in India, where the founder of the dalit movement, Dr B. R. Ambedkar, refused to accept that co-

¹³ A small contribution to this task of examining how change is taking place, and re-thinking 'globalisation', took place during a course I ran at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, during the Fall semester 2006, titled 'Other Worlds, Other Globalisations'; for details, and in time the work of the course participants, see www.critical-courses.cacim.net.

lonialism was the only enemy of the Indian people and insisted that the movement – led by Gandhi, Nehru and other civil actors – accept the dismantling of caste as an equal task; but it came to a head only when he insisted on this.

Third, we need equally to recognise, in this context of competing alter-globalisms, the degree to which the leadership of international NGOs, private foundations, and also of many social movements promoted by such organisations, is today coagulating into what has many of the characteristics of a powerful transnational class. Just as in the case of corporations, these characteristics include key individuals (mostly males) across the world being on the boards of each other's organisations, thereby building ever-larger webs of interlinked control.¹⁴ For the good of both civil and incivil societies, it is essential that we read, comprehend and spell out this phenomenon in political terms.

And fourth, we need also to recognise that the recent phenomenal growth and expansion of transnational civil organisations ('NGOs') is not only a result of spontaneous association but also as a function of more flexible strategies by the US government in securing global hegemony through the dominance of the Washington Consensus (Hurl, 2006; Wallerstein, 2006).

In conclusion, and as I see it, emerging global cooperation among civil social and political actors – collectively referred to as 'global civil society' – is at one and the same time a crucial vehicle for transnational *civil* solidarity and therefore, in this more limited sense, for the democratisation of world politics; but seen through the lens of the historic larger and wider democratisation that is today beginning to unfold, of incivil societies coming into their own, and of the power of civility, it is arguably also – because of the dynamics of civility and its internal tendencies of corporatisation – an instrument for the consolidation, strengthening and imposition of historically unequal social and political relations and of entrenched interests. In the terms of the question asked at the outset of this article therefore, I suggest that it is – in a larger historical perspective, and unless challenged to make major shifts in its politics – arguably contributing today to less democracy, not more.

14 For a discussion of the emergence of a transnational capitalist class, see Sklair, L. (1991); and for a first exploration of its parallels in so-called 'alternative globalisation', see Sklair, L. (2005).

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The political and its absence in the World Social Forum – Implications for democracy

Teivo Teivainen

It has become increasingly accepted that the world cannot be properly understood through theoretical lenses that consider state actors as the exclusive domain of the political. At the same time, there has been surprisingly little systematic analysis of how the political is manifested in the actions and articulations of the globalisation protest movements that have been subject to much general attention since the spectacular street actions in Seattle during the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in 1999. The movements themselves have tended to pay more attention to making politicising claims about institutions considered their adversaries, such as the WTO or the International Monetary Fund (IMF), than to thoroughly debating the implications of the political nature of their own praxis. This lack of attention to the political nature of the articulations among the globalisation protest movements is also reflected in the way they have generally been analysed as members of an emerging 'global civil society', especially when these analyses rely on dichotomous oppositions between the political and the social or, to add another dimension, on the holy trinity of the political/social/economic.

On the one hand, I tend to be sceptical about the usefulness of the *civil society blah-blah-blah* that we so often hear in both academic and activist meetings. One example is the kind of talk where the World Social Forum (WSF) is posited as providing a social counterpart to 'balance' the excessively economic focus of the World Economic Forum. This kind of talk generally either assumes away questions of politics or looks at the political as something that simply has to do with the role of states vis-à-vis either of these forums. On the other hand, I would not want to deny totally the possibility of using 'civil society' as a meaningful concept, especially since the social movements and other social actors themselves often refer to it. For the purposes of this article I will not rely on any concept of 'civil society' as a pre-defined theoretical construct or analytical tool. I will rather focus on 'practices that are shaped in its name' (Amoore and Langley, 2004). In other words, I will refer to concrete social movements and non-governmental organisations that may claim to form part of 'civil society',

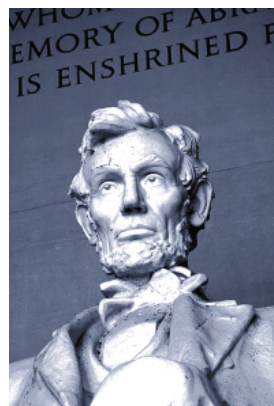
but my focus will be on the politics of their articulations, especially in the context of the WSF.¹

‘Civil society’ and ‘democracy’ in the WSF Charter of Principles

The WSF had its first annual gathering in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and has thereafter become perhaps the most important global arena for social movements and networks that seek democratic transformations of the capitalist world-system. It offers an excellent case study for analysing the possibilities of global democratisation in the 21st century. On the one hand, it is an attempt to facilitate democratic transformations in local, national and global contexts and an arena in which these transformations are debated. Nevertheless, the WSF has faced various contradictory demands that have complicated the democratisation of its own internal organisational structure, which has been expanding from a mostly Brazilian-based organisation towards an increasingly global site of world politics.

The key document that defines the guidelines of the WSF is its Charter of Principles, elaborated between the first two forums, in 2001 and 2002. ‘Civil society’ is mentioned twice and ‘world civil society’ once in the Charter of Principles. The Charter makes clear that who gets to define ‘civil society’ at least in principle gets to decide who can take part in the WSF, because the WSF ‘brings together and interlinks only organisations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world’. The standard definition of civil society offered by the Charter states that it is ‘a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context’. In other words, it does not include representatives of political parties, governments or military organisations: three typically ‘political’ kinds of organisations.

Despite the oft-repeated lip service to the WSF as an open ‘civil society’ space, it is by no means open to all kinds of social movements and non-governmental organisations. There is no strict ideological litmus test to screen the participants. Rather than strict boundaries, the ideological orientation that the participants are supposed to have constitutes frontier zones in which many such organisations that may not be committed to all the elements spelled out in the Charter of Principles in practice take part in the process.



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1 For a strongly critical view on the usefulness of the concept of global civil society to analyse the ‘transnational archipelago of transnational interactions’, see Tarrow, 2002: 245.

According to the WSF Charter of Principles, the organisations that can participate in the Forum are defined as:

...groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among humankind and between it and the Earth.

In the Charter of Principles, ‘democracy’ is directly mentioned four times. Whereas Clause 1 defines the WSF as an open meeting place for ‘democratic debate of ideas’, Clause 4, when speaking about ‘globalization of solidarity’ as a new stage in world history, says it will rest on ‘democratic international systems and institutions’. And, finally, Clause 10 tells us that the WSF upholds respect for the practices of ‘real democracy’ and ‘participatory democracy’.

The WSF by no means includes all the movements and networks that aim at democratic transformations. Its composition has various geographical, sectorial, ideological and civilisational limitations. The emergence of the WSF was, however, a key moment in the gradual shift of emphasis in the aims of many of these movements. The reactive protest dimension has been partially replaced by a more proactive democratisation dimension. A somewhat simplistic but illustrative way to locate this shift is to call the wave of activism that made one of its major public appearances during the World Trade Organization meeting in 1999 in Seattle ‘globalisation protest movements’ and to use the term ‘global democratisation movements’ to characterise the activism of the new millennium symbolised by the WSF. In other words, the WSF provided a channel through which many of the globalisation protest movements of the 1990s have become the global democratisation movements of the 21st century.

Politicisation as a method of democratisation

As argued by Barry Gills (2002), the globalisation protest movements need to be viewed as ‘symptomatic of something far greater than a mere reaction to globalization’. The main question I want to pursue is to what extent the emergence and further expansion of a forum that these movements have created points to new possibilities to apply democratic principles in the globalising world. In this article I can only provide brief reflections,² and one of the issues at stake is how the movements have opened up new spaces for democratic claims by po-

2 For further elaborations see, for example, Teivainen, 2002b; Teivainen, forthcoming.

liticising such social relations that have traditionally been considered to be outside the boundaries of the political. Transnational relations of capitalist production and gender hierarchies are two well-known examples of the spheres that the movements have attempted to politicise. Less attention has been paid to the articulations and power relations between the movements themselves.

The road from politicising protests to transformative proposals is filled with dilemmas. The dilemmas become particularly thorny when the explicit ultimate aim is to articulate proposals of many movements into collective projects to create a radically different world. In such situations we must pay close attention to the workings of power not only in the structures that these movements want to transform but also within their own articulations. Even if the main slogan of the World Social Forum asserts that ‘another world is possible’, it is embedded in the existing one. The WSF’s organisational structure and material resources are in many ways conditioned by the existing power relations of the capitalist world.

For the reproduction of capitalism one of the ideological defence mechanisms has been depoliticisation of power relations, especially but not only those located in the socially constructed sphere of the ‘economic’. The new democratisation movements must face depoliticisation not only out there, in the world external to their movements. They also have to tackle the dilemmas that depoliticisation presents in their own internal organisational efforts.

The difference between the inside and the outside of the organisational constructs of these movements is never absolute. For the sake of analytical clarity, however, we can make a distinction between internal and external depoliticisation of the WSF. The former refers to the claims according to which the WSF is not a locus of power, as stated by its Charter of Principles. As an expression of wish this sounds excellent, but as a description of reality it is clearly erroneous. There are various kinds of power disputes within the WSF process, and if the aim is to increase the horizontality of WSF decision-making, denying the existence of current hierarchies is not a good way to begin. What I would call the external depoliticisation of the WSF consists of ideas and practices that consider it as a space where movements gather but which in itself should not have the characteristics of a political movement. I do not intend to claim that these depoliticising tendencies are necessarily always harmful or outright undemocratic. My hypothesis is, rather, that they have presented various kinds of dilemmas that the WSF organisers have only gradually started taking into account. The



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WSF has experienced a learning process that is political in two inter-related senses. Like any process of learning, it is political because it involves various relations of power between those engaged in it. It is also political by reproducing and confronting different meanings and boundaries of the ‘political’.

Rethinking the political

The politicisation practised by the globalisation protest movements has been only partial, but it opens up new democratic horizons. Both within the movements and inside academia there is still much need for a radical rethinking of what kinds of possibilities politicisation opens for democratic transformations. The WSF process, however, embodies the idea that there exists a new conception of the political that transgresses traditional definitions, especially though not only vis-à-vis territorial states and political parties. As has been stated by Cândido Grzybowski (2004), the WSF participants ‘must be radically political’ and engage in a ‘new way of doing politics’. A key Brazilian organiser of the WSF, Grzybowski concludes insightfully that ‘we engage in a fully political act, but it seems that we fear its consequences’ (*ibid.*). Also many academic observers like Arturo Escobar (2004) have seen a ‘new theoretical and political logic on the rise’ in the WSF, even if its contours are ‘still barely discernible’.

To explore the political in the WSF and in the globalisation protest movements, it is important to move not only beyond state-centric conceptions but also beyond idealised accounts of horizontal networks that create new forms of participation that are assumed to be opposed or unconnected to questions of representation. The death of representational politics has been prematurely announced and celebrated by various activists and theorists of the movements (see Passavant and Dean, 2004). In the beginning the WSF organisers tended to exclude the questions of representation from the discussion on the new political logic within the WSF. There have, however, been increasing demands to deal with the perceived lack of representativeness within the WSF governance bodies. For example, during the first years of the WSF process there have been relatively few African or Asian organisations that have participated in the key decision-making bodies of the process, especially its International Council. Trying to deny the need to talk about representation became increasingly difficult as the underrepresentation of Africans and Asians grew more visible. And once talking about representation was accepted as a legitimate concern in the process, it was possible to consider the process in more political terms.

There exists a plethora of definitions of the political. As regards the sites in which the political can be located, Roberto Mangabeira Unger's two definitions of 'politics' provide a helpful starting-point. For him, the narrow meaning of politics can be stated as 'conflict over the mastery and uses of governmental power'. To analyse the politics of practices and spaces other than those directly related to governments, it is more useful to rely on the broader meaning, which he defines as 'struggle over the resources and arrangements that set the basic terms of our practical and passionate relations'. (Unger, 1987: 145–46.) Here I will take the broader meaning as my first starting point and consider the political not only in relation to state governments but also in other kinds of social relations including articulations between social movements.

A key question in defining the political is its relationship with democratisation, in other words, with the increase in possibilities people have to take part in decisions that concern the basic conditions of their lives. My second starting-point here is that to be political is to politicise and politicisation is a key aspect of democratic struggles. It means revealing the political, and therefore potentially democratisable, nature of such relations of power that are presented as neutral. Politicisation has been a central feature of many radical democratic attempts to expand the established boundaries of the political, including socialism (politicising the relations of domination associated with capitalist economy) and feminism (politicising the relations of domination associated with patriarchy).

One of my key assumptions is therefore that the political consists of the variety of social relations in which democratic claims can be assumed to be valid. The fact that many politicising projects have not led to effective democratisation has often resulted in disillusionment with politicisation. Democratic hopes of radical political movements taking over the state have over the past decades repeatedly evaporated when newly installed governments have started to practise structural adjustment as proposed by international financial institutions and other policies in which key decision-making tends to be shielded from democratic oversight. Politicisation is a necessary, but by no means sufficient, condition for democratisation.

Even if not synonymous with democratisation, politicisation is a necessary element in democratic struggles, both today and tomorrow. Whereas some radical theorists of the past have claimed that in a post-capitalist future politics could be replaced with an 'administration of things' (Engels, 1989), we can observe similar depoliticisation in the current claims that decision-making within the WSF can 'escape the logics of rivalry and power' (Whitaker and Viveret, 2003). As



To negate the political does not make it disappear, it only leads to bewilderment in the face of its manifestations and to impotence in dealing with them

Chantal Mouffe (1993: 140) has affirmed, ‘to negate the political does not make it disappear, it only leads to bewilderment in the face of its manifestations and to impotence in dealing with them’. Relations of power cannot simply be fantasised away, neither in analysing how social relations have been nor in imagining or proposing how they could be. As one of the world’s most important processes in which social movements interact, and at the same time a site of sometimes ferocious power struggles, the WSF provides multiple challenges for rethinking the political. In particular, it offers theorists and activists a possibility to construct such conceptions of the global political that may be helpful for both knowing and democratising the world.

While the political should not be considered as exclusively linked to states, neither should it be conflated with the social by simply claiming that everything needs to be politicised (see Isin, 2002). Instead of the postmodernist tendency to politicise for the sake of politicisation, which easily leads to an endless cycle of deconstruction in which the construction of institutions is difficult, the real need is to politicise in order to open up possibilities for democratisation in sites of socially consequential power. My main focus is on such forms of the political that challenge the existing power relations of the capitalist world-system. Without pretending to locate the roots of all social power in the reproduction of capitalism, I would argue that while the WSF is explicitly opposed to ‘domination of the world by capital’, its organisers have to date paid insufficient attention to how capitalist power relations affect the internal organisation of the WSF itself.

Democratic challenges to economism

The separation of the political and the economic is one of the mechanisms through which democratic claims have been contained under capitalism. According to the doctrine of economic neutrality, economic issues and institutions are somehow apolitical, beyond political power struggles and therefore not subject to democratic claims. With the constant, even if not always lineal, expansion of the social spaces defined as economic, the possibilities of democratic politics have been increasingly restricted.³

The doctrine of economic neutrality is most obvious in institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, but it also manifests itself in the WSF process. Especially during the first years of the process, questions of funding, labour relations and provision of services within the WSF were considered mainly technical issues, handled though a depoliticised

3 On economism in general and what I call transnational politics of economism in particular, see Teivainen, 2002a.

‘administration of things’. The fact that the WSF is organised inside a capitalist world is also evident in the disadvantaged structural position of participants from relatively poor organisations and countries. To claim that the WSF is an ‘open space’ may sound like a joke in bad taste for those who do not have the material means to enter the space. Furthermore, even if the organisers of the WSF have increasingly tried to apply the principles of a non-capitalist ‘solidarity economy’ in the forum itself, the apparently mundane issue of the logistics of accommodation has been heavily conditioned by the profit-making logic of the local hotel industry that especially in Porto Alegre has heavily raised prices to take advantage of the increased demand during the annual WSF.

One of the results (and also causes) of the recent intensification of globalisation protest movements has been the possibility to radically rethink the economic/political boundary. Not all these movements are, or consider themselves, anti-capitalist, though I am particularly interested in their potential to create conditions for a democratic post-capitalist world as well as the possibility to create democratic organisational forms despite or inside capitalism. Many of the globalisation protest movements have aimed at politicisation of global relations of command associated with institutions such as the World Trade Organization, World Economic Forum and transnational corporations. These institutions claim to be purely ‘economic’, and therefore not subject to democratic norms. One of the ideological contradictions of the contemporary global expansion of capitalism is that while the ‘economic’ institutions become more powerful, their political nature becomes, at least potentially, more evident.

The political nature of the economic institutions does not become evident automatically. The contradictions of capitalism create conditions for critical responses, but these responses are not generated without active social forces. The new transnational activism that emerged in the globalisation protests of the 1990s has made it more visible that ‘economy’ is a political and historical construction. To the extent that the movements can convincingly demonstrate that apparently economic institutions are in reality important sites of social power, it becomes more difficult for the latter to be legitimately based on inherently non-democratic principles such as ‘one dollar, one vote’.

Economism is an ideological concealment of the political relations of command inherent in the ‘economic’. These power relations are hidden behind the doctrine of economic neutrality, but we are not only dealing with an imposed illusion. When enough people act as if something called an economic sphere with an autonomous and natural logic really



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exists, the sphere becomes ‘real’, even if socially constructed. By acting transgressively, by politicising the economic through protests and proposals, the globalisation protest movements have created conditions for a radical unthinking of the economic/political boundary. The WSF is one of the main processes in and around which this politicisation has taken place. It is, at the same time, important to ask to what extent the WSF itself reproduces economism and creates apparently non-political structures in its mode of organisation.

Negations and affirmations of the political in the WSF

After various annual main events organised between the first forums held in Porto Alegre and the latest one held in January 2007 in Nairobi, and a rising number of local and regional forums, one of the most controversial questions for the WSF is to what extent it should remain merely an arena where different movements gather and to what extent it should be conceived as a movement in itself. Another key issue concerns the dilemmas of making the WSF process more democratic. I would argue that these two questions have been tackled by the WSF organisers in overly depoliticised terms. The frustrations that this depoliticisation has triggered have, however, led to attempts to politicise the process through sometimes excessively state-centric understandings of the political.

The WSF may not be a *movement* of a traditional kind, but it needs to be *in movement* in order to respond to the challenges its growth has presented. One of the intellectual prerequisites of this movement is to think of the WSF in political terms that transgress both the traditional state-centric conceptions of political practice as well as the currently fashionable depoliticised understandings of ‘civil society’. The political needs to be embraced, resignified and used to create conditions for a more democratic world and a more democratic WSF process.

While almost no-one involved in the WSF process would hold that the WSF is or should be totally apolitical, I shall argue that there has existed a depoliticising tendency that has caused various problems for the process. Some of the problems related to the internal power relations of the WSF and to its role in the world have been innovatively confronted by the organisers over the years, but despite the learning process many of these problems remain.

The WSF was originally constructed as an ‘open space’ where movements discuss democratic alternatives to domination of the world by capital and to different forms of imperialism. Compared to the tradi-

tional methods of political parties and alliances of social movements, one of the novelties of the WSF is that it has avoided constructing mechanisms that would pretend to represent the WSF as a whole. No-one is allowed to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants. While this principle resonates well with the emphasis on horizontal and leaderless networks that many radical activists profess today, it has also caused increasing frustration among organisations such as the transnational peasant alliance Via Campesina, which would like to make the WSF more effective in proposing and promoting concrete strategies of social transformations.

The Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire (2002) once stated that in order to change the world we must first know that it is indeed possible to change it. This helps us understand one dimension of why during its first years the WSF has experienced a spectacular growth and provided so much inspiration for social movements and other actors engaged in processes of democratic transformation. The apparently simple WSF slogan ‘another world is possible’ has aroused enthusiasm because it helps break the demobilising influence of another simple slogan, generally attributed to Margaret Thatcher, according to which ‘there is no alternative’ to the existing capitalist order.

After repeating in forum after forum that ‘another world is possible’, many WSF participants have become eager to know what that other world may look like and how we are supposed to get there. Various participants have become increasingly frustrated with the depoliticised dimensions of the WSF. For some, the demands for a more political WSF have meant the need to create more explicit alliances with, or allowing more involvement by, traditionally political actors such as political parties of progressive governments. For others, the key challenge is to invent ways in which the process itself needs to be practised more politically without assuming that the only way to move beyond the frustrations caused by the depoliticised understandings of civil society is by involving traditionally political actors.

One way of distinguishing these different approaches within the WSF is to postulate a difference between ‘strategic politics’ and ‘prefigurative politics’. The former option has been expressed by politicians such as Venezuela’s president Hugo Chávez as well as intellectuals such as Samir Amin or Ignacio Ramonet, who claim that the WSF should move from being merely a ‘folkloric’ event or a ‘bazaar’ towards a more strategic role that necessarily implies a more explicit articulation with progressive governments.

The prefigurative option, based on creating for the movements and their articulations new modes of internal organisation that consciously resemble the future world they want to create (Grubic, 2003), has been prevalent among many participants of the Intercontinental Youth Camp, a relatively autonomous space generally located in the political and geographical peripheries of the major WSF events. The advocates of prefigurative politics have generally been critical of the internal hierarchies within the WSF, including those that result from an excessive association with governments, and opt for less state-centric forms of being political.

As pointed out by those who emphasise prefigurative politics, the WSF has not always practised what it preaches. In particular, the aim of constructing a democratic world has not been accompanied by sufficient attention to constructing democratic social relations within the WSF itself. At the same time, the criticism of the existing hierarchies within the WSF by youth camp activists and others has often been based on conceptions of horizontal networks or power-free open spaces that do not provide effective strategies for large-scale democratic transformations. In order to change the world, the democratic politics of the movements needs to be both strategic and prefigurative.

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MIND THE GAP

Linking below, across and against – World Social Forum weaknesses, global governance gaps and the global justice movement's strategic dilemmas

Patrick Bond¹

Introduction

The last few years have not been ripe for global reforms, as demonstrated by some telling intra-elite battles decided mainly by an arrogant United States government: the inability to expand the UN Security Council in September 2005; the potentially permanent breakdown of the Doha Round of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations in July 2006; the minor shift of voting power within the IMF board of governors in September 2006 (which strengthened several countries at the expense of Africa); the failure to expand the Kyoto Protocol at a November 2006 conference in Nairobi; and the lack of Middle East, Gulf, central Asian and Horn of Africa peace settlements or indeed prospects.

Likewise, this appears a 'down time' for global-scale social change work in the radical tradition, if by that one considers full-fledged attacks on institutions like the World Trade Organization in Seattle (1999) or the G8 in Genoa (2001), or the more surgical activities (and the solidarity) that characterised the defence of Zapatismo² in Mexico after 1994, or of Cochabamba water warriors after they kicked out Bechtel in 2000, or of factory occupations in Buenos Aires after 2002, or of the right to water and electricity in Soweto, or a myriad of struggles for human rights and democracy in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Burma, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Colombia and elsewhere.

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2 The Zapatistas emerged in Chiapas – a province of southeastern Mexico – in 1994 as a coherent force of many thousands of indigenous people, peasants, workers and lay theologians demanding dignity and economic justice.

To be sure, in June 2007, there was formidable protest against the G8 by mainly European activists in Rostock, and the World Bank/IMF annual meeting in October as well as the G20 session near Cape Town in November may be important markers of ongoing militancy. The anti-war movement also provides occasional shows of strength, especially in sites such as Italy where US bases are at stake.

Still, it is sometimes argued that since September 2001, alliance-growing internationalism in the North (especially long-sought unity between social movements, environmentalists and labour) and the space or impulse to conduct protest against corporate globalisation in the South have both withered a bit, or at minimum failed to maintain the momentum required, given ongoing global-scale threats. If Joe Stiglitz is correct, in *Globalization and its Discontents*, that fair trade activists and the Jubilee movement were crucial to getting his reformist critique onto the agenda, then it is not surprising that Stiglitz, Jeffrey Sachs, George Soros and other high-profile global Keynesians have themselves made no progress.

Without a doubt, there continues to be hectic advocacy work across borders carried out by NGOs, international labour federations and environmentalists. But the waning visibility of militant community-based tree-shakers probably prevents the petit-bourgeois NGO jam-makers from finding any fruits for – or of – their labours. Setting aside the remarkable rise of left-leaning Latin American governments and their puncturing of the International Monetary Fund's self-financing model, next to nothing has been accomplished to reform the world over this time, apart from dubious debt deals, permission to produce generic AIDS medicines and a slight increase in North-South aid. The move by some globally-conscious activists to anti-poverty campaigning is one reflection of how weak the genuine anti-poverty campaigners are, in articulating a coherent global-scale political project.

But this is not meant to sound so pessimistic. Instead, for advocates of global justice, the period since 2001 also witnessed two kinds of constructive activities, one in building the World Social Forum (WSF) and its constituent movements, and the other linking social movements across borders, usually sector by sector – albeit with insufficient linkages between the sectors. In his important politico-anthropological book on Africa, *Global Shadows*, James Ferguson (2006: 108) offers this confession:

Traditional leftist conceptions of progressive politics in the third world (to which many anthropologists, including myself, have long



The waning visibility of militant community-based tree-shakers probably prevents the petit-bourgeois NGO jam-makers from finding any fruits for – or of – their labours

subscribed) have almost always rested on one or another version of the vertical topography of power that I have described. 'Local' people in 'communities' and their 'authentic' leaders and representatives who organise 'at the grassroots', in this view, are locked in struggle with a repressive state representing (in some complex combination) both imperial capitalism and the local dominant classes. The familiar themes here are those of resistance from below, and repression from above, always accompanied by the danger of cooptation, as the leaders of today's struggle become the elites against whom one must struggle tomorrow.

I do not mean to imply that this conception of the world is entirely wrong, or entirely irrelevant. But if, as I have suggested, transnational relations of power are no longer routed so centrally through the state, and if forms of governmentality increasingly exist that bypass states altogether, then political resistance needs to be reconceptualised in a parallel fashion.

Can we learn to conceive, theoretically and politically, of a 'grassroots' that would be not local, communal, and authentic, but worldly, well-connected, and opportunistic? Are we ready for social movements that fight not 'from below' but 'across', using their 'foreign policy' to fight struggles not against 'the state' but against that hydra-headed transnational apparatus of banks, international agencies, and market institutions through which contemporary capitalist domination functions?

Hence we begin such a reconceptualisation – a vast task which can only be done through myriad debates and struggles, and with activists from the 'grassroots' as our most serious guides – by checking the progress of the World Social Forum. From disputes between the various camps within the WSF we might reconstruct a map of ideological currents that span Third World nationalism, the Post-Washington Consensus reformers and the disturbing fusion of neoliberalism and neoconservatives to be found in most multilateral agencies. Those with any lingering hope for global governance as a route to global eco-social justice under prevailing power relations should, after this reality check, perhaps instead refocus on those cross-border, cross-sectoral and cross-cutting alliances that can rearticulate how best to fight global-scale repression in all its manifestations.

The World Social Forum 'at the crossroads'

We learnt a great deal about the divergent ways forward for global justice movement political strategy at the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi. One of the most influential commentators and activists,

Walden Bello (2007), found the Nairobi WSF to be:

...disappointing, since its politics was so diluted and big business interests linked to the Kenyan ruling elite were so brazen in commercialising it... There was a strong sense of going backward rather than forward in Nairobi. The WSF is at a crossroads... After the disappointment that was Nairobi, many long-standing participants in the Forum are asking themselves: Is the WSF still the most appropriate vehicle for the new stage in the struggle of the global justice and peace movement? Or, having fulfilled its historic function of aggregating and linking the diverse counter-movements spawned by global capitalism, is it time for the WSF to fold up its tent and give way to new modes of global organization of resistance and transformation?

From my own experience, a mixed message – combining celebration and autocritique – is in order, in the wake of the Nairobi WSF. From 20–25 January 2007, the 60,000 registered participants heard triumphalist radical rhetoric and yet, too, witnessed persistent defeats for social justice causes – especially within the WSF's own processes. Many of these were aired at the leading African political webzine, www.pambazuka.org:

- Kenya Social Forum coordinator Onyango Oloo listed grievances that local activists put high on the agenda: 'colonial era land edicts and policies which dispossessed their communities; the impact of mining and extraction activities on the environment and human livelihoods; discriminatory policies by successive governments that have guaranteed the stubborn survival of pre-colonial conditions of poverty and underdevelopment among many pastoralist and minority communities; the arrogant disregard for the concerns raised by Samburu women raped over the years by British soldiers dispatched on military exercises in those Kenyan communities; and tensions persisting with neocolonial-era settler farmers and indigenous Kenyan comprador businessmen in hiving off thousands of hectares of land while the pastoralists and minority communities are targets of state terror, evictions and denunciations'.
- WSF organiser Wahu Kaara: 'We are watching [global elites] and this time around they will not get away with it because we are saying they should cancel debts or we repudiate them. We refuse unjust trade. We are not going to take aid with conditionality. We in Africa refuse to be the continent identified as poor. We have hope and determination and everything to offer to the prosperity of the human race.'



The WSF is at a crossroads... Is the WSF still the most appropriate vehicle for the new stage in the struggle of the global justice and peace movement? Or is it time for the WSF to fold up its tent and give way to new modes of global organization of resistance and transformation?

- Firoze Manji, the Kenyan director of Pambazuka: ‘This event had all the features of a trade fair – those with greater wealth had more events in the calendar, larger (and more comfortable) spaces, more propaganda – and therefore a larger voice. Thus the usual gaggle of quasi-donor and international NGOs claimed a greater presence than national organisations – not because what they had to say was more important or more relevant to the theme of the WSF, but because, essentially, they had greater budgets at their command.’
- Nairobi-based commentator Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem: ‘The WSFs show up Africa’s weaknesses whether they are held outside or inside Africa. One of the critical areas is our level of participation and preparedness. A majority of the African participants – even many from Kenya itself – were brought by foreign paymasters or organisations funded by outsiders. Often they become prisoners of their sponsors. They must attend events organised or supported by their sponsors who need to put their “partners” on display, and the “partners” in turn need to show their loyalty to their masters.’
- Blogger Sokari Ekine (‘Black Looks’) on the final WSF event: ‘Kasha, a Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex activist from Sexual Minorities Uganda, went up to the stage and asked to make a statement. She was asked for a copy of what she would be speaking about and gave them her piece. The organizers threw her piece on the floor and refused to allow her to speak. Kasha stood her ground saying she, like everyone else, had a right to speak here at the WSF. Despite the harassment by the MC and organizers, Kasha took the mic and spoke. She spoke about being a lesbian, about being a homosexual. She refuted the myth that homosexuality was un-African. She spoke about the punishment and criminalization of homosexuals in Kenya, in Uganda, and in Nigeria. She said homosexuals in Africa were here to stay. Homosexuals have the same rights as everyone else and should be accepted and finally that even in Africa Another World is Possible for Homosexuals. Kasha was booed and the crowd shouted obscenities at her waving their hands [and] screaming: “No! No! No!” But she persisted and said what needed to be said.’

These sobering observations were reflected in a statement by the Social Movements Assembly at a January 24 rally of more than 2000: ‘We denounce tendencies towards commercialization, privatization and militarization of the WSF space. Hundreds of our sisters and brothers who welcomed us to Nairobi have been excluded because of high costs of participation. We are also deeply concerned about the presence of organizations working against the rights of women, mar-

ginalized people, and against sexual rights and diversity, in contradiction to the WSF Charter of Principles.’

Conflicts included arrests of a dozen low-income people who wanted to get into the event; protests to forcibly open the gates; and the destruction of the notoriously repressive Kenyan interior minister’s makeshift restaurant which had monopolised key space within the Kasarani stadium’s grounds. Soweto activist Trevor Ngwane was a protest leader, but after the first successful break-in by poor Kenyans, reported stiff resistance: ‘The next day we again planned to storm the gates but found police and army reinforcements at the gates. Those officers carried very big guns. Comrades decided to block the main road until the people were allowed in for free. This action took about half an hour and then the gates were opened. The crowd then marched to the Organizing Committee’s offices to demand a change of policy on the question of entrance. Another demand was added: free water inside the WSF precinct and cheaper food.’

Although that demand was not met, Oloo gracefully confessed the ‘shame’ of progressive Kenyans during the Social Movements Assembly rally. WSF logistical shortcomings reflected the Kenyan left’s lost struggles within the host committee, he said. The interior minister (‘the crusher’) snuck in at the last second, and the Kenya Airports Authority systematically diverted incoming visitors to hotels, away from home stays (2000 of which were arranged – only 18 actually materialised. thanks to diversions).

Setting these flaws aside, consider a deeper political tension. For Oloo, ‘These social movements, including dozens in Kenya, want to see the WSF being transformed into a space for organising and mobilising against the nefarious forces of international finance capital, neoliberalism and all its local neo-colonial and comprador collaborators.’

In South Africa, the Centre for Civil Society (CCS) has hosted several debates on this question, with at least four varying points of view emerging.³ In July 2006, for example, leading African political economist Samir Amin presented the ‘Bamako Appeal’, a January 2006 manifesto which originated at the prior WSF polycentric event, and which combined, as Amin put it, the traditions of socialism, anti-racism/colonialism, and (national) development. In support was the leader of the Organization of African Trade Union Unity, Hassan Sunmonu (also a WSF International Council member). Complaining that ‘billions of

3 The quotes below are largely found on the CCS dvd set *CCS WIRED*, which recorded the July 2006 ‘Workshop on the World Social Forum’.

ideas have been generated since 2001 up till the last Forum', Sunmonu found 'a lot of merit in that Bamako Appeal that we can use to transform the lives of ourselves, our organizations and our peoples.'

But reacting strongly against the Bamako Appeal, CCS student (and Johannesburg anti-privatisation activist) Prishani Naidoo and three of her comrades criticised its 'last century' tone and content, which mirrored 'the mutation of the WSF from an arena of encounter for local social movements into an organised network of experts, academics and NGO practitioners'. For Naidoo *et al.*, 'It reassures us that documents like the Bamako Appeal will eventually prove totally irrelevant and inessential to struggles of communities in South Africa as elsewhere. Indeed, the WSF elite's cold institutional and technicist soup, occasionally warmed up by some hints of tired poeticism, can provide little nourishment for local subjectivities whose daily responses to neoliberalism face more urgent needs to turn everyday survival into sustained confrontations with an increasingly repressive state.' In contrast, Naidoo and the others praise the 'powerful undercurrent of informality in the WSF's proceedings [which] reveals the persistence of horizontal communication between movements, which is not based on mystical views of the revolutionary subject, or in the official discourse of the leaders, but in the life strategies of their participants.'



The WSF's greatest potential – so far unrealised – is the possibility of linking dozens of radical movements in various sectors. Instead, at each WSF the activists seem to disappear into their own workshops: silos with few or no interconnections.

A third position on WSF politics is the classical socialist, party-building approach favoured by Ngwane and other revolutionary organisers. Replying to both Amin and the autonomist critique at the July workshop, Ngwane fretted, on the one hand, about reformist projects that 'make us blind to recognise the struggles of ordinary people.' On the other hand, though, 'I think militancy alone at the local level and community level will not in itself answer questions of class and questions of power.' For that a self-conscious socialist cadre is needed, and the WSF is a critical site to transcend localist political upsurges.

A fourth position seeks the 21st century's anti-capitalist 'manifesto' in the existing social, labour and environmental movements that are already engaged in excellent transnational social justice struggles. The WSF's greatest potential – so far unrealised – is the possibility of linking dozens of radical movements in various sectors. Instead, at each WSF the activists seem to disappear into their own workshops: silos with few or no interconnections. Before a Bamako Appeal or any other manifesto is parachuted into the WSF, we owe it to those activists to compile their existing grievances, analyses, strategies and tactics. Sometimes these are simple demands, but often they are also articulated as sectoral manifestos, like the very strong African Water Network of anti-privatisation militants formed in Nairobi.

These four positions are reflected in a new book released at the Nairobi WSF by the New Delhi-based Institute for Critical Action – Centre in Movement – and CCS: *A Political Programme for the World Social Forum?* (Sen and Kumar, 2007). It contains some older attempts at left internationalism, such as the Communist Manifesto (1848) and the Bandung Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference (1955), as well as the ‘Call of Social Movements’ at the second and third Porto Alegre WSF, the 2005 Porto Alegre Manifesto by the male-heavy Group of Nineteen, and the Bamako Appeal with sixteen critical replies. There are also selections on global political party formations by Amin, an analysis of the global labour movement by Peter Waterman, the Women’s Global Charter for Humanity, and some old and newer Zapatista declarations.

Lest too much energy is paid to these political scuffles at the expense of ongoing struggle, consider the spirit articulated by Ngwane, in a Nairobi debate with WSF founder Chico Whitaker: ‘Ordinary working class and poor people need and create and have a movement of resistance and struggle. They also need and create and have spaces for that movement to breathe and develop. The real question is what place will the WSF have in that reality. What space will there be for ordinary working class and poor people? Who will shape and drive and control the movement? Will it be a movement of NGOs and individual luminaries creating space for themselves to speak of their concern for the poor? Will it be undermined by collaboration with capitalist forces? I think what some of us saw happening in Nairobi posed some of these questions sharply and challenged some of the answers coming from many (but not all) of the prominent NGOs and luminaries in the WSF.’

To date, the WSF’s primary achievements have been in gathering the multiplicity of movements fighting neoliberal capitalism and imperialism, and maintaining the open space to keep alive mutual education and networking. But aside from the kinds of adverse power relations that were critiqued by grassroots activists in Nairobi, the WSF’s main disappointment remains our inability to converge on strategy, generate agreed joint actions, and forge cross-sectoral ties.

In past decades, ‘internationals’ were forged from labour, socialist, women’s, youth, anti-racism/colonialism, anti-war and other such movements, actively seeking commonalities across borders. In addition to these movements, future international initiatives will more tightly link organisations devoted to minority rights, civil rights, democracy, indigenous people, cultural freedom, human rights, sexual identity, disability rights, and elder and youth rights. There are, in addition,

many other issue-based movements that already coordinate advocacy and protest, in many cases taking their direction from the South where movements are more militant and the stakes higher: finance, debt, aid, investment, trade, recuperated factories, co-ops, corporate disempowerment and anti-consumerism, land, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, housing, urban access rights, water, energy, health, food/nutrition, social security, education, other environmental struggles, media, policing, prisons, and information and communication technology.



The challenge ... is finding sites of interlock where the [movements'] own political programmes can be drawn on for the sake of a larger – and firmly grounded – manifesto that would inspire a new era of coordinated global/national/local activism.

In addition to better targeting of common enemies (such as the Bretton Woods twins, the WTO, the White House, the European Union, etc.), the challenge, I think, is to gain more coherence not only for networking among these movements, but also in finding sites of interlock where their own political programmes can be drawn on for the sake of a larger – and firmly grounded – manifesto that would inspire a new era of coordinated global/national/local activism.

One national-scale example of an all-encompassing political project – which perhaps would emerge from greater linkages across and between these movements, and much closer attention to their traditions of struggle – comes from South Africa: the 1994 *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (RDP) (African National Congress, 1994). That document attempted to fuse the historical struggles of the Mass Democratic Movement's component parts, drawing upon the analyses, strategies, tactics and alliances built in some cases over decades. Though the neoliberal African National Congress did a subsequent U-turn on the vast majority of progressive mandates in the RDP (Bond and Khosa, 1999), it remains a crucial statement of South African social justice aspirations.

If such a global-scale project is not hosted by the WSF, where then? One answer is that many movements are beaver away on the terrain of 'global governance', where there are various efforts underway to reform multilateral institutions. However, if we look at these carefully, they have not had much success, given the balance of forces at the world scale.

Global governance gaps

It should be clear, after nearly three decades of systematic NGO advocacy within and around the multilateral agencies – the Bretton Woods Institutions, World Trade Organization and even the United Nations – that collaboration has mainly not paid off. UN researcher Kleber Ghimire (2005, 1) registers pessimism based on his survey of

movements (albeit sometimes ‘spontaneous and informal’) that address debt, trade barriers, the Tobin tax on financial corruption, anticorruption and fair trade:

[A]lthough governments, bilateral bodies and international development institutions are beginning to pay more attention to such reformist transnational movements, this has not resulted in significant policy impacts... There are major ideological limitations of the system to readily accommodate such demands... There are few signs of stable interactions between formal political bodies and social movements. Internal divisions persist between reformist and radical forces within the movements themselves...

This latter point is worth exploring. In what I term ‘movements for global justice’, one major split appears between ‘autonomist’ and ‘socialist’ politics, as noted in the dispute over WSF programmatic politics above. But two other ideological currents in civil society should also be noted: Third World nationalism (especially as applied to networks active on matters such as racism, reparations, trade and debt), and the ‘Post-Washington Consensus’ approach adopted by many NGOs, trade unions, progressive religious organisations and academics aligned with civil society. Moreover, they are arrayed against two common foes: neoliberalism and neoconservatism

Ironically, notwithstanding profound internal contradictions, which bubbled to the surface in Paul Wolfowitz’s 2007 sex/money scandal, the mid/late-2000s are witnessing an unreformable multilateral system whose managers generally fuse neoliberalism and neoconservatism, serving the interests of a Washington nexus in which the Pentagon, Treasury and Federal Reserve are unusually powerful and well aligned, but also making substantial concessions to European interests.

Influenced by Gordon Brown, the European Union not only made Pascal Lamy head of the World Trade Organization in 2005 but also chose as IMF managing director in mid-2004 the former Spanish finance minister Rodrigo Rato, whom Vicente Navarro (2004) describes as ‘ultra-right’ because not only was he the most austerity-oriented EU finance minister, ‘he supported such policies as making religion a compulsory subject in secondary schools, requiring more hours of schooling in religion than in mathematics, undoing the progressivity in the internal revenue code, funding the Foundation dedicated to the promotion of francoism (i.e. Spanish fascism), never condemning the fascist dictatorship.’



There are few signs of stable interactions between formal political bodies and social movements. Internal divisions persist between reformist and radical forces within the movements themselves.

Wolfowitz – the architect of the illegal US/UK/Coalition of the Willing war against Iraq – was appointed to head the World Bank in March 2005, after shoring up the Suharto dictatorship during his stint as Ronald Reagan’s ambassador to Indonesia during the late 1980s (Vallette, 2005), and as chief strategist for US defence secretary Dick Cheney, he drafted the Defense Planning Guidance: ‘Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival... In non-defence areas, we must account sufficiently for the interests of the advanced industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political and economic order’ (US Defense Department, 1992).

There has been no respite at the United Nations, where the Bush regime chose hardliners to run the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNICEF and the World Food Programme, as well as the secretary-generalship and other key positions. In the wake of an early 1990s bout of (failed) UN leadership by Boutros Boutros-Ghali (a somewhat more Third Worldist Egyptian booted out by the US in 1995), Kofi Annan’s tenure was characterised by an obsequious obedience on matters ranging from ineptly-targeted anti-Iraq sanctions (which left at least half a million children dead) to Nato’s illegal bombing of Serbia and the Iraq invasion and occupation. As National Security Council officer Robert Orr told an Annan biographer, ‘Very few secretaries-general had worked with the US military. Here we were in an era where the US military was going to be a big part of the equation. You needed a secretary-general who understands that the US military is not the enemy. Kofi could do it’ (Anderson, 2007).

As Perry Anderson’s (2007) ferocious critique of Annan and the UN concludes, any hope for the UN as a source of counterhegemony ended during the 1990s:

Victory in the cold war, knocking the USSR out of the ring, and the concomitant eclipse of nationalism by neoliberalism in the Third World, henceforward gave the United States more thoroughgoing real power over the UN than it had enjoyed even at the height of its postwar ascendancy, since it could now rely on the compliance, tacit or express, of Russia and China with its imperatives. Annan’s Secretariat was one product of this change. The multiplication of UN peacekeeping missions in the ‘90s, offloading policing tasks of lesser strategic importance for the American imperium was another. Paramountcy does not mean omnipotence. The United States cannot count on always securing UN legitimization of its actions *ex ante*. But where this is wanting, ret-

respective validation is readily available, as the occupation of Iraq has shown. What is categorically excluded is active opposition of the UN to any significant US initiative. A Security Council resolution, let alone a Secretary General, condemning an American action is unthinkable.

Ban Ki-moon, whose appointment required Chinese assent, may keep a lower profile than Annan, but his role is unlikely to be very different. The US grip on the organisation has not relaxed, as can be seen from recent UN resolutions on Lebanon and Iran, which the White House could never have obtained so easily before. Anxious voices from liberal opinion, worrying that the organisation might become irrelevant if Bush's 'unilateralism' persists, and plaintive appeals from the left to defend the UN from distortion by Washington, are regularly heard today. They can be reassured. The future of the United Nations is safe. It will continue to be, as it was intended to be, a serviceable auxiliary mechanism of the Pax Americana.

(The new secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, proved Anderson's point in January 2007, on the day the US began bombing Somalia: 'I fully understand the necessity behind this attack'.⁴)

In this context, for UN Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) to serve Pax Americana requires that they re-legitimise the Bretton Woods Institutions and World Trade Organization. That is indeed the necessity behind the MDG rhetoric, as three leading UNDP bureaucrats have conceded (Vandemoortele, Malhotra and Lim, 2003). Even the UN officials admit that while 'Monterrey [Financing for Development conference in 2002], Doha and the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) [the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative] hold great promise to make significant contributions to the achievement of the MDGs, however, progress thus far has been extremely slow.' Abundant evidence suggests that *because of* Monterrey, Doha and HIPC (including 2005 concessions), MDG targets will not be met (Bond, 2006; Bush, 2007).

4 Within two days it became apparent that 70 nomadic civilians in southern Somalia near the Kenya borders were the main victims. According to one report, they were 'misidentified in a secret operation by [US] special forces attempting to kill three top al-Qa'ida leaders... [Nomads were] bombed at night and during the day while searching for water sources. Meanwhile, the US ambassador to Kenya has acknowledged that the onslaught on Islamist fighters failed to kill any of the three prime targets... In addition to the scores of Somali civilians killed, the simmering civil war in the failed state has been rekindled' (Penketh and Bloomfield, 2007).

Conclusion: Bottom-up strategies to link across borders and sectors

If the World Social Forum is a difficult site at present because of its lack of a political programme, where then might builders of the global justice movement seek commonality? Three strategic points appear obvious. First, in terms of scale politics, Walden Bello (2002) has suggested that ‘deglobalisation’ (of capital) informs the global justice movement’s struggles to change power relations and decentralise economies. Second, a central objective in the spheres of production and reproduction should be ‘decommodification’, in the spirit Gosta Esping-Andersen (1990) describes for the best Scandinavian social policy, codifying the ‘double movement’ that Karl Polanyi (1957: 57) has posited as a world-historical phenomenon once the market penetrates society too far. Third, towards both appropriate scale and social policies, we should continue seeking ‘nonreformist reforms’ which would achieve concrete goals and simultaneously link movements, enhance consciousness, develop the issues, and build democratic organisational forms and momentum.

Many of the dilemmas associated with global governance reform considered above suggest that instead of top-down corrections, it is worth focusing instead on bottom-up pressure, but, as Ferguson suggests, in a manner that entails movements working across borders, and linking what are sometimes single issues in the process. It is especially in the middle-income, semi-peripheral countries that commodification and economic globalisation are most fiercely experienced, and most actively resisted, and it is not surprising that global leadership is often found in these sites.

These are not scenes that only occur outside the realm of state politics, for in many Latin American sites (especially Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador) mass popular initiatives have brought changes of governments through votes and protests. Overall, the last 30 years since the onset of neoliberalism, and especially the last decade, have witnessed a formidable upsurge of unrest: 1980s–90s IMF riots, high-profile indigenous people’s protests since Zapatismo in 1994, global justice activism since Seattle in 1999, the Social Forum movement since 2001, globally coordinated anti-war demos since 2001, autonomist protests and the Latin American left’s revival. In the process, the most serious activists are crossing borders, races, classes and political traditions in sector after sector: land (Via Campesino), healthcare (International People’s Health Movement), free schooling (Global Campaign for Education), water (the People’s World Water Forum), energy/

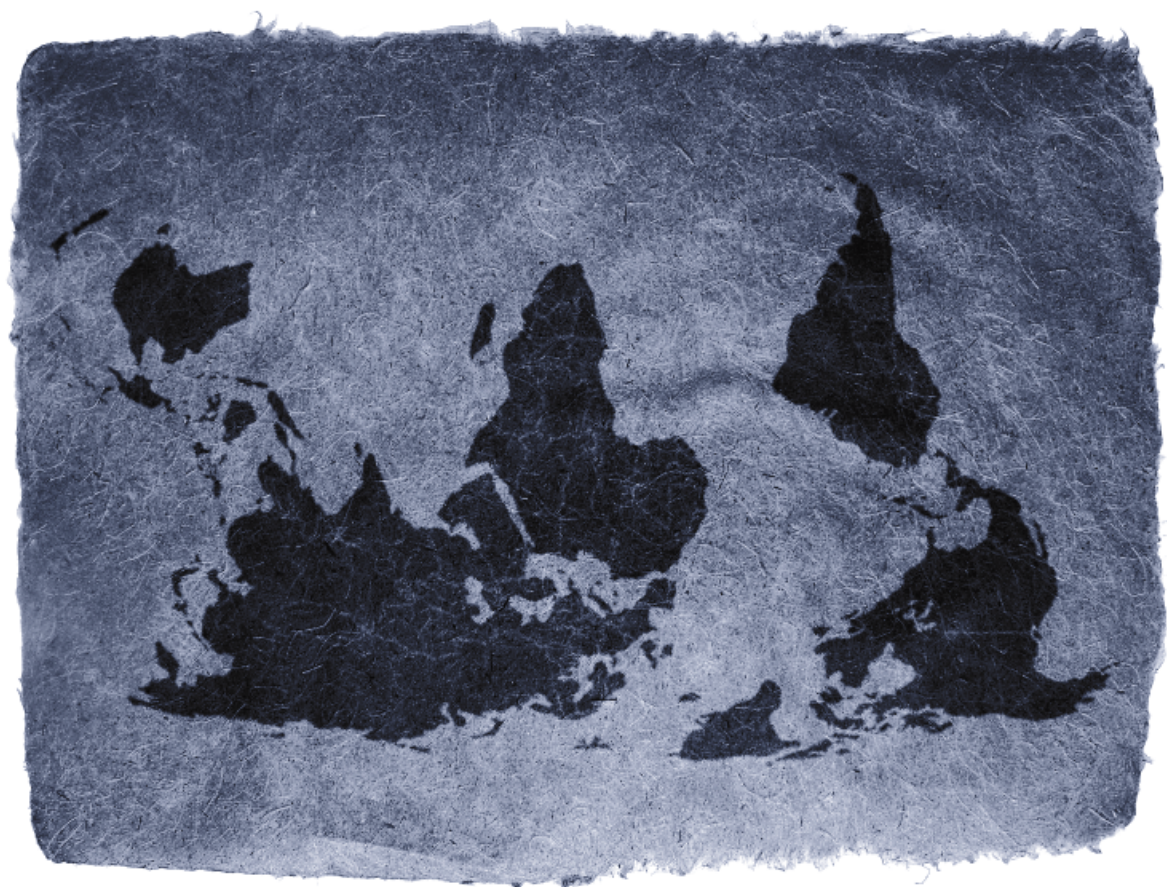
climate change (the Durban Declaration), debt (Jubilee South), democratic development finance (IFIs-Out! and World Bank Bonds Boycott), trade (Our World is Not for Sale) and others.

For these movements, what strategies are most appropriate, given the circumstances and this array of forces? As noted in the discussion about the WSF, some in the global justice movement insist that autonomist independence is the objective, while others consider these as seed-bed struggles for socialism, starting locally but building to national, regional and international scales when the power relations are less adverse. Although this is not the optimal site for such a debate, it is fairly obvious that in Chiapas, Zapatismo has ended its localist project and moved to a national agenda, in alliance with other indigenous and progressive movements. Argentine factory occupations appear to have hit their maximum autonomist strength at the stage of roughly 200 sites and 15,000 participants. Brazilian landless activists are reformulating critiques of the national state, in the wake of the betrayal by the Workers Party, but making yet more militant demands for state services such as interventions against major landowners and grid connections to water and electricity services for their occupied lands. Johannesburg's Anti-Privatization Forum and its affiliates – sometimes identified as autonomist because of their illegal reconnection of water and electricity – have recently debated the adoption of an explicitly socialist manifesto. Autonomism may, hence, be at the point of exhaustion as a scale politics, potentially to be renewed by national-scale political initiatives, as we see in Latin America – yet which work across borders and link issues, as Hugo Chavez and his movements appear to clearly comprehend.

But the work required to analyse the movement of movements – and their analyses, strategies, tactics and alliances – has not even properly begun. Perhaps we must await the increasing coherence of these cross-border and potentially cross-sectoral movements at the next local, national and regional social forums, which will build towards the 2009 World Social Forum. Meantime, the activists are driving the research forward in a manner that tells us more about the world than any other method, namely *praxis*, and it behoves us to learn from their victories and failures alike.

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Global civil society and democracy – A difficult but unavoidable task: visions from the south

Moema Miranda

In 2006, on my return from a trip to Nairobi, Kenya, I found an old book by Amílcar Cabral (Cabral, 1980) in a secondhand book shop in Rio de Janeiro. Perhaps, in such circumstances, my attention was even more drawn to this book by an African hero: the leader of the anti-colonial struggle in Guinea Bissau and Príncipe was participating in the Tricontinental Conference in Cuba in 1966.¹ In his speech, he reaffirmed his allegiance to Marxism and said he entirely shared the thesis according to which ‘class struggle is the engine of history’. However, as an African he recognised that the anti-colonial struggle did not have a profile that could easily be lined up with the classical definition of ‘class struggle’. For the majority of people struggling in Africa, the organisation of society along class lines was not a reality. They belonged to ethnic groups, to tribes, to nations, which still existed at the margins of the capitalist order and constituted their social and economical organisation based on other parameters. However, Amílcar Cabral, the Marxist intellectual, could not accept that the people of his continent should stand ‘outside history’, for not defining their struggles in terms of ‘class’, as they were articulated in the dominant readings of Marx’s legacy at that time (Cabral, 1980).² In addition to the debate on ideas and concepts, he had to guarantee the international solidarity and support from those to whom he addressed his speech. Defeat of the colonial order and expulsion of the Portu-

1 One is about the creation of the Tricontinental Conference, ‘*Organização de Solidariedade dos Povos da Ásia, África e América Latina*’ and the 7th Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution.

2 ‘What was said allows us then to ask the following question: Does history only start from the moment when the phenomenon of class and consequently the class struggle are unchained? Answering in the affirmative would put history outside all life periods of human groupings, from the discovery of hunting and, later, through nomadic and sedentary agriculture, to the breeding of cattle and private appropriation of land. But it would also – which we refuse to accept – mean considering that various human groupings in Africa, Asia and Latin America lived without a history or outside history at the moment they were subjected to the imperialist yoke. It would be to consider that the population of our countries, as the *Balantas* of Guinea, the *Cuanhamas* of Angola and the *Macondes* of Mozambique, if we abstract from the very light influences of colonialism they have been subjected to, today still live outside history or that they do not have a history’ (Cabral, A. 1982)

gueses were urgent. Hence his attempt at justification and adjustment in a laborious task of making reality conform with theory.

Reading the book made me more convinced that our present debates on concepts, names and definitions definitely need to find their starting-point in the people's real struggle for emancipation and the vital quest for a social, economic and political order that is inclusive, sustainable, generous and plural. We are still marked by the colonial logic (in its multiple neocolonial versions), a birthmark of the origin of capitalism. It is still fundamental to refute and fight colonialism in its less evident expressions, in the spaces of sciences, of definitions and of nomenclatures. Clearly, naming is a difficult and complex task. Hence, when we approach the debate about the sense, purpose and framing of what is being identified by academics and activists as the new 'global civil society', these concerns must be in our minds.

Rather than engage in a nominalist debate, the purpose of this short article is to attempt to reflect openly on the challenges that we have ahead of us – as militants and anti-capitalist activists involved in the construction of 'another possible world' – when acting in this planetary sphere (or 'global', for those who prefer this word) towards the democratisation of a world globalised by capital.

Thus, let us take as given the increase in new forms of 'worldwide', 'planetary' and 'global' actions by an enormous number of economic and social actors and forces at the beginning of the 21st century. The preemptory action comes from capital itself and its corporative and transnational/multilateral agencies. But, simultaneously, the expansion of the capacity of connection, communication and displacement, made possible through access to technicians and technology, has also multiplied the relations of different entities, cultural, political, and artistic forces, and so on. Here we can therefore speak of philanthropic agencies, networks of culture and music, as well as of organizations acting on behalf of corporate interests, and the like. But in this article I am not concerned with this multiplicity.

In this vast and polyphonic phenomenon, our attention will primarily be centred on action, on the challenges and possibilities of intervention by alter-globalist forces. This choice comes from the fact, according to the point of view from which this article is formulated, that the main processes (though certainly not the only ones) with the capacity to democratise the global order in a radical way are those that also set themselves the task of confronting capitalism and neoliberal globalisation. Therefore, from the outset there is a thesis and a political position guiding the reflections that follow.



We are still marked by the colonial logic (in its multiple neocolonial versions), a birthmark of the origin of capitalism.

The global order that threatens and (re)unites us

Far from its origins and first utilisation by philosophers and/or intellectuals, the notion of civil society – and that of ‘global civil society’ – was brought to the political arena with great impact at the end of the 20th century. Among the many consequences of the 1990s, the years of the neoliberal order, there are two that concern us directly: in the first place, the culmination of a long process of planetary action by capital forces, defined as ‘globalization’, a word that has become jargon and passed into mainstream use. The mark of the planet’s new hegemonic order.

It is not in our interest here to undertake a detailed analysis of this process, so widely debated by activists and intellectuals. It is a complex phenomenon, full of contradictions, with multiple facets, but the fact is that, with the defeat of the bipolar order, we entered an age in which capitalism for the first time became hegemonic on a worldwide scale.

However, from its very beginning capitalism faced strong resistance, and was a target of constant and intense criticism. The hegemony of capital’s order represents a victory with bloody battles and countless deaths, not a stroll in the park. Each advance corresponded to an intense process of struggle, resistance and criticism. But – and this is one of the characteristics of the hegemony – it is the winners who define the fields where the battles take place. There is a certain correspondence between instances and spheres where the order is confronted and those that define the legitimate ordering of economic, social and political relations (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2002. Aguiton (2003) speaks even of the ‘isomorphia’ between the organisational forms of capitalist production and those of the anti-capitalist struggles). Thus, the 19th and 20th centuries saw this dispute occurring mainly in factories and within nation-states. At the turn of the 20th century, a sphere of anti-capitalist struggle with planetary dimensions started to emerge, which had not had the same characteristics and relevance before.

Therefore, there is a new dimension and/or space in which a set of networks, entities, associations and campaigns are intensely active, movements we can define as ‘global’ ‘planetary’ or ‘worldwide’. Even though this new sphere of action has links with previous left-wing internationalist proposals of the 20th century and is similar to some practices in environmental movements, which originated on a supra-national scale, it differs from both. We will speak of these differences and challenges that confront us. But first, we will introduce aspects in the discussion that are more directly tied to the concept of civil society as it is currently structured.

The second characteristic of the globalised world, and of concern in this debate, is the noticeable de-politicisation of economic and social relations. Moreover, the alleged fragilisation of nation-states is also expressed in the fact that governments on the right and on the left implement very similar agendas in terms of economic and social policies. Recently, a critical intellectual wrote about Brazil, as governed by Lula, a former labourer elected president for the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party), that we are witnessing the 'kidnapping of politics' (Oliveira, 2003).³ He affirmed that when implementing a neo-liberal agenda, Lula demonstrated that politics had lost the capacity to be the space or the sphere in which the dominated classes struggle to extend and/or guarantee their rights. Again, we will not undertake a deeper analysis of the phenomenon. For the purposes of our debate the essential is to concentrate on the question of the de-politicisation of government relations and, linked to it, the more or less widespread disbelief in the capacity of politics to produce significant transformations in the economic and social order.

It was in this context, at the end of the 1990s, when parties and politics lost the power or the possibility to act as spheres in which the society's subordinated groups organised themselves to claim their rights, that the notion of 'civil society' emerged in the public arena as a privileged *locus* of resistance and democratic and/or anti-capitalist struggle. Evidently the ambiguities present in the concept – even when it is used in a more well-defined (see Scholte, 2007) and restricted sense – are undeniable. This ambiguity reveals an empirical reality, rather than a theoretical problem. From our point of view, 'civil society' must be understood as a dense and intense *field* (see Bourdieu, 1982) of contradictory relations – cooperative and/or competing – and not as a homogeneous space (a sphere or a dimension) of similar forces that share common values. Hence, one can understand the growing visibility of a set of activities and initiatives, which on the one hand created bridges of dialogue with the multilateral organisms, breaking with the logic of conflict and confrontation.⁴ On the other hand, philanthropic and supporting activities emerged, mitigating the more immediately harmful effects of capitalist development. In many countries – as much in the North as the South – civil society organisations

3 The book was written before the victory of Evo Morales in Bolivia. I consider that today, in Latin America, this reflection needs to be made with more intensity and care, given the deep alterations the region is undergoing.

4 The series of Conferences organised by the UN in the 1990s, starting with Rio in 1992, marked an important initial moment of the constitution of a sphere of dialogue and 'global' action by entities which had more obvious national dimensions. With respect to this, see Pianta (2005).

actually began to substitute for the State, in assistance and support activities to groups defined as ‘excluded’.



In contrast to the political field, which is clearly organised as an arena where interests are disputed, ‘civil society’ can present itself as a space, sphere or field of dialogue and consensus-building.

In contrast to the political field, which is clearly organised as an arena where interests are disputed, ‘civil society’ can present itself as a space, sphere or field of dialogue and consensus-building. In the context of the 1990s, when the absence of alternatives to capitalism was affirmed, this became a relevant space. No doubts remain that, understood in this way, civil society was targeted by very serious and forceful critics as to its functionality for the maintenance of the establishment. If this is true for what has been collectively understood as civil society at the level of nation-states, it was even more so on the rising global scale. Even the requirements of capacity and the ability to become interlocutor and actor in this sphere made it more restricted and limited. Moreover, NGOs originating in the North, with their enhanced capacity for dialogue with their ‘partners’ in the South and with more financial resources, have been and still are powerful actors in the business of defining agendas and forms of actions that are ‘legitimate’, accepted and ‘financeable’. They also try to impose their own evaluation criteria of ‘impact’, ‘transparency’ and ‘accountability’ and, evidently, have an influence that cannot be denied in the delineation of this field. All these elements further increase the criticism, ambiguity and doubt concerning civil society’s capacity to influence the democratisation of global relations.

However, and in spite of this, the dynamics of resistance to capitalism, the new possibilities of communication and important initiatives of articulated action in new bases – whether the activities of Seattle and Genoa, or the World Social Forum – have contributed to make this an ever denser field through the action and presence of organisations, networks and movements that create initiatives, campaigns and actions clearly contesting neoliberalism, and on the other hand, that have connections that are expanding on a worldwide scale. Moreover, a new political culture is born here, one that values diversity and articulation.⁵ As examples only, we could mention the actions of Via Campesina, the initiatives of the *Plataforma da Água* (Water Platform), new networks of economic justice and fair trade, in addition to the classic arguments against free enterprise and debt.

The fragilities are apparent. But, at the same time, the existence of a new dimension in our struggles is undeniable, validating new actors,

5 The World Social Forum has in this sense a prominent place in strongly contributing to the design and practice of this new ‘left political culture’. See, among others, Whitaker (2005).

new agendas and new forms of political action, communication, articulation and dialogue. The fundamental question is how much this movement has been able to make an impact on the democratisation of relations and the global order. The answer is not simple, nor immediate. In the following, we will try to make headway with some aspects of this debate.

Southern winds: missteps and exits

It would be *non-sense* to debate a 'global civil society' as we have discussed the 'engine of history' in earlier periods. This implies a recognition that the notion is tied to its origin, avoiding the risk of assuming that it is universal or that it serves for all of us, men and women. That is not the case. This is a concept with a Western first and last name. One of the main consequences is that many of the groups that confront capitalism more strongly and act in the direction of radicalising democracy on worldwide terms can be excluded from these definitions and concepts. The case of Latin America is paradigmatic in this sense.

Today, indigenous peoples are among the most capable of intervention, contestation and of formulating alternatives in our continent. One notices that even among a sizeable section of the left, until a few years ago these people were almost seen as remnants of a bygone age. As groups that would have to renounce their own identity, integrate in mainstream society and join in the struggles of 'peasants and workers'.

However, and despite the difficulties they face, they are acting more and more as forces for democratising the worldwide order, in a struggle against the logics of profit as the preponderant way of organising human relations and human beings with all other living beings. For example, the indigenous peoples of the Andes have recently formed a new coalition: *Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas* (CAOI) (Andean Association of Indigenous Organisations). They declare themselves as 'peoples' and not as 'part' of another people. They are, therefore, not actors in civil society. They advance radical proposals for restructuring the State and social relations. They denounce the 'degeneracy of the political structures of the so-called Nation-State, of uni-national and uni-cultural states' (CAOI, 2006). They form plansput forward proposals for constructing plural states and intercultural societies. They struggle for a new institutionality, collective rights and self-determination. They act against the 'new strategy of capitalist and neoliberal colonisation through TNCs' and against the 'abuses of the transnationals' (*ibid*). They also fight for democratic radicalisation, demanding 'political participation in national process-



Today, indigenous peoples are among the most capable of intervention, contestation and of formulating alternatives in our continent... They overflow and extend the formal limits of civil society by integrating political action as a part of their agenda of transformation.

es, based on community work'. Furthermore, they discuss fundamental aspects in terms of culture and identity demanding, for example, bilingual education, which they make as important a demand as any other 'political' one. Finally, they do not see their struggle as belonging to a particular group. They refer in their manifesto to 'the exploited women and men, oppressed and marginalised peasants, *cocaleiros* (coca-leaf-planters), *ribeirinhos* (riverside-people), afro-descendants, *barriadas* (slum inhabitants), informal workers, students, labourers and intellectuals', affirming that the Indigenous Agenda is only one contribution to the struggle 'for everybody's liberation from every kind of exploitation and oppression' (*ibid*). They are modern, traditional and contemporary. They overflow and extend the formal limits of civil society by integrating political action as a part of their agenda of transformation. Political action that aims and intends to profoundly change the nation-state and a global order fixated on profit, at the service of capitalist accumulation.

Moreover, in other countries of Latin America, and originating in similar movements, indigenous peoples have formed political parties, as for example in Ecuador and in Bolivia, where they have won majority elections.

Thus, they re-define the borders and edges of a civil society concept as such. On the other hand, they are not only social movements and not even exclusively political forces. They are absolutely not satisfied with the national borders, and, more and more, they are looking for ways of going beyond regional action, connecting themselves with struggles on other continents. They have a profound sense of common good and common humanity, and a radical respect for diversity. Thus, they act as fundamental forces in the construction of a democratic global and post-capitalist order.

Other examples could be given from the people of the forest who in the Brazilian Amazon have created a concept they call 'forestship' in contraposition to that of 'citizenship', which is more restricted, occidental and based in the city, in *polis*, in *urbis*.

We could also mention movements in the urban peripheries of our countries, led by the young, which have hip-hop and music as a connecting element. They contest the worldwide order without establishing their action in terms of a traditional political direction, but also affirming that they are at the edge of civil society, adult and adjusted.

Certainly, other similar examples could be found in South Africa, in Kenya or India. Our challenge as activists is to fortify and extend the spaces, the fields and the dimensions of meeting, dialogue and collective learning between these sets of initiatives. So it is necessary to recognise that the field of civil society, although it has a significant importance, is not the only one from which the democratic forces of the global order act. This notion, even extended, would leave out many of us. But, if we take it as a form that is precarious, provisory and in construction, and, even more important, able to recognise other spaces and initiatives, it can be – and has been – crucial in the long struggle for ‘other possible worlds’.

Thus, to conclude this text, we can indicate some lines of action/reflection from what has been said previously:

1. Undeniably, political space exists today and there is an urgent need for action in the supranational dimension – a realm that has specific, contemporary characteristics, and is under construction. The initiatives are still modest in view of the possibilities available as well as the constraints. However, they are fundamental to the construction of new political and emancipatory practices.
2. A new sphere cannot be based solely on collective actions and there will be no actors capable of leading in an authoritarian, centralised and unified way. This means that unionised workers will not be the leaders in this process. Thus, the traditional references for internationalist actions are being both deconstructed and reconstructed by practices and actions from emerging political and social forces.
3. ‘Global civil society’ should therefore be understood as a field of forces characterised by conflict as well as cooperation. Not only as a space, a dimension or a sphere. A field that holds enormous contradictions. But which at the same time opens up innovative types of articulated possibilities between new and old actors and social forces.
4. For the forces and/or actors who undertake the subject of democratisation of the global order, it is fundamental to recognise the importance of re-politicising the action, perspective and practices. A radical democratic global order is not in each and everyone’s interest. Therefore, it will be a result of both conflict and dialogue. It is crucial to overcome the political traumas and recognise that democracy implies conflict and divergence. When creating a new

political culture, which is not self-destructive and deleterious, and which is not exclusively occupied with power struggles over who will govern the institutionalities of the nation-states, we should not abandon politics, but in contrast, re-politicise our spaces of performance with new directions, concepts and practices.

5. It is currently the anti-democratic forces serving capital – in spite of all the crises, limits and signs of fragmentation announced – that act to control the global sphere in a hegemonic manner. However, capitalism will not be able to establish a democratic global order. It is definitely prevented from doing so by its nature of accumulation, exploitation and competition. Thus, a new democratic order for Planet Earth will have to be something other than a capitalist one.
6. In pursuing this struggle we will not be able to construct a common agenda, a single way or a main script. We have at most a set of more or less shared values, defined in generic terms and understood in a distinct way by different political traditions, countries and social movements.
7. This is a social, political, cultural process of immense intensity and urgency. We do not have previous reference points in the history of humanity. We have to intensify and diversify the construction of discourses, propositions and actions. It is essential to extend the common capacity to distinguish and recognise, among the diversity of initiatives, the different actors, forces and subjects that act in a way that promotes democratisation, and continue to invest in the possibilities of combining dialogue and action. This implies an immense effort of dialogue, of cultural translation, and a readiness to accept errors and slips.
8. Moreover, during this tortuous often chaotic and lengthy process, we need to articulate actions, initiatives, practices, with reflection, dialogue, thought and debate.
9. The task is difficult, though certainly unavoidable. Victory is not certain, but hope keeps us going!

Translation by Daniel Eyvind Meyer and Wendy Davies

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Civil society and the nation-state – The case of Kenya

Steve Ouma

Understanding civil society organisations

There has been a great deal of debate to clarify what kind of organisations should be regarded as civil society organisations (CSOs). The only unfortunate thing is that such debates by most theorists and practitioners in this area assume that CSOs are homogeneous. Such an assumption is both fallacious and inaccurate. If one takes the category of NGOs for instance, they come in different forms. There has been talk of DONGOs (donor-organised NGOs), MONGOs (my own NGO), GONGOs (government-owned NGOs), FANGOs (family-owned NGOs), FONGOs (first-lady NGOs) and so on. The other contentious issue has been the response to the question: So who are the CSOs? It is my opinion that the simple way to deal with this blurred enquiry is by creating a distinction between the state and the rest of society. This in any case seems to be the idea behind the initial thinking that led to the coining of the expression *societas civilis* within the Greek city states. Reading from this script, then, our understanding is that civil society organisations do exist as a cartridge between the state and society (Mutua: 2004).

In this regard civil society organisations play the role of the watchdog and interact with the state to stem its excesses. This is why civil society has remained a necessary and critical feature of any political democracy. Both Hegel and Alexis de Tocqueville agree that civil society was one of the major achievements of the modern world. In fact ‘...a civil society that is self-organised and independent from the state is necessary for the consolidation of democracy’ (Kaane, quoted in Mutua: 2004). We can thus assert here that civil society is the independent eye of the society, consisting of popularly self-organised and vigilant civil associations. Without civil society, those in power turn into despots. In most societies, however, civil society is a very recent phenomenon. In Kenya, for instance, the emergence of civil society organisations in both form and character is fairly recent.

The history of CSOs in Kenya

In presenting the history of CSOs in Kenya, the Ministry of State for National Heritage has given a chronology, starting from the emergence of voluntary development initiatives during colonial Kenya. In this account (Government of Kenya: 2006), it argues that the cradle of CSOs in Kenya is linked to the emergence of church-based and secular organisations independent of the state in the colonial period. These church-based organisations were formed to address relief and welfare issues. Hard on the heels of these was the formation of local welfare organisations by the migrant workers who had moved to the major Kenyan cities such as Nairobi, Mombasa and so on. Although they started as welfare organisations, most of these associations formed the epicentre for political organising in the later struggle for independence in Kenya. By the late 1970s, Kenya had about 120 NGOs, both foreign and national. The scope of engagement of these NGOs had also gone beyond relief and welfare work to include human rights, civic education and the democratisation process.

However, the story as told by the ministry just ends there. It makes no mention of the role and place of NGOs and civil society in Kenya in the 1980s and 1990s. The above description is devoid of context and does not give a hint of the vexed relationships between the state and civil society, let alone the turbulent cultural, historical and political milieus that inhere in different parts of the world. The period of 1980–1997 witnessed the most egregious violations of human rights in Kenya. Torture, political murders, political repression, detention without trial, corruption and theft of state resources were the trademark and took place with impunity. This unacknowledged period was also characterised by the emergence of human rights NGOs in Kenya. These organisations form a distinct category among CSOs and differ in principles, membership, organisation and goals from other civil society groups. According to Welch, human rights NGOs occupy an even more rarefied plane:

They seek to benefit society, or at least a significant portion of it, without necessary direct benefit to themselves. They constitute both a precondition for, and a supplement to, the constitutionally defined political process and the formal political bodies of the democratic State. As voluntary organizations in larger measure, they often pursue idealistic causes. But the causes are crucial to the functioning of a modern society.¹



NGOs seek to benefit society, or at least a significant portion of it, without necessary direct benefit to themselves.

¹ Claude Welch, quoted in Mutua (2004).

These groups played a key role not only as advocacy organisations keen to ensure the expansion of the civil and political rights space in Kenya but more importantly as the vanguard of human rights struggles. They also worked to ensure the development of local institutions and processes that promote accountability.

The entrance of human rights civil society organisations on the Kenyan scene was a watershed for understanding the real role and place of CSOs in a democracy. They came in as the custodians of the independent citizenry with a vision of freedom and liberty. In fact this helped in re-shaping the orientation that most welfare and development NGOs had had thus far. They brought a shift from charity to accountability. A shift from a donor-recipient relationship to one of pragmatic solidarity with the majority who were being excluded by the market and the despotic patron-client based political establishment. Civil society in Kenya pursued this struggle through mass action, riots, picketing and civil disobedience. On the other hand civil society organisations such as the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), made fierce statements calling for change in governance and transformation of the Kenyan state to make it more inclusive and accommodating.

This analysis demonstrates the organising of the civil society organisations within the space of the nation-state. It is an account of how CSOs using the human rights and social justice discourse can organise and shape their country.

Questions of ideology and class

Civil society organisations in Kenya, have undertaken this task in the context of limitations on their status. For instance, the fact that they must seek legal approval from the state limits the force with which they can act. They are always reminded, ‘You have to work within the law’ – the rule of law. Perhaps this is why, even when analysing the place and role of civil society at the national level, one can never ignore the thorny issue of the ideology of these groups, related to the issue of class. Chidi Odinkalu (2000) has written about the elitist nature of human rights organisations, for instance. He notes that most of these organisations are modelled after the Northern watchdog organisations. He observes that the majority of them are located in urban areas, rely on foreign funding, mostly from the West, and have generally professional boards.

As a response to the limitation of middle-class civil society organisations in Kenya, the country has seen a proliferation of community-based organisations. These are mainly organisations formed within the

context of social movements and characterised by having a particular goal towards which they move in a slow, halting, yet persistent fashion. As movements, they are unorganised, with neither established leadership nor recognised membership, and little guidance and control. This is a class issue that we must not ignore as we talk about societies and the emerging social movement. The question being raised here is whether, in the context of class conflict, middle-class civil society organisations can still be relied on to represent the interests and vision of the majority poor, of marginalised minorities and of the weak in society. It appears that for civil society organisations to play their traditional role, they have to expand their contours beyond those of NGOs, trade unions, churches, and so on. Civil society must now include the community-based organisations, most of which have organised against the system. For the Kenyan situation, it is unfortunate that these class tensions continue to exist and appear to be getting sharper by the day. But we must not forget that civil society is acquiring global dimensions, at least if the food and gate charges riots at the World Social Forum in Nairobi are anything to go by. In these riots, the poor and grassroot civil society organisations were up in arms against the commercialisation of the WSF and its insensitivity to value systems that would ensure inclusiveness at the WSF venue and affordability of admission.

The changing centre of power

The Kenyan background demonstrates the role of the civil society institution within the national democracy. The challenge of our time is, however, one of cross-boarder civil society organising. With the intensification of the impacts of capital-led globalisation, this is becoming more real. We are currently dealing with the global connectivity of human rights violations. If you take the case of the working conditions of cut-flower workers in Kenya, for instance, being forced to work for long hours is not just caused by the unscrupulous or bullying employer, it is also about the purchasing practices of a sourcing company based in the Northern capital like London or New York. These companies, for instance, insist on short lead time and shortterm contracts; in return the Kenyan employers ask for long working hours and casual terms of employment of the worker. This means that civil society organisations can no longer respond to the global challenges within the confines of the nation-state *per se*. In this respect, civil society organisations must see themselves as part of global citizenry.

A review of the current global order demonstrates global connectivity and the creation of new centres of power. Economic globalisation requires the recognition of multiple human rights duty hold-



The ideology of globalisation is rooted securely in market liberalism, which argues that a country can maximise the welfare of its people only if it integrates in the global economy.

ers. Human rights are no longer affected only by the state, which has territorial control over the area where people live. Decisions by inter-governmental organisations, by economic or violent non-state actors and by other states have far-reaching consequences for the degree to which human rights are enjoyed in a particular part of the world. None of these other actors is, however, sufficiently accountable as yet for the human rights impact of its actions. But the vision is clear: that of a web of human rights obligations, with the territorially responsible country still at the centre, but no longer in sole control. Besides the economic connection, globalisation has brought increased exchanges, networks of government and non-governmental organisations, a growing sense of interdependence, the spread and elaboration of the concept of human rights, international collaboration in dealing with global problems, and so on. All these, however, are dominated by world economic forces. The ideology of globalisation is rooted securely in market liberalism, which argues that a country can maximise the welfare of its people only if it integrates in the global economy. This ideology is directed against state actions to redress social injustices through affirmative policies and other redistributive mechanisms. Further, it explains why states are unable to promote the rights of workers and protect the domestic economy against the ravages of external forces. A number of organisations and institutions have been established to nurture this new economic order; predominant is the World Trade Organization (WTO), along with the growing role and influence of international financial institutions and transnational corporations.

Mobilising against the WTO

At Seattle in 2001 civil society organisations marched against the effects of globalisation epitomised by the World Trade Organization. The WTO has been described as the ‘practical manifestation of globalisation in its trade and commercial aspects’.² Central to the ethos and practice of the WTO is a set of principles that have provided the basic foundation for most contemporary developments associated with globalisation. Among those principles we can cite free trade, open markets and tariff reductions. This development demonstrates an increased role for the WTO in influencing the way that citizens can exercise their civil, political, cultural and economic rights. As a result, human rights organisations have realised that they first have to organise themselves as global citizenry. In the intervening half-decade, civil society organisations (CSOs) gained tremendous experience, channelled their

2 See Memorandum by the Civil Society Organizations in Africa to the World Trade Organization towards the Cancun Ministerial Meeting, November 2003.

increased professionalism more effectively, and networked faster and better through the Internet. Civil society's participation, facilitated by increasing access, contributed to the more holistic Rio agreements that empowered it to play a global advocacy role. The unprecedented convergence of so many groups and movements in Seattle also linked environmental, social, economic and democracy issues. And they have increasingly recognised the importance of both negotiating within the system and taking direct action outside it to influence decision-making. As mentioned earlier, there has been considerable concern about the international trade system, and whether the WTO is bound to take account of human rights. On 13 July 2003 civil society organisations wrote to the Director General of the WTO as follows:

Our organisations have been critical of many of the rules developed in the WTO which we believe to be against the interests of developing countries and detrimental to the rights of local communities, small farmers, workers, consumers, women, indigenous people, and to the environment. We had high expectations when some developing country Members took joint initiatives to correct the imbalances and the defective rules, such as resolving implementation-related issues and strengthening special and differential treatment. But we then witnessed how these commendable efforts have yielded hardly any effective results after years of endless discussions. We are also very critical of proposals and pressures to introduce new issues into the WTO even when many developing country Members are either opposed to or unprepared to begin negotiations. We believe the proposed new agreements will be damaging to development, to the environment, to working people and to vulnerable groups including the poor and women.³



The fact at this point was and still remains that the WTO has arrogated to itself powers that give it enormous control over the lives and welfare of the billions of global citizenry.

This memorandum resonates very well with the various press statements and letters that national CSOs in countries like Kenya had been writing to their governments. The fact at this point was and still remains that the WTO has arrogated to itself powers that give it enormous control over the lives and welfare of the billions of global citizenry.

Global vanguard

CSOs realised that just as they have been watchdogs in the face of despotic, unaccountable and brutal nation-states, they have the vocation to be the counter-force to the new global centres of power. The Seattle engagement was about the global vanguard role of CSOs. At Seattle, despite warnings from developing country representatives (and the

³ *Ibid.*

chants of protesters outside the conference hall), representatives from the Northern countries persisted in developing a position in a process that excluded the majority of delegates. Unsurprisingly, the talks ended in deadlock and frustration. The CSOs' protests at Seattle constituted an uprising against the harm that would be caused to workers, farmers, indigenous communities and other vulnerable communities in developing countries if the developed countries were allowed to push ahead with the unfair and opaque trade regime represented by the WTO. At the collapse of the meeting the CSOs maintained that they stood for a comprehensive and unfettered completion of the Doha Development agenda. This agenda is premised on the importance of trade as a tool of development and alleviation of poverty.

The demand by the civil society organisations in this regard have been that, as a minimum, the WTO needs to reform its processes and mechanisms of deliberation so as to be more inclusive, and to allow for discordant (especially civil society) voices to be heard. More fundamentally, however, it needs to review its approach to the substantive issue that it is supposed to tackle: the question of free trade. This encounter signals the emergence of a new type of CSO able to deal with the dynamics and character of the globalising nature of governance.

The challenge of accountability, class and legitimacy

Although CSOs have played a lead role as mobilisers and have been the vanguard in this regard, I suspect that with time, the old class-based tension between civil society and people's organisations will come up again. Once more there has been simmering tension, with farmers and workers arguing that CSOs and – more so – Northern-based CSOs cannot represent them. The locally based people's organisations are raising the issues of accountability, class and legitimacy. For me this calls for a redefined ethos. It challenge the CSOs to start rethinking their relationship with those whom they purport to represent. It is apparent that CSOs, whether national or global, cannot stand up as moral high priests and fail to deal with the question of who gives them the power to speak for the oppressed constituency. This is an internal governance question for CSOs which must be addressed for them to retain their 'right to be heard'. My thesis here is that in the era of globalisation the international civil society movement must base its ethos and methodology on the framework of pragmatic solidarities and building horizontal and vertical linkages for the struggles of the poor.

Pragmatic solidarity here means that the middle-class civil society organisations should agree to be led by the struggling communities

in their own space and according to their own priorities. This is an era where, although they are the vanguard, the CSOs cannot act as *saviours*, nor can they any longer see the weak farmers, workers and women affected by the onslaught of globalisation as mere victims. This change of paradigm of relations also implies that the CSOs must allow the struggle of the people's organisations to shape the tactics and ideology of the global civil society movement.

Once we have defined the framework for these class and accountability issues, then our *right to speak* will have been earned. The nature and vigour of centres of power in the globalised world are so intense that we cannot afford the luxury of internal contradictions. To take a telling example from the 6th WTO ministerial conference, the struggle of the Korean farmers was expressed through protests staged on the streets while most CSOs struggled to influence decisions from the inside. Whilst I agree with this inside/outside method of dealing with the global centres of power, we must always remember that those outside form the constituency. CSOs should safeguard themselves from adulteration, and therefore from being seen as part of the internal system. As for their relevance in the globalised world, it is crystal clear: they are the global vanguard for human rights and social justice.

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The challenges for global civil society in a 'post-communist' world

Alla G. Glinchikova

The essence of the moment

I am not sure about the West, but we in Russia hardly spoke of civil society in Soviet Union times. 'Civil society' became problem number one when the Soviet Union crashed and died. Suddenly, we realised that the Soviet Union as the entity defining our national identity, and Marxism as the means of self-expression, could not be easily and quickly replaced by something else... We rushed to the West to get new words, new definitions and institutional forms, and they didn't make us any more 'Western' than we had been before, though many things had changed. For example, we acquired a multi-party system, free elections and the right to private property – some of us even actually acquired private property – and NGOs appeared...! We developed the Duma, which was supposed to be our Parliament. The press was taken out of state party control, because the state party had disappeared. So, the press and media were supposed to become free... We acquired the 'right to speak', which meant that you could speak about anything you wanted and not risk being imprisoned as 'an enemy of the people' or 'an enemy of the state'. We got the right to move around the globe, to contact people without permission from the KGB, or other state or party 'eyes' and 'ears'. We could read any books, any newspapers, without fear of arrest. Computers and the Internet entered our lives and made it much more difficult for our brains to be controlled from one centre or pushed in one direction. But most of all, it seemed that we acquired a new ethics, where the individual became important and respected, where notions of beauty and pleasure were not restricted, where sex and prosperity weren't meant to cause feelings of blame and sin. 'Unsanctioned' communication emerging from the bottom of society was no longer prohibited, and even strikes and different forms of social protest could and did take place. At last, we could even leave the country and migrate to other places on earth, if we wanted. We experienced the euphoria of freedom, which fell into our hands so unexpectedly that it was almost frightening. We opened ourselves up to the West, economically, politically and emotionally; we accepted the new Westernisation and were sure that we also would be accepted as a new segment of civil citizenship.

Now, after over 15 years, we have realised that things are otherwise. The so-called West is in no hurry to accept us into its civic family. The Western 'left' are too busy protecting their national welfare achievements from unexpected 'Eastern brothers' who rushed to them in the flood of global migration. At the same time, the West's businessmen who rushed to our countries preferred to use and develop the criminal habits of our post-communist bureaucracy, and enjoy the paternalistic climate of our post-communist permissiveness, rather than introduce their 'Western' democratic tradition of 'rights and freedoms'. It is really difficult to determine which elite was the motor of post-communist corruption. But it looks as if the two elites 'found each other'. It was like a second 'meeting on the Elbe', but now it was the meeting of globally corrupted sections of the Western and Eastern elites.

We also realised something else. We started understanding why our bureaucracy so unexpectedly gave us 'freedoms'. Because at that moment they needed these freedoms for themselves! They needed the right to property in order to merge communist managerial control with capitalist private ownership. They declared the right to free movement all over the earth in order to take stolen money out of the country, avoid responsibility and enjoy a 'civilised life' among 'decent' people in other states. They declared democracy and all these freedoms without much risk to their hegemonic position, because they were sure that in the countries of the post-communist world, with their super-concentrated finances, property, economic and political information systems, and their paternalistic mentality, people would not be able to exercise any of these freedoms, and all the advantages of 'freedoms and democracy' would be enjoyed by post-communist elites without any competition from broader society. They shared their opportunities for plunder only to avoid (or postpone) competition among the elites of former Soviet republics; this was called the Belovezhsky Agreement and legalised the dissolution of the USSR. Later one further small problem appeared – the distribution of power, of political and economic influence, between three modern 'hypostases' of the post-communist elite: bureaucrats, 'businessmen' and criminals. A fragile 'peaceful coexistence' between these three groups is more or less provided by their common fear of society and the high prices of mineral resources.



West's businessmen who rushed to our countries preferred to use and develop the criminal habits of our post-communist bureaucracy, and enjoy the paternalistic climate of our post-communist permissiveness, rather than introduce their 'Western' democratic tradition of 'rights and freedoms'

1 In 1945, as World War II was drawing to a close, Nazi Germany was caught between the armies of the western Allies advancing from the west and the Soviet Union advancing from the east. On April 25, these two forces linked up near Torgau, on the River Elbe. The meeting on the Elbe thus came to symbolise the meeting of East and West.

The financial crisis of 1998, when the state defaulted on interest payments on loans, showed society its economic place; and the restrictive antidemocratic laws of 2000–2007 gave that trend a clearer political shape. People suffered from criminals in the Caucasus; bureaucrats started to attack society under the slogan of preventing world terrorism. Criminals took control of the mass media; bureaucrats attacked society by squeezing the freedom of the press. Criminals used and corrupted democratic procedures to gain power; bureaucrats attacked society by substituting 'vertical power links' for democracy, under the banner of law and order. When all this was finished, the time came to think about the 'legitimacy' of such power.

And here we come back to the issue of globalisation. Why did it happen that such a strong society, which valued human dignity so much (throughout its history it had never been defeated by any invader!), failed to use its chance to gain social freedom and self-determination and, instead, 'changed its chains, but not its destiny'?

The answer is that this time the challenge was not to exchange 'capitalism' for 'socialism', as it was at the beginning of the century, and not to exchange 'socialism' for 'capitalism', as neoliberal reformers declared it to be. The real challenge for the Russian society this time – was to exchange *a paternalistic type of social existence for a civic one*. And this type of change Russian society did not make. The Russian society didn't become civic in spite of private property, representative democracy, the emergence of thousands of NGOs and other declared economic and political freedoms. Russian society didn't become civic in spite of the introduction of all the civic institutions that usually characterise 'civil society'! As a result of economic and political transformation the paternalistic, industrial, distributive model, called 'socialism', was replaced by an equally paternalistic, but now a neoliberal model, called 'capitalism'. But if this is the case – if a civic institutional structure is not enough to give society a 'civil' character, if it is possible to have 'civil' institutions and not to be civil – then what does it mean to be 'civil'?

Thus the latest transformation of the post-socialist³ world has posed a challenge: that of reconsidering the traditional Western understand-

2 The reference is to Robespierre's words in his speech to the National Convention on 26 July 1794 (8th Thermidor), the day before his arrest.

3 Here, and elsewhere, we are speaking about the post-socialist (mainly post-Soviet) part of the world. However, it is important to note that some tendencies of its civil transformation are shared – to a greater or lesser degree – by other parts of the post-colonial world.

ing of *what 'civil society' is*. The best among the many definitions, where 'civil society' characterises not a structure of society, or a type of communication, or institutions, but a special area of activity, a space in which people discuss and deliberate on their problems and develop their autonomous activity, is still insufficient for the non-Western world. *This definition works only for the countries that already have a civil society and are preoccupied with searching for a new social space where its activity can focus.* But it is absolutely senseless for those societies where civil transformation has not taken place. *In other words, no space can make society civil, if it is still paternalistic.* This is the case of Russia and of most of the non-Western world.

Paternalistic and civic societies

To define implies difference. The Western world needs to define a space where civil society keeps acting civically. For the post-Soviet world a definition of civil society can be given only by differentiating this society from a paternalistic one. Because here it is not a matter of defining *an already existing entity, or quality of society*, but of defining *a required quality of society, which doesn't yet exist*. Post-Soviet society is paternalistic, not because it lost traditional democracy as a space of civic activity, as happened in the West. It is paternalistic because it *didn't go through civic transformation*. And this is quite another story.

Paternalistic society is a society that accepts itself as an object in relation to politics, and the state as a subject. It is a society that doesn't have the value of 'control over the state' from the bottom, but accepts the value of state control over society from the top. It has a very special notion of the legitimacy of power. Power is legitimate since it is moral, or ideologically compatible with people's understanding of 'good'. Paternalistic society didn't go through the stage of individualisation of faith, or didn't complete such individualisation. So it couldn't develop basic forms of individualised internal morality, which could become the basis for social trust and autonomous integration. As a result, paternalistic society has socio-cultural problems with self-integration and autonomous social action. It always needs an external integrative force, like the state, which can integrate it from the outside. Otherwise it falls into turbulent internal conflicts.

Paternalistic society has very special type of ethics, reflected in a very special attitude to official 'civic' institutions. The ethics of paternalistic society still have a religious basis, even when the society claims to be atheist. In the case of post-Orthodox society, which is the case of Russia, its ethics strictly forbid egoism as a moral value. It is obvious,



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that such ethics pose a major problem with respect to civic rules and institutions, which were developed and introduced by people in order to find a reasonable compromise for satisfying their egoistic interests. In other words, paternalistic ethics reject civic institutions as 'immoral'. As a result, paternalistic consciousness rejects the civic state at a very deep level and can follow its instructions only under the threat of punishment. Furthermore, the less state behaviour is civic, the more legitimate it is for paternalistic society.

If this is so, why should paternalistic society become civic? Maybe the type of social configuration that we call 'civil', *where society accepts itself as the subject and aim of politics, and the state as its instrument*, is just an exception, which became the destiny of the Western world, and only for some time? Why should we speak about the globalisation of a civic type of social configuration?

Paternalistic society in the modern world is a sick society, however, whether it realises it or not. The biggest problem of paternalistic society is that it is...secular society, governed by the secular state. A secular state is a good thing for civic society. The Western world passed through this transformation from paternalistic theocratic society to civic society in the course of the Reformation, and then from theocratic to civic state in the course of various revolutions. In the course of this double transformation, theocratic paternalistic control of church over state in the West was replaced by the civic control of society over state through the forms of representative democracy.

Every social system should have forms of social feedback in order to meet the challenges of transformation and to evolve in a positive way. The post-colonial world – thanks to colonialism (or self-colonisation in the case of Russia) – didn't undergo (or didn't complete) the authentic individualisation of faith that enables the development of new internal civic ethics. Most non-Western societies were stopped in their authentic development and 'frozen' at the stage of paternalistic social ethics. Without such important cultural and spiritual transformation they couldn't develop internal autonomous forms of civil integration and become the subject and motor of the secularisation of states.

At the same time the secularisation of states took place from the top without the involvement of society, and against it. As a result, a peculiar kind of social 'centaurs' developed, where states destroyed all forms of paternalistic moral control by the Church, refused to take any moral responsibility towards society and didn't allow new civic forms of control to develop. This combination of *secular state with pa-*

paternalistic society in the post-colonial world became one of the important roots of totalitarian regimes in the 20th century. Civil feedback – on social, political and economic issues – was replaced by central total planning and hierarchical control. And that worked for as long as it was possible technically, economically and politically.

The scientific and technological revolution of the second part of the 20th century made this type of system inadequate. Centralised state integration couldn't substitute for social feedback any longer in the new circumstances. 'Postponed' by colonialism, and then by 'communism', civil transformation of the non-Western world became the primary challenge, and crucial to its survival.

What then is the problem? Didn't globalisation break down all the barriers preventing civic integration and communication? Yes and no. Globalisation does open up new opportunities for including the post-Soviet world in the global civic process. But the past lives on in the present and we should be very cautious about this. The meeting of the civic and the paternalistic world doesn't lead inevitably to the growth of civic tendencies and the defeat of paternalistic ones on a global scale. On the contrary, we can see that the paternalistic approach can find many ways and reasons to recreate itself on a new level even in societies with civic traditions. The growth of social and political absenteeism, the crisis of traditional forms of democratic participation, the development of fundamentalist nationalism, the readiness to sacrifice the basic principles of individual and social sovereignty in favour of 'protection against global terrorism' – all these processes show the growth of paternalistic social tendencies on a global scale.

The biggest problem for civic integration is the problem of civic communication. This problem is a result of *different phases* of civil development in the Western and the post-Soviet/post-colonial worlds, and the different challenges that globalisation presents for these 'two worlds'.

Specific challenges for the civic transformation of paternalistic societies

The challenge of 'national' integration

It is very important to understand that the post-Soviet world didn't pass through the phase of *nation-state self-determination and self-identification* that was basic to the development of a civic type of community in the West. In order to change into the subject of politics society needs to find a basis for internal autonomous integration. Nation-

state self-identification offered such an opportunity in the case of the Western world. In general it developed from a theocratic empire into a system of secular civic nation-states. The post-Soviet world didn't pass through this authentic phase of secular civic nation-state building because of colonialism, or self-colonisation in the case of Russia. For example, Russia moved from being a theocratic state to being a secular paternalistic monarchy and empire, and then a secular paternalistic 'communist' empire. It means that at the present stage the post-Soviet world, in order to develop internal civic forms of integration, has to come back to – or move on to (!) – the problem of national civic integration. It is obvious that this can't be just a repetition of the Western process. The *problem of nation-state self-identification* has to be solved by the post-Soviet world in the context of globalisation, which means the erosion of the nation-state principle! So, here we see how globalisation creates objective difficulties for civic transformation in the post-Soviet world.



The problem of *nation-state self-identification* has to be solved by the post-Soviet world in the context of globalisation, which means the erosion of the nation-state principle

At the same time we can see how this objectively progressive tendency of civic national self-identification is used by neo-paternalistic forces in order to introduce a fundamental neoliberalism in post-communist countries under the slogan of 'sovereign democracy', which actually means the absence of democracy as it is commonly understood. To have a fruitful global civic dialogue we should clarify the meaning of democracy in order to make it wide enough to include authentic forms of civic activity in the post-Soviet world and narrow enough to exclude various forms of 'sovereign democracy' that just reproduce a paternalistic social configuration under the guise of formal 'democratic' institutions and phraseology.

The challenge of 'civic ethics'

Civic integration in the West wouldn't have been possible without a very significant transformation of ethics during the Reformation. We shouldn't forget that paternalistic society was based on a predominantly religious type of ethics. In Russia this religious type of socio-ethical behaviour was preserved even after the secularisation of the paternalistic state. The religious basis of such ethics was simply replaced by 'secular' absolutist and then communist ideological principles. But in essence it was still the same non-individualised ethics of an irrational, mainly emotional trust in power and absolute self sacrifice, morally incompatible with principles of economic and political sovereignty and the rights of individuals and society in general. Since civic integration should be based on autonomous, individualised impulses of people who have common moral and social values, the transformation of paternalistic ethics becomes an important chal-

lenge for post-Soviet societies. And we should understand that ethical transformation cannot be ‘arranged’ by NGOs or any other formal institutions. Ethical transformation in a paternalistic society can be led only by people who have earned enough social ‘trust’ to introduce and fight for civic values.

The strategy of civic organisations should also be different in such a situation. It is one thing to meet already existing demands for social and political freedoms, and quite another to have to introduce and develop such values in society.

The challenge of democratic evolution

The post-Soviet world has to develop its civility in a situation where traditional forms of representative democracy are losing their social and political effectiveness because of globalisation, new technologies, and new levels of communication, introducing new ways of manipulating and controlling societies. If it is a problem for the Western world, it is doubly difficult for the post-Soviet world. Is it possible to ‘jump’ into participative democracy directly, without the development of the traditional institutions of representative democracy along with the development of democratic political parties? Many Western leftists coming to non-Western countries in Latin America or in Russia are in a hurry to introduce this Western model of ‘non-party’ civility. Very often these ideas are also supported by indigenous elites, who want to use these new, ‘pure’ social movements, which are participative and ‘not interested in power’, in order to give legitimacy to their authoritarian paternalistic politics. So, it is important to understand that in the post-Soviet world the development of really democratic political parties, fighting for power and reflecting the interests of the people, becomes a very important stage of civic activity.

The syndrome of post-communist political and social absenteeism

If we speak about the post-communist part of the post-Soviet world, we should take into consideration the long period of so-called ‘compulsory’ civic activity, which was used by the ruling political elite to imitate social involvement and gain support for its hypocritical regime. Such ‘people’s’ organisations as party, trade union, youth, women’s and other organisations were entirely controlled from the top and used not as an instrument of civic control but, on the contrary, as an instrument of total bureaucratic control over society. This ‘historic memory’ developed very deep mistrust and disgust on the part of common people towards any form of ‘political’ and ‘social’ activity.

The society, emerging from the traumatic pseudo-communist experience, is disappointed not only in the lack of social and political activity, but also in the lack of such basic social values as 'the common interest', 'truth', morality, patriotism, justice and humanism. We shouldn't forget that the so-called 'socialist regime' undertook its crimes against society under the slogans of the highest civil and moral principles and in the name of society!

So, the problem of *division – or barriers – between society and the ruling establishment/bureaucracy/state* becomes the major problem to overcome for the civic recovery of post-communist societies. It should become clear that the protection of social values, social freedoms and social sovereignty shouldn't be trusted to any other authority than society itself. Society needs to find the way to keep, protect and exercise its political subjectivity under any government and any power.

Civil society between 'left' and 'right'

This problem of the political and social self-determination of civil society is also one of the 'difficult legacies' of the 'communist past'. The essential point about the Soviet system was that in the name of the 'people's interests' the state expropriated not only all the property but also all the social functions of society, all forms of social activity. Social autonomy was strictly forbidden and was declared the biggest crime. In such a situation denunciation became nearly the only accepted way for common people to exercise their social inclusion... and their free civic activity! No need to explain what a deep crisis of social morality resulted from such an ideology. Since authoritarian 'communists' appropriated the 'left' of the political spectrum, those people who started fighting for social sovereignty and civil society development had to declare themselves... on the 'right', or be excluded from politics altogether. But when they declared themselves on the 'right', civil society groups lost the support of society and turned into a small elitist Western-fashioned sector, alienated from Russian society socially, politically, financially and morally. The more they kept their distance from society, the more they were disappointed in their own society for not being 'civil'. But the negative reaction of society to the word 'right' is quite natural. Because if 'communists' had a hidden anti-civil position, the Russian 'right' openly declare themselves as people who do not care about the socially 'weak', who constitute the majority of the population of Russia. That is why the artificially prolonged death of the old-fashioned paternalistic 'left' is a very important obstacle to civil society integration in this part of the world.

It can seem strange, but our attempts to cooperate with the democratic Western left and enlist their help in our task of modernising the 'left' in our society met with little support. The Western left were so concerned with 'creating a common leftist front' against capitalism in Europe that they didn't want to touch on such a sensitive issue.

This problem also demonstrates how important the political and party issue is for the development of civil space in the post-communist world and how urgent the appearance of a democratic civic left party is for the democratisation of civil movements and the NGO sphere in this particular part of the world.

What is universal in civil society and what is global?

Now we can see how different the challenges of globalisation are for different parts of global society. Does that mean that we can't speak about civil society as a global entity? If Western forms of civic activity and civic integration can't be universalised for the whole world, does it mean that we can't speak about civility as a universal value?

I think that the development of a social model, where society became a real subject of politics, is the greatest achievement of all humanity, though historically it was a 'discovery' on the part of the Western world. And this achievement and discovery should be spread over the whole world. But we should be very careful *to differentiate between the essence of Western social discovery and the concrete institutional, organisational, ideological, political forms* that civil integration acquired in the West. *A universal essence but a wide variety of concrete social forms and models – this is the way forward for global civil society development.*

What can be referred to as universal values? The value of individual sovereignty, the value of social sovereignty, the value of individualised ethics, the value of the universality of human nature and human dignity, the value of tolerance, the value of cooperation and free integration, the value of freedom and social responsibility, the value of justice, the value of compassion. And there is one more value, which may be the most difficult – the importance of learning the 'social languages' of another culture and of being able to identify and translate civic tendencies from one 'social language' into another.



The internal contradictions of global civil society – What impact on global democracy?

Lorenzo Fioramonti

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Introduction

In today's international system, key decisions that change the lives of millions of people and influence the policies of national governments are taken by institutions that show a significant deficit of democratic participation and control. Not only institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which are often described as the least democratic bodies in global governance, but also the United Nations and the World Trade Organization have come under growing scrutiny for their lack of democratic accountability, and for being effectively controlled by Western elites and multinational corporations.

This international democratic deficit has become the target of many civil society organisations and movements fighting for the democratisation of global governance and the creation of a democratic global system. Apart from proclamations and official statements, however, it remains to be seen whether this new 'global civil society' is actually contributing towards global democracy in its day-to-day activities. Is global civil society really democratising the world by opening up new space for citizen participation, or is it just another global aristocracy striving to play a niche role in the international system?

In order to offer a tentative response to this question, this article will analyse the extent to which those crucial democratic standards ex-

pected from global governance institutions are applicable to global civil society. To this end, the actual practices, activities and behaviours of global civil society organisations and movements will serve as the main focus of analysis and will offer important information about the extent to which global civil society is actually ‘walking the talk’.

Democracy and global civil society: A critical relationship

The relationship between civil society and democracy is a critical one. During the 1990s, civil society hype convinced most policy makers, academics and analysts of various sorts that civil society activism was undoubtedly the most powerful driver of democratic development. After a few years of excessive enthusiasm, a more careful and reflective position gained currency in the expert debate, with the acknowledgement of the many contradictions within civil society activism and its numerous dark sides (Whitehead, 1997; Carothers, 1999; Anderson and Rieff, 2005).

As a matter of fact, civil society is made up of individuals, groups and organisations that may have very divergent attitudes towards democratic values. For instance, what would be the democratic energy of the white trade unions and women’s movements that supported the establishment of apartheid in South Africa? And what about the workers’ movements that backed Hitler, thereby contributing to the collapse of the Weimar Republic (Berman, 1997; Fioramonti, 2005)?

If the pro-democracy contribution of the civil rights movement in the USA is unquestionable and straightforward, it is rather difficult to make the same claim for organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan, the nationalist movements in the former Yugoslavia, or the various intolerant religious groups that operate around the world today (from the Christian anti-abortion armed groups in the US to the Islamist cells in the Middle East). Whether we like it or not, all these groups belong to what we call civil society.

Civil society is usually understood as the space in which individuals associate to advance their interests and values. However, it is virtually impossible to decide what ‘interests’ and ‘values’ qualify as legitimate. For instance, were we to establish that only values such as non-violence, tolerance and equality identify who belongs to civil society, then not only would the Ku Klux Klan be disqualified, but also most indigenous movements, feminist and environmentalist groups, freedom fighters and street protesters.

This initial analysis serves the purpose of demonstrating that the relationship between ‘actual’ civil society (as opposed to the civil so-



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ciety described in philosophical essays) and democracy is not as linear as many would have us believe. This relationship becomes even more complicated and controversial when we go beyond values such as non-violence and tolerance and start to investigate how civil society fares in terms of more nuanced principles, such as democratic accountability and legitimacy.

Before analysing accountability and legitimacy in greater detail, I need to clarify what I mean by ‘global civil society’, given that so far I have mainly cited examples of national civil societies. In this article, global civil society indicates the realm of organisations, associations and movements that operate on a global scale by belonging to worldwide networks or by working on issues of global relevance. By adopting this very general definition, I understand as examples of global civil society not only international NGOs such as Oxfam, Médecins Sans Frontières, Greenpeace and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and transnational social movements such as Via Campesina, but also the more small-scale organisations, associations and indigenous movements that have joined international networks and promote causes of global relevance.¹

I have intentionally excluded from this list the overt cases of ‘uncivil’ organisations (such as international terrorist organisations or armed groups), although some authors remind us that these are members of global civil society in their own right (Anderson and Rieff, 2005). For the purposes of the remainder of this article I will examine only the ‘civil’ part of global civil society, as the inclusion of overtly violent movements might distract and perhaps mislead the reader. Indeed, what is being analysed here is not whether antidemocratic forces within global civil society have an impact on global democracy (which could be a interesting topic for another article), but rather what the actual contribution of ‘good’ civil society is: the one that helps the poor and fights for social justice; the one that appeals to the compassion of ordinary citizens and whose work is funded through charitable donations.

As I will show by means of several examples, it is my conviction that global civil society presents the same lack of accountability that it bemoans in global governance institutions. In turn, this lack of accountability affects its legitimacy and raises questions as to its real contribution towards global democracy.

¹ As a matter of fact, I doubt that any of the organisations analysed in this article are truly ‘global’ and therefore the expression ‘global civil society’ should be seen as a conceptual construct rather than an empirical reality.

Global civil society: problems of accountability and democratic deficit

Most global civil society organisations, from well-known NGOs such as Greenpeace and Oxfam to international social movements, take great pains to explain to the world that they are fighting global injustice, from poverty to human rights abuses to environmental degradation. Their actions often enjoy significant media coverage and their capacity to challenge governments has grown steadily. Financially speaking, some of these global organisations and movements possess assets that are comparable with those of multinational corporations (Pech and Padis, 2004). For instance, just on specific projects, Oxfam International spent USD 528 million in 2005, and this figure does not even include all the management costs.²

Whereas the public knows a great deal about the initiatives undertaken by global civil society, very little is known about the organisations themselves, how they function internally, and to whom they are accountable.

It is common knowledge that most of the funding for civil society organisations (particularly NGOs) comes from governments, multinational corporations (usually, through their personalised foundations) and multilateral institutions (Wallace, Bernstein and Chapman, 2006; Bendell, 2006).³ Although this does not apply to all global civil society organisations, it inevitably gives rise to a simple question: how can an organisation criticise the democratic deficit in global governance and, at the same time, receive money from those institutions that cause the democratic deficit?

One might say that if an organisation is credible and transparent, it will not let anything, including the source of its funding, affect its mission. As nice as this might sound, this belief runs counter to the direct experience of many staff members of NGOs and associations, who know very well how important it is to secure funding and the impact this has on the organisation's priorities. As the traditional African proverb goes, 'If you have your hand in another man's pocket, you must move when he moves' (Edwards and Hulme, 1996).

On the basis of this common-sense realisation, growing evidence has been collected which shows that most organisations around the world

2 www.oxfam.org/en/files/annual_report_2005.pdf (accessed 22 July 2007)

3 There are of course some organisations that rely solely on membership fees, such as trade unions and some international coalitions and social movements.

have actually become more accountable to donors than to their intended beneficiaries, the most extreme cases being ‘briefcase NGOs’ set up with the exclusive goal of attracting funding (Bendell, 2006; Brown and Jagadananda, 2007). It is of course disappointing that many organisations spend more time reporting back to donors and drafting new funding proposals than working side-by-side with those they intend to help. However, what is more dangerous is that such dependency inevitably affects their overall contribution to social justice given that, in real life, the interests of different social groups are often conflicting.



If the power distribution is not questioned, then well-intended programmes can easily prove detrimental to social development as they (perhaps unintentionally) strengthen the status quo

Donors (who are often based in Western countries) obviously have the right to their specific priorities. Most of the time, however, these priorities are not developed in consultation with the world’s poor. If donors are official development agencies, then we should expect that their priorities will stem from the need to comply with certain requirements set out by their governments (read Western governments) or justify their disbursements to tax payers (read Western tax payers). In the case of private foundations, it is reasonable to expect that their overall priorities will be set by their boards of directors (read Western managers). Moreover, if these foundations have been set up by multinational corporations, then it would be reasonable to expect some type of influence of the latter on the policy priorities of the former.

And where do the beneficiaries fit within this framework? Many donors and organisations take great pains to explain that they consult with ‘stakeholders’ and ‘target groups’ when setting their policy priorities. However, this reveals a very technocratic approach to social development. World injustices exist not because of technical deficiencies, but because power dynamics are skewed to the advantage of those who control economic and political resources. If the distribution of power is not changed, then it is irrelevant how many stakeholders or target groups an organisation consults with; if the power distribution is not questioned, then well-intended programmes can easily prove detrimental to social development as they (perhaps unintentionally) strengthen the status quo.

Consider, for instance, the case of multinational corporations, which unquestionably wield a great deal of power in today’s world and, generally speaking, have not accumulated their wealth by fighting injustices. In past decades, many multinational corporations, from Shell to Nestlé to Microsoft, have formed charitable foundations. While it is not necessarily true that multinational corporations exercise direct control over their charitable foundations, it is at the same time un-

likely that a few legal technicalities guarantee that there is no conflict of interest between the two entities. Moreover, many of these charitable organisations make investments in areas that can be detrimental to social justice.

Take the Gates Foundation as an interesting case. The Gates Foundation is one of the biggest charitable organisations in today's world, with capital that exceeds the GDP of two-thirds of the countries in the world. Thousands of NGOs, associations and community-based organisations around the world receive grants from the Gates Foundation to run a vast range of activities, from health-care projects to combat HIV/AIDS to activities aimed at building the capacity of local communities and empowering the poor.

However, the Gates Foundation invests the bulk of its capital in activities that have nothing to do with philanthropy. As reported by the *Los Angeles Times* in early 2007, the Gates Foundation has huge shares in other multinational companies, particularly in the pharmaceutical and oil sectors. As we know, many global injustices are due to environmental exploitation and intellectual property rights that limit access to life-saving medicines. Against this background, would it be legitimate (as the *Los Angeles Times* does) to ask how the Gates Foundation can help fight those global injustices it appears to be benefiting from? Will the Gates Foundation oppose its own interests and those of its mother company, Microsoft (which has always championed intellectual property rights and monopolised the global market of software) to help the world's poor? And does this conflict of interest have a consequence for those global civil society organisations that receive money from the Gates Foundation, allegedly to fight social injustices?

Recent research has shown that the lack of transparency and accountability around funding is a major problem not only for global NGOs, but also for other forms of civil society, such as indigenous organisations and social movements.⁴ In many ways, the mystery that surrounds funding and decision-making processes within grassroots social movements is more worrying than it is in the case of international NGOs.

There is a conviction among certain critics that, whereas NGOs are controlled by donors and corporate interests, social movements enjoy

4 An analysis of internal democratic practices and participation within various types of civil society organisations, from NGOs to indigenous movements, was developed by the Civil Society Index Programme at the international coalition, CIVICUS. The Country Reports for more than 50 countries are available at www.civicus.org (accessed 22 July 2007).



In situations where no clear decision-making structures exist, grassroots participation is not necessarily enhanced, and the voices of minorities and marginalised groups may be less likely to be heard

a high degree of internal democratic participation since they are less formalised and their structure is more fluid. Although this is by no means true in all instances (take for instance the consolidated structure of a global network such as Via Campesina), it is a matter of dispute whether a lack of formal structure is tantamount to more flexible and democratic participation.

In Latin America and Asia, most social movements are highly personalised entities, often shaped around charismatic leaders. Although presenting themselves as loosely organised movements, they are in fact quite centralised in terms of decision-making.

In situations where no clear decision-making structures exist, grassroots participation is not necessarily enhanced, and the voices of minorities and marginalised groups may be less likely to be heard. According to Jo Freeman, the widely heralded principle of ‘structurelessness’ becomes a way of masking power, ‘a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others’ (Freeman, 1972: 153).

If decades of social and political research have revealed anything about collective social phenomena, it is that power dynamics are always present, even when there is no formal structure to support them. There is always somebody who decides, and once ‘one knows with whom it is important to check before a decision is made, and whose approval is the stamp of acceptance, one knows who is running things’ (*ibid*: 154).

Power dynamics not only dictate who takes decisions but, in many cases, also who participates in the activities of the organisations. Although most organisations claim their members regularly participate in meetings and elect the representatives of the organisations, this is far from being a widespread reality. Criticisms of elitist practices, self-appointment and top-down management are not limited to certain cases of international coalitions (the most well-known case is probably Greenpeace), but extend to a plethora of organisations and movements in various regions of the world (Gibelman and Gelman, 2001).

Nor can it be said that there is no abuse within global civil society organisations. Although most of these organisations fight for a more just world, it is rather striking how certain crucial practices of fairness in the workplace have not yet made significant inroads in how NGOs and social movements are run.

Many people who spend their life fighting for justice and equity find that the organisation for which they work (or volunteer) does not respect those very principles in its internal management. For instance, it would be very interesting to investigate how organisations that fight for workers' rights (say, against abusive policies by multinational corporations) fare when it comes to their own staff. Systematic research would probably find that, although many civil society organisations advocate for social welfare and social security, they offer mainly short-term contracts to their staff and resort to retrenchment policies more often than private companies. And what about huge salary gaps between the rank and file and the top managers of these organisations, as demonstrated by the case of US charitable organisations that have made headlines in recent years?

Why consistency is important for global civil society's legitimacy

Inevitably, the contradictions discussed above have a bearing on the legitimacy of global civil society organisations as global actors, and this affects their capacity to contribute towards global democracy.

The legitimacy of civil society organisations rests on the justness of their cause. Global civil society organisations are not elected by the people, and therefore their legitimacy as global agents is based on what one could define as their 'normative stand' (something in between value-rational and charismatic legitimacy, according to Max Weber's classification). These organisations are accepted as legitimate voices in the international arena because there is widespread belief that they are genuinely fighting for causes of global relevance.

Global civil society organisations have adopted a language that is based on key norms and ideals (such as social justice, democratic participation and fundamental human rights) and criticise the current system of global governance for not respecting those values. Paradoxically, global civil society seems to be struggling to live up to the very expectations of democratic participation and pluralism it has generated.

Unlike governments (whose legitimacy is based on their control over a certain territory) and multinational corporations (which do not make too much of a secret of being accountable only to their shareholders), global civil society must uphold and put into practice those norms and values if it wants to have any meaningful role to play on the global scene. Otherwise, it will be no more than another aristocratic voice without a legitimate aspiration to represent the unrepresented.

In a nutshell, this means that consistency is more crucial for global civil society organisations than it is for other global actors. The fact that global civil society cannot live up to the standards against which it assesses the ‘democraticness’ of the system of global governance raises questions as to its legitimacy as a voice of the voiceless.

If we were to conclude that due to these contradictions, inconsistencies and abuse, global civil society does not possess any normative legitimacy, what then should we conclude about its contribution toward the democratisation of global governance?

Conclusion: What outcome for global democracy?



The contradictions that have the most damaging consequences for the democratising power of global civil society are those that have to do with its legitimacy

Like other social phenomena, global civil society is heterogeneous, and characterised by internal rivalries. Activists who participate in international fora sponsored by multilateral institutions such as the World Bank or the United Nations are regularly labelled as sellouts by more radical activists, who on the contrary believe that erasing the current global governance system is better than reforming it. Social movements and professionalised NGOs struggle to communicate and are often suspicious of one another's motives. Women's movements fight for causes (such as reproductive health) that are often opposed by many religious organisations, although both groups are part of what we call global civil society. Trade unions advocate for workers' rights and combat retrenchment policies, while environmental groups mobilise to have certain factories overhauled or shut down, which in turn might bring about layoffs.

However, as this analysis has demonstrated, the contradictions that have the most damaging consequences for the democratising power of global civil society are those that have to do with its legitimacy. The fact that global civil society organisations often do not 'walk the talk' and forget to put into practice the very values they advocate for is the most serious threat to their legitimacy.

In many regards, global civil society could be seen as a new aristocracy. The leaders of the most well-known organisations and movements know one another, and often act as if they were members of a selective club. They have adopted a business-like language, hire expensive consultants to improve their marketing strategies and control capital that compares to that of large corporations.

For years, global civil society organisations frankly believed that their moral mission provided them with a blank cheque. As the do-gooders

of the world, they had no reason to bother about paying attention to issues such as the accountability of their sector and their democratic deficit. However, as their power grows, so does their obligation to provide explanations.

In this regard, it is a good sign that some of the most well-known international NGOs have recently decided to sign an ‘accountability charter’.⁵ However, as this article has discussed at length, problems relating to accountability and legitimacy have little to do with technicalities and handbooks and a lot to do with power dynamics.

Thus it is possible that, despite charters and declarations, the ‘bubble’ of global civil society will burst and reveal its oligarchic tendencies. At the same time, it is also likely that new forms of political opposition will emerge from within global civil society and contest the current distribution of power. Of course, these new dynamics will also present new contradictions and types of abuse. New forms of participation will emerge and others pass away. New leaders will come to the fore, and others will move back to the rearguard. Aristocracies have always replaced previous aristocracies and will always be replaced by new aristocracies. But is this the type of democratic development global civil society has in mind?

If we are to espouse the idea that democracy does not entail the end of abuse and power imbalances but constitutes a way to deal with these elements in a truly participatory fashion, then the only way in which global civil society can contribute towards world democracy is by creating new forms of democratic participation within itself.

Only if it becomes an open space in which participatory democracy is genuinely promoted, self-criticism is practised, power dynamics are dealt with and roles are continuously redesigned will global civil society regain its normative legitimacy.

If it succeeds in fighting its inherent aristocratic tendencies and introducing new forms of democratic participation, it will have advanced a more convincing argument not only vis-à-vis global governance institutions, but before the whole world, from the local to the global community.

5 Accessible at www.ingoaccountabilitycharter.org (accessed 22 July 2007)

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Corporate globalisation, civil society and post-political regulation – Whither democracy?

Christina Garsten and Kerstin Jacobsson

Introduction: Globalisation scenarios, asymmetries and regulatory gaps

Globalisation is a word suggestive of many futures. For some, globalisation provides scenarios for a better world. It entails enhanced interconnectedness, seamless communications and the potential for instant linking of distant communities. It promises easy access to information and resources and an opening-up of boundaries of various sorts. For others, it suggests a subordination of social equity and justice to productivity and competitiveness. Rather than easy access to resources it suggests widening gaps between the wealthy and powerful and those isolated from access to basic resources. And for yet others, the more important issues are to do with the global threats to environment, to food and water and biological diversity. Globalisation is essentially a process of risk diffusion on a scale never before experienced.

Indeed there is more to globalisation than meets the eye. Unpacking some of the globalisation scenarios reveals that just as there are many scenarios there are great asymmetries of globalisation. Some groups of people are authors of globalisation processes, some recipients; some are winners, some losers. Globalisation, its possibilities and benefits, has varying impacts across the world. Not all people are equally involved in globalisation. Also, different processes of globalisation, such as the movement of people, ideas, finance and technology, do not go hand in hand, but dance unevenly with each other (see, for example: Appadurai, 1990; Hannerz, 1992; Sassen, 1998). We are seeing how corporate finance moves easily, whereas some basic resources, or some groups of people, are left out of the circuits of mobility. The term 'globalisation' is no doubt expansionist in its universalising ambitions, yet it is something of a misnomer. Globalisation, in Bauman's words (1998: 2) 'divides as much as it unites; it divides as it unites – the causes of division being identical with those which promote the uniformity of the globe'. What seems to be an opening-up of the world and its possibilities for some is perceived by others as a closing-down.

In other words, globalisation translates differently across the world and its impacts and expressions vary greatly.

Corporations are drivers of globalisation processes, authors of globalisation scenarios. To a large extent, the new economies of scale mean that corporations are increasingly operating across and beyond borders, at a transnational or even a supranational level. Ideological shifts in the late 20th century have also provided more leeway for global corporate activity. Since the 1980s, when Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were in power, corporations have benefited greatly from the shift away from the notion of government as economic arbiter towards a belief in market forces as the road to prosperity (Florini, 2003: 98). Indeed, corporations are now in command of considerable resources across the world and, to that end, are important players in the fashioning of global scenarios. Corporate power now extends beyond national borders, maximising the advantages of operating both within and beyond national structures, while relying crucially on the legal, fiscal, environmental and human organisation of the nation-state (Appadurai, 1996: 168).



The increased presence of transnational corporations on the global arena also implies that they are positioned to exert much greater influence on the distribution of resources within and across societies

The increased presence of transnational corporations on the global arena also implies that they are positioned to exert much greater influence on the distribution of resources within and across societies. Many command resources that are formidably large in relation to those of the nation-state. The effects of corporate activities can be wide-ranging, impinging not just on economic factors, but also on the environment and on social and cultural structures. Deregulation in both rich and poor countries has opened the door to the play of market forces across borders and to mergers and acquisitions that have strengthened corporate power at the transnational level. With the gradual dismantling of national regulations and trade barriers, a related retreat from welfarism and corporatism, and the establishment of flexible and entrepreneurial corporations as the template for organisational design, disorganised capitalism has taken a strong grip on the world. In the absence of a 'world government' with a mandate to oversee and sanction the doings of corporations, nation-state governments are facing severe challenges. Large-scale global economies leave us with a fragmented political authority with limited power to control markets (Palan, 2000). The regulatory activities of corporations will thus have an impact on what route globalisation will take, and how it translates into everyday reality for people.

The differing scenarios of globalisation have a lot to do with governance. The forms of governance, the ways in which groups of people

collectively make choices and set the parameters for the ordering of society, will to a large extent determine what globalisation eventually entails for people. Contemporary globalisation scenarios involve a dynamic and often conflictual relation between corporate powers and markets on the one hand, and the multifaceted interests of civil society on the other. Economic interest and social responsibility seldom go hand in hand, and are often at odds with each other.

With enhanced globalisation of markets, increasing financial interdependencies, transnational flows across borders, and re-ordering of social relationships across of time and space, we are facing significant challenges in the regulation of market forces. In our view, the attempts to regulate are increasingly characterised by a belief in the possibility of consensus. Voluntary regulatory arrangements, soft law and moral regulatory frameworks such as codes of conduct, standards for corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the like, are gaining increasing recognition. Often these frameworks, although developed by powerful corporations or multilateral organisations such as the OECD, are taken to represent ‘the voice of civil society’.

In this article, we argue that the trend towards voluntarism ultimately means that political conflicts are transformed into moral frameworks. Likewise, conflictual relationships are increasingly transformed into consensual ones (see also Garsten and Jacobsson, 2007). The article focuses specifically on global regulation and governance, which, we argue, is highly post-political in nature. This has certain implications for the conceptualisation of civil society, for the role of civil society in challenging and regulating corporate globalisation and ultimately for democracy. With an increasingly consensual, voluntary and moral conception of regulation of market forces, what happens to democratic processes and political action?

Voluntary regulatory arrangements and the blurring of boundaries

Even if there is no ‘world government’, the world is spanned by many organisations with global governance concerns. However powerful they may be, corporations thus do not exist in environments free of rules. On the contrary, they have to respond to rule-making organisations at different levels. There is large number of organisations that seek to advise, guide or set rules for the conduct of corporations in a global market. The emergence of such standard-promoting organisations is an expression of the broader growth of new forms of organisations and governance that have been referred to as constitut-

ing part of ‘world society’ (Meyer, 1994). These organisations expend considerable effort convincing other organisations that it is in their interest to accept and adopt these new, voluntary forms of regulation. (Brunsson, Jacobsson and associates, 2002). We are seeing the formation of new transnational legal regimes and regulatory institutions that are either private or supranational and are taking over functions until recently located in nation-state institutions (Sassen, 1998).

Rules aimed at promoting a higher degree of corporate social accountability are now increasingly being placed on the corporate agenda. Corporate leaders are, to varying degrees, responding to pressures from different kinds of organisations and movements, ranging from local civil society groups to international governmental organisations (IGOs). They are alerted that they need to make sure international agreements on human rights, labour rights and environmental protection are not breached. Alongside financial interests, which are clearly the primary focus, social and ethical issues are brought onto the agenda of corporate activities. As Marcus (1998:7) notes, ‘the emphasis on organizational competitiveness is still there, but the discourse is inflated with concerns about values, corporate personhood, the relation of individuals to community – in general, those topics that might have been considered before as “soft” in relation to “means-ends” modifications of organisational practices with the bottom line of competitive enhancement always in sight’.

Corporate social responsibility has since the 1960s emerged as a response to concerns about the role of corporations in society at large. CSR suggests that corporations have an obligation to consider the interests not only of shareholders, but also of customers, employees, and communities, in all aspects of their operations. This obligation extends beyond their statutory obligation to comply with legislation. These new forms of governance, or regulation, are most often voluntary in nature. They build on the voluntary adoption of standards and codes of conduct by corporations, rather than on force or sanctions. They rely on the voluntary engagement of corporations in issues of human rights, workers’ rights and social responsibility, rather than on clear directives. Moreover, we see a multiplicity of actors being involved in these voluntary transnational governance activities: state actors, corporations, non-profit organisations, professional associations, intergovernmental organisations, sometimes in networks of private and public actors. Corporations are entering into ‘partnerships’ with civil society organisations, with NGOs, as well as with IGOs and state agencies, to develop common frameworks for social responsibility, codes of conduct or ethical policies. Often, these frameworks



Corporate social responsibility ... suggests that corporations have an obligation to consider the interests not only of shareholders, but also of customers, employees, and communities, in all aspects of their operations

although isare taken to represent ‘the voice of civil society’. Civil society is thus drawn onto the agenda of corporations, as a stakeholder to be reckoned with, a ‘partner’. Generally, it is considered important to develop ‘good relations’ with the surrounding community, to promote an image of ‘goodwill’ and thus to secure the backing of the social context of corporate operations. To a great extent, these efforts are part of a brand positioning, of ‘reputation management’, as well as maintaining stable employee relations.

In the new forms of global governance, states are just one type of actor among others involved in regulatory activity; the state must increasingly share rule-making authority with other actors. ‘Hierarchical’ forms of governance are being replaced by ‘network governance’ or by ‘governance without government’. This means that systems of regulation are developed which lack an authoritative centre and thus have a dispersed power and authority structure. (On dispersion of authority see Strange, 1996, and on private authority in international affairs, see Cutler *et al.*, 1999; Hall and Biersteker 2002). Scott has used the concept of ‘post-regulatory states’ (Scott, 2004) to capture the blurring between public and private actors and the introduction of more de-centred forms of regulation, relying less on state authority and sanctioning power. We can in this case speak of post-sovereign forms of regulation and governance. Governments still govern but increasingly in partnership with other actors.

The multiplicity of actors involved in global governance has its correspondence in the variation in regulatory modes: self-regulation by private actors (whether by delegation by a public actor or on their own initiative and on a voluntary basis), co-regulation of public and private actors, or the use of soft law, such as guidelines, recommendations and codes of conduct, by public as well as private actors. Soft law bridges the dichotomy of law and non-law as well as of public and private actors (Mörth, 2006: 120). Soft law is normative in content but is not backed up by sanctions or hierarchy (Mörth, 2004).

Others have spoken of post-regulatory forms of governance: ‘While traditional regulation imposes mandates that are relatively specific and uniform, hierarchically determined, static, and substantive, in post-regulatory governance there is a preference for procedures or general standards with wide allowances for variation rather than detailed rules, for intensive consultation to set and modify standards, for standards that are wholly or partly voluntary, and for adjustments over time in response to feed-back. Post-regulatory governance is flexible in the face of different conditions across space and time’ (Mosher, 2000: 6).

‘New governance’ is procedural, heterarchical and flexible, in contrast with old-style governance which is regulatory, top-down and uniform (Eberlein and Kerwer, 2004; Mosher and Trubek, 2003).

These new modes of governance rely on the voluntary adoption and acceptance of involved actors. Generally, they are more flexible and adaptable to varied business operations and social contexts. By relying on partnership ideas and multi-stakeholder involvement, they also tend to blur the boundaries between business and civil society, and between the interests of different organisations and collectivities. But what interests us here is not so much their capacity or incapacity to ensure commitment and abidance through this form of governance, but their normative and post-political character. It is to this topic that we now turn.

Moral frameworks and post-political regulation

A powerful example of the voluntary base of global governance of corporate affairs is the UN Global Compact. In an address to the World Economic Forum on 31 January 1999, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, challenged business leaders to join an international initiative – the Global Compact – that would bring companies together with UN agencies, labour and civil society to support universal environmental and social principles. The Global Compact was launched at the UN Headquarters in New York on 26 July 2000. Today, thousands of companies from all regions of the world, international labour and civil society organisations are engaged in the Global Compact, working to advance 10 universal principles in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption.

The Global Compact seeks to promote responsible corporate citizenship so that business can be part of the solution to the challenges of globalisation. In this way, the private sector – in partnership with other social actors – can help realise the former Secretary-General’s vision: a more sustainable and inclusive global economy (<http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/index.html>, visited 12.5.07).

The Global Compact is a purely voluntary initiative with two objectives: to mainstream the 10 principles in business activities around the world, and to catalyse actions in support of UN goals. To achieve these objectives, the Global Compact offers facilitation and engagement through several mechanisms: policy dialogues, learning, country/regional networks and partnership projects. The Global Compact

is not a conventional regulatory instrument – it does not ‘police’, enforce or measure the behaviour or actions of companies. Rather, it relies on ‘public accountability’, ‘transparency’ and the ‘enlightened self-interest’ of companies, labour and civil society to initiate and share substantive action in pursuing the principles upon which the Global Compact is based.



The rhetoric of the Global Compact thus relies on voluntarism, consensus and humanitarianism, rather than on force, conflict and politic

The Global Compact defines itself as ‘a network’ that involves all the relevant social actors: governments, who defined the principles on which the initiative is based; corporations, whose actions it seeks to influence; labour, in whose hands the concrete process of global production takes place; civil society organisations, representing the wider community of stakeholders; and the United Nations (<http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/index.html>, visited 12.5.07). The voluntary nature of the Global Compact has proved successful in attracting a large number of corporations to join, but has also attracted a great deal of criticism for being an initiative with ‘zero teeth’, and with no power to sanction or otherwise pursue corporations who fail to meet the principles.

The rhetoric of the Global Compact thus relies on voluntarism, consensus and humanitarianism, rather than on force, conflict and politics. It works by encouraging and providing incentives to responsibility and accountability. Indeed, the rhetoric of ‘social responsibility’ has to a large extent displaced the political interests of corporations. Following in the wake of the new vocabulary of social concern and accountability, the classic antagonisms of state and market, welfare and profit, have also been eradicated, or at least blurred. Ethics and moralities are now replacing politics. The conditions are claimed to be ripe for ‘deliberative’ or ‘dialogic’ forms of democracy, at a global level (Mouffe, 1999: 2).

Voluntarism is an idea that fits nicely with the market. Corporations have shown a distinct preference for limiting the debate to voluntary standards and self-regulation. Many intergovernmental organisations, such as the OECD, the EU and the UN, have reinforced this tendency. Also, advocacy groups tend to promote voluntary initiatives before the idea of legally binding rules. The general understanding is that corporations should commit themselves to, not be forced into, finding suitable means to ensure that their commitments are fulfilled. The UN Global Compact is a clear example of this belief.

Behind such voluntary regulation lies an often illusory consensus. Since the principles, codes or standards are often abstract in char-

acter, agreement and consensus can easily be reached – at the level of principle. Drawing on Mouffe (1999), it is important here to recognise the distinction of ‘the political’, with ‘the post-political’. While ‘the political’ is characterised by conflict, the post-political vision implies that conflicts can be transcended. In contemporary political discourse, and not least in relation to corporate power, conflicts and confrontations are increasingly considered outdated. Instead, collaboration and partnership are seen to offer more constructive ways of reaching policy agreements. Mouffe takes issue with the consensus model implicit in the thinking around notions of deliberative democracy. The consensus model postulates the possibility of win-win politics, and suggests that there are solutions that are supposedly beneficial for all people in society. Along the same lines, we suggest that the role of corporations today is largely being reconceptualised as one not necessarily in opposition to, but rather complementary to, that of the state and welfare politics. The ‘us and them’ distinction, so crucial in much political thinking, is no longer there. Instead, corporations are drawn into circles of discussion, negotiation and agreement around possible ways of regulating world trade and corporate activities. And with the blurring of the ‘us and them’ distinction politics tends to disappear from centre stage. Instead, we are left with an illusion of consensus and agreement.

For Mouffe, the ‘excess of consensus’ is dangerous because it is potentially socially explosive. ‘Democracy is in peril not only when there is insufficient consensus and allegiance to the values it embodies, but also when its agonistic dynamic is hindered by an apparent excess of consensus, which usually masks a disquieting apathy’ (Mouffe, 1993: 6). According to Mouffe, it is a typical liberal illusion that we can have pluralism without antagonism. To Mouffe, pluralism without antagonism is pluralism without the dimension of ‘the political’. She draws on Carl Schmitt in insisting on the dimension of conflictuality as inherent in ‘the political’. Conflict is the crucial category of politics. According to both Mouffe and Schmitt, politics needs an ‘us and them’ distinction. In the realm of corporate social responsibility (CSR), the ‘us and them’ is basically outdated, and substituted for by notions of ‘partnership’ and ‘collaboration’. There is no basic antagonism between state and market, social accountability and business. Instead there is the potentiality of agreement, complementarity and consensus. The power of corporations to impact on social, cultural and environmental aspects of the surrounding society is still there, but downplayed. The market, despite its ideology of competition, works best by silencing conflicts of interest and shadowing power.



With the blurring of the ‘us and them’ distinction politics tends to disappear from centre stage. Instead, we are left with an illusion of consensus and agreement

Whither democracy?

In the area of CSR, which is by nature a political area with high political stakes, politics are downplayed in favour of normative and morally imbued exhortations. In Mouffe's view, political conflicts are increasingly played out in the moral register (Mouffe, 2005: 3). She illustrates with the war against terrorism, but also with the rise of right-wing populism and the moral condemnation of such populism by the political establishments. By moralisation Mouffe means that political antagonisms are formulated in terms of good and evil (2005: 75). In her view, this is a problem since 'when politics is played out in the register of morality, antagonisms cannot take an agonistic form' (2005: 76). In the realm of CSR, this is clearly evinced in the vocabularies used by actors, such as 'partner', 'partnership', 'commitment' and 'agreement'. There is little in the way of antagonism, conflict, party or interest – except at grassroots level, where the actual consequences of failures to live up to the codes of conduct are experienced.

True, the economic and the moral domain have always been nested into each other in different ways. In this regard, the moralistic turn of business in the area of CSR is nothing new. But what is perhaps new is the particular ways in which the relevance of the political for understanding and for regulation of the economic domain is downplayed in favour of the moral. The regulatory gaps and the fragmented political authority of nation-states in the globalised economy leave a space for normativity and moralisation to enter. The economy is to be understood in terms of its own laws and challenges, and political interventions in the economic sphere are therefore to be limited. But the moral domain, as a confluence of ideology, conscience and conduct, is to be understood as an increasingly important part of the economy.

According to Mouffe, politics proper is replaced by moralisation and/or juridification. 'Given the growing impossibility of envisioning the problems of society in a proper political way, either is a marked tendency to privilege the juridical field and to expect the law to provide the solutions to all types of conflict. The juridical sphere is becoming the terrain where social conflicts can find a form of expression' (Mouffe, 2000: 115). In the case of CSR, juridification, in the sense of the law's expansion into new policy areas and differentiation into sub-fields as well as increased conflict-solving with reference to law (Blichner and Molander, 2005), is not an accurate description of what is happening. Given the fact that the existing base of international law for extending international legal obligations to corporations in the area of human rights and workers' rights is difficult to implement,

the tendency is, rather, one of a delimited role for international law and binding rules, and an enhanced role for soft-law initiatives such as guidelines, standards and codes of conduct. And these forms of enforcement are by nature voluntary and infused with a moral discourse.

Hence, while we agree with Mouffe that there is a shift from politics to moralisation we wish to emphasise here the enhanced role of what we call post-political forms of governance in contemporary polity, which are, indeed, legitimised by ideology and discourse. Regulatory codes is that they work by taking what is essentially a political problem, removing it from the realm of political discourse and recasting it in neutral language. Regulatory codes often present themselves as rational, objective and neutral, based on the sound principles of human solidarity and market dynamics working together to form a humane capitalism. Corporate citizenship and social accountability gain legitimacy by enabling corporations to strike a balance, at least theoretically, between profit and greed, moral considerations and universal values (Garsten, 2003).

As stated by Parker (2002: 245), 'Corporate responsibility, or citizenship, is constituted in interaction between formal regulation through the state, informal social action (the penumbra of democracy and institutions of civil society) and corporate self-regulation.' Despite the power of corporations to shape everyday social life and their command of huge resources, international as well as national polity lacks the adequate tools and techniques to oversee their capacity for self-regulation and to respond to avoidance of accountability. Generally, new forms of post-political governance are not tied adequately to institutions of democracy. Often, there is little in the way of organized follow-up on the extent to which corporations actually take action on accountability. The corporate shell is rarely permeated by civil society stakeholders or by the general public, but despite talk of 'transparency' the corporation remains largely inaccessible to the public eye (Garsten and Lindh de Montoya, forthcoming). Dialogue and negotiation are rarely pursued to the extent where they can actually influence additional responsibilities or changes in self-regulatory arrangements by corporations. Hence, the legitimacy of post-political forms of regulation must, by definition, be questioned.

Following Schmitt, we contest that the absence of the political is also due to liberal thinking as such – and liberal thinking is hegemonic in world affairs today. According to Schmitt, liberalism can only oscillate between ethics and economics and is bound to miss the speci-



The corporate shell is rarely permeated by civil society stakeholders or by the general public, but despite talk of 'transparency' the corporation remains largely inaccessible to the public eye

city of the political. State and politics disappear in liberal thinking. ‘In a very systematic fashion liberal thought evades or ignores state and politics and moves instead in a typical, always recurring polarity of two heterogeneous spheres, namely ethics and economics, intellect and trade, education and property’ (Schmitt, quoted in Mouffe, 2000: 46). In this perspective, both moralisation and marketisation fulfil a truly de-politicising function. In our view, the transformation of politics into ethics or economics is a better example of post-politics than of juridification. Global regulation and governance, in our view, by its very nature implies a moving away from conflicts, or surface conflicts hide the real conflicts in the world. Voluntary market mechanisms are believed to be more effective than politics. To draw on Mouffe’s vocabulary: involuntary regulation postulates that a world without antagonisms is possible.

What we find useful for our purposes is the concept of the ‘post-political’ as well as the notion that it is a liberal illusion that we can have a pluralism without antagonism, that power can be thrown out of the window. Here, we would like to add one dimension to the post-political nature of global governance and regulation that is not fully covered in Mouffe’s analysis, namely the fact that the nature of power relations and control is made invisible in CSR types of regulation. There is a displacement of the political from the realm of corporate accountability. As Torfing puts it, the new forms of governance ‘[take] us beyond both hierarchical state regulation and competitive market regulation. Hence, the “visible” hand of the state and the “invisible” hand of the market should be supplemented by the “continuous handshake” of negotiated interaction through partnerships and governance networks’ (Torfing, 2005: 4). Governance networks tend to be networks of actors held together by common principles, procedures and norms (Ayres and Braithwaite, 1992; Sahlin-Andersson, 2004).

What is problematic, in our view, is that the implicit consensus model in much of the new forms of governance goes hand in hand with a displacement of the political. Inspired by Harper (2000: 47), we suggest that ethical standards, codes of conduct, and principles aimed at regulating global business, are to some extent in the business of creating a moral order. In this moral realm, the standards and codes are given a status beyond political contestation, as morally and ethically sound, and hence, difficult to question in principle (Garsten, 2003).

The multi-stakeholder model, with its principle of inclusiveness, used in much of the global governance efforts, can be seen as a way to increase legitimacy in the absence of a representative democracy.

It is a societally-based legitimacy rather than one deriving from a state-centric representative model (Mörth, 2006). It is, indeed, in the field of transnational relations that we find the other type of expression of a consensus model criticised by Mouffe, namely deliberative democracy. Mouffe is critical of the very idea of deliberative democracy, with its presumption that society requires a stronger form of consensus, namely a moral one, based on impartiality and resulting from rational deliberation (Mouffe, 1999: 3). In her view, agonistic politics is a struggle between hegemonic projects, which can never be reconciled rationally (Mouffe, 2005: 21). Moreover, both the deliberative democratic model and the 'aggregative' model of democracy, with its negotiation of interests, in her view underplay the importance of passion as the driving force in politics. We can not fully discuss her critique of deliberative democracy here. Suffice it to note that deliberative democracy has been advanced in the discourse of transnational democracy. With the difficulties in institutionalising forms and principles of representative democracy transnationally, and with transnational corporations outgrowing national regulation, hopes have been placed in other types of democracy, notably deliberative democracy (see for instance Eriksen and Fossum, 2000; Eriksen, 2005; Closa and Fossum, 2004; Jørges and Neyer, 1997a, 1997b). There are also more skeptical voices (Jacobsson and Vifell, 2005; Mörth, 2006). Others basically defend the principles of statist representative democracy, hoping that it will be possible to extend it to the global level, for instance through a world parliament (Held, 1995).

Concluding notes: Global democracy on the slippery road

In our view, it is questionable whether new post-political forms of regulation, with the accompanying moralisation of political discourse and the reliance on market mechanisms, can contribute in any strong sense to democracy at an international level. It is hard to conceive of a democratic project where neutralisation and displacement of politics are ever-present. Democracy, in the Western representative form, comes with ideas of differing interests, separation of powers, of areas of responsibility, of accountability and even liability. And it is exactly the notion of accountability that is difficult to pursue in corporate social responsibility, with its post-political forms of governance. And without sufficient openness and transparency, dialogue and negotiation with the public and with civil society as stakeholder is hampered. Decisions taken, and the procedures preceding them, are often difficult to track backwards.



Corporate social responsibility and democracy are part of the same conceptual family, but they are not twin siblings

To conclude, whether or not CSR as a form of post-political governance on the global scene will lead to more or less democracy is an open question. Corporate social responsibility and democracy are part of the same conceptual family, but they are not twin siblings. Whereas democratic theory acknowledges the variety of interests and the differences in power of interacting parties, corporate social responsibility forms of governance generally presume the good will of equal actors. The question remains, can normative appeals to voluntary moral action replace politics? We think not.

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Global civil society and de-/democratisation – AIDS politics, anti-apartheid and the World Social Forum

Håkan Thörn

The crisis of democracy

The latest phase of globalisation, originating in the 1970s, has been celebrated as the universal triumph of democracy. It is argued that while 68 per cent of the countries in the world in 1974 could be considered as authoritarian, in 1995 75 per cent of all countries had established procedures for democratic elections (Held *et al.*, 1999). There is however also a completely different story to be told about the same period: the crisis of democracy, both as an idea and as a practice. Today, ‘democracy’ is used to justify interest-driven foreign policies and sometimes even as an excuse to launch war. ‘Democracy’ is also a concept that wealthy organisations in the Global North use to condition their aid to the poor in the Global South. In this context, the history of democracy as an idea, and democratisation as process of struggle, is often forgotten.

If there is anything to learn from human history, an obvious lesson is that elites never give away their power voluntarily – or for free. The earliest constitutions claiming ‘democracy’ in the context of the modern nation-state were the results of violent revolutions in North America and France. As they included only a privileged few, much later workers, women, slaves (and other excluded groups) were included as citizens as the result of struggles, which included illegal acts. In the history of modernity there are hardly any examples of processes of societal democratisation (however limited their achievements in terms of actual ‘rule by the people’ may have been) without the involvement of broad social movements. After the second world war, modernisation theorists tried to frame ‘democratisation’ as an evolutionary logic – a discourse that was heavily criticised during the 1960s and the 1970s but which has been revived since 1989 – suppressing the fact that ‘democratisation’ had come about as a result of people’s struggles and that there is nothing inevitable – or irreversible – about their achievements.

In dominant discourses on democracy, ‘democratisation’ is most often limited to the establishing of parliamentary democracy and the institutionalisation of certain citizen rights (and duties). Historically, ideas and popular demands for democracy have not, however, been limited to a narrow definition of ‘the political’. Whether we look at the modern history of anti-colonial movements or of social movements in the Global North, waves of popular democratic demands have been closely intertwined with demands for social justice. These historical experiences are also manifested in various strands of democratic theory that strongly emphasise the close connection between democracy and social equality (see Young, 1990; Dahl, 1989). During the 20th century a clear tendency in countries all over the world was that democratisation processes were linked to the introduction of policies of economic redistribution and decreasing social cleavages. As David Harvey (2005) has argued, the current era of economic globalisation can in fact be seen as the result of an elite-driven political project articulated as a *counter-reaction* to these developments. Figures support his argument. While a clear tendency in ‘almost all countries’ was that the economic power of the upper classes was restrained during the post-war decades, the tendency of economic redistribution was radically reversed as a result of neoliberalisation: just one example is that in the US, where it all started, ‘the ratio of the median compensation of workers to the salaries of CEOs increased from just over 30 to 1 in 1970 to nearly 500 to 1 in 2000’ (Harvey, 2005: 17). Neoliberal globalists argue that this is a price we should pay in order to increase economic growth globally – the increasing wealth of the wealthier will eventually ‘trickle down’ to the poor. The World Bank has put forth statistics showing that the income cleavage between the OECD countries and other states decreased between 1970 and 1995 (World Bank, 2001). Other figures, however, show that the cleavage between the richest and the poorest parts of the population of world society, and within nations, has increased dramatically (UNDP, 2006). Whatever the statistics, it is obvious that that neoliberalisation has reorganised, rather than fundamentally altered, the patterns of huge global inequalities established during the era of modern European colonialism – with a clear tendency of an increasing social marginalisation – globally and within states (Held and McGrew, 2002). Here are some telling facts about the present state of world society. The poorest 40 per cent of the world population (2.5 billion people), who live on less than USD 2 a day, account for 5 per cent of global income, while the richest 10 per cent account for 54 per cent; 1.1 billion people do not have access to clean drinking water and 2.4 billion do not have basic sanitation; every hour 1,200 children die from preventable diseases (UNDP, 2006); women own only 1 per cent of the world’s property and earn only 10 per cent of all income (Dickenson, 1997).



At the point in history where more countries than ever before proudly declare that they are ‘democratic’, the power of national political institutions have been weakened under the pressure of transnational capital and hollowed out by a significant withdrawal of citizens’ interest in and commitment to party politics

The adoption of neoliberalism by globally influential elites, political parties and dominant institutions – and its reversal of the post-war political trend of economic redistribution – was also what led to the crisis of democracy. The winners in this process were the elites and the rising new middle classes in Asia, Latin America and the Global North. The losers faced frustration – those who were most threatened by the increasing unemployment, and were on the wrong side of the widening economic gaps, were also the ones hardest hit by the shrinking welfare systems. Many of the disadvantaged lost their faith in the existing ‘democracy’, either by turning away from party politics or by supporting anti-democratic and xenophobic populist movements such as Le Pen’s Front National in France or BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) in India.

To sum up, this is the fate, the paradox, or perhaps the logic, of ‘democratisation’ in the context of current economic globalisation. At the point in history where more countries than ever before proudly declare that they are ‘democratic’ because they have established procedures for free elections, the power of national political institutions have been weakened under the pressure of transnational capital and hollowed out by a significant withdrawal of citizens’ interest in and commitment to party politics.

Is global democracy possible?

In the debate about the crisis of democracy, which has now raged for more than a decade in the public space as well as in the social sciences, a number of ‘solutions’ have been proposed. While some want to ‘restore’ what has been lost by re-strengthening national political institutions, others see the contemporary circumstances/crisis as an opportunity to further radicalise, extend or deepen an unfinished historical project to achieve ‘rule by the people’. While the political space of the nation state has been the point of departure for the discussion, different diagnoses are made about its future as *the* centre of democratic politics. Considering the global interconnectedness of contemporary social relations and power structures, national politics is clearly insufficient to deal with many of the most burning social and ecological issues that the population of the planet faces. As theorists of global democracy such as David Held (1995) have argued, democracy has to be globalised if we are to have any significant democracy at all. Others, like Robert Dahl, are sceptical about the idea of globalising democracy. The idea of democracy was invented in relation to a limited population and scale – the Greek city state. When transferred to the social space of the nation state, the gap between the power of

the idea of democracy and its actual practice widened. According to the sceptics' view, it is likely that 'rule by the people' on a global level would simply be an excuse for strengthening elite rule. According to Dahl (1989;1999), the most realistic way of democratising globalisation would be to strengthen and deepen national democratic processes, something that could facilitate stronger (national) democratic control of international institutions and agreements.

The view that global democracy must build on a re-strengthening of the political power of the nation state often involves an argument that states could compensate some of their lost power by a stronger emphasis on playing their interests strategically in the context of supra-national institutions and agreements. This has in fact already happened, as the number of international agreements and supra-national organisations has increased dramatically during the last few decades. In fact, this 'globalisation of politics from above' may even be seen as part of the explanation for the crisis of democracy. This is the view of Manuel Castells, who has argued that states' have increased their activity in the international community 'on the condition of "kicking away" the ladder of their nations, thus ushering in the crisis of democracy' (Castells, 1997: 308). The term 'democratic deficit' was actually coined in relation to one of the globally most important supra-national organisations – the European Union.

On a global level it is, at least in the present situation, perhaps more relevant to talk about democracy as an absence rather than a 'deficit'. But there is no absence of global politics – as people in various parts of the world strongly experience in different ways. Could it be democratised – and what would that mean? This is one of the most burning issues in the contemporary world. What would global democracy look like? How could a global public be constituted beyond any naïve universalism? How would diversity and difference be accounted for? Through what procedures could a global public exert influence over decision-making processes on a global level?

There have been a number of attempts to work out theoretical models of global democracy. But again, history reminds us that democratisation was never the result of the implementation of abstract models. This is not to deny the relevance of global democratic theory – as long as it takes into account that whatever democratic achievements have been made in the modern era were the result of social struggles, fought out in the context of civil society. Considering this, for those of us who are interested in the actual prospect of a possible democratisation of the process of globalisation, a crucial question must be: Are

there any tendencies, any actual social forces or struggles to achieve democracy on a global level? Is there even a global civil society in which such struggles are being played out?

Global civil society



As an equivalent to the nation state is lacking on a global level, global civil society is a political space different in character from national civil society

The discourse of global civil society refers to a steadily increasing body of actors, with diverse interests and identities, performing politics on a global level: social movements, NGOs (in various forms), private foundations and interest groups. I believe it makes sense to conceptualise this field of political struggle as ‘global civil society’. My definition is analytical rather than descriptive – global civil society is a political space in which a diversity of political experiences, action strategies, identities, values and norms are articulated and contested (Thörn, 2006b). It should be emphasised that it is a space of struggle and conflict – over the values, norms and rules that govern global social space(s) – and ultimately over the control of material resources and institutions. Stating that global democratisation may possibly emerge from global civil society doesn’t mean that it is a space that by definition is inherently ‘democratic’. Anti-democratic forces are part of this space. Neither is it a ‘neutral’ space. As activity in global civil society is about power and influence it is a space that at any given moment is defined by the power balance between different formations of actors and institutions within and outside of it. Further, as an equivalent to the nation state is lacking on a global level, global civil society is a political space different in character from national civil society. Actors in global civil society often play a multi-level political game as they simultaneously have a presence in different political arenas (including national spaces), in opposition to, and sometimes in alliance with, supranational organisations, transnational corporations as well as nation states and local city councils.

From this also follows that the conditions of participation and influence in global civil society are uneven as they reflect global economic and political inequalities. An important tendency during the past decades is that transnational corporations have played a significant role in the politics of contemporary globalisation through the formation of think-tanks, forums and interest groups. The Bilderberg group, TABD (Trans-Atlantic Business Dialogue) and of course the World Economic Forum are some of the significant parts of an influential formation of contemporary global civil society. Another emerging formation of global civil society, the social movements for global justice, have often focused on, and mobilised against, the influence of these groups, which have resulted in ‘critical discourse moments’ (that is,

moments of intensified debate and conflict, Gamson and Modigliani, 1989) in global civil society. For example, the transnational protest against the OECD's proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) claimed that the MAI documents had been shaped under the strong influence of corporate lobby groups. In other instances conflicts have emerged when transnational corporations have acted legally in order to 'test' the growing body of supra-national agreements. When Brazil started to manufacture copies of patented AIDS medicines as part of its programme of free distribution of medicines, the government referred to a rule in the WTO agreement that allows for patents to be ignored in the cases where a country faces a serious threat to its public health. But in 1999, after South Africa had announced that they would import copies from Brazil, 38 pharmaceutical companies brought charges against the South African state for suspected breaches of the WTO agreement. As a response the South African social movement organisation Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) – with support from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Oxfam – initiated an extensive transnational campaign, leading the pharmaceutical industry to subsequently drop the charges because of the globally spread negative publicity (Mbali, 2003; Olesen, 2006).

The Case of AIDS Politics

Global AIDS politics, which is largely a politics of aid, also provides examples of the fact that global civil society can contribute to democratisation by undermining democratic institutions on a national level. During the last decade, and partly under the influence of the neoliberal agenda of de-regulation and privatisation, donors have increasingly emphasised NGOs as the proper 'aid agents' on the ground. While international NGOs (INGOs) are often used to channel money from governments and various foundations, local NGOs have become increasingly important as receivers of aid. A case in point is Uganda, which previously has been reported as a success story of AIDS politics. Its national programme, based on a close dialogue with a broad range of civil society actors and free distribution of condoms, led to a substantial decrease in HIV prevalence (Kirumira, 2007). Recent reports from Uganda, however, indicate that the positive trend might now be changing, and that this might partly be due to conditions imposed by influential donor agencies. The most important donor in Uganda today is PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief), a five-year, 15-billion-dollar US initiative to fight HIV/AIDS (launched by President Bush in 2003), which demands that receivers of aid should not advocate the use of (or distribute) condoms. In practice this means that any organisation that is to



During the last decade, and partly under the influence of the neoliberal agenda of de-regulation and privatisation, donors have increasingly emphasised NGOs as the proper 'aid agents' on the ground

receive funding from PEPFAR must sign a statement agreeing not to distribute condoms. Further, while the number of AIDS-related actors in Ugandan civil society is growing, the funding resources for AIDS-related programmes is narrowing to a limited number of actors, mostly faith-based organisations, which are preferred as partners both by PEPFAR and the Global Fund (Kirumira, 2007).

The global justice movement – more or less democracy?

The term 'global justice movement' emphasises a perspective that regards the enormous global inequalities as the major global political issue to be dealt with; it implies that global redistribution is a precondition for global democratisation, at least if it is to include people on all continents, and probably also for profound environmental change. But what are the prospects of this movement actually contributing to a democratisation of the process of globalisation?

The global justice movement became known world-wide when the global media discovered tens of thousands of 'anti-globalisation protesters' in a major North-American city, Seattle, in December 1999. But beyond any US/Eurocentric view of the world, the protests between 1999–2001 in Seattle, Washington, Prague, Göteborg and Genua were a culmination of a process of linking a number of movements/protests against neoliberalisation and its social consequences, predominantly in the Global South: the 'IMF riots' occurring in 39 debtor countries between 1976 and 1992 – with a first wave peaking in the early 1980s and a second wave occurring after 1989 (Walton and Seldon, 1994); the protests against GATT in Bangalore in 1993 (which gathered 300,000 people), the Zapatista movement in Mexico, the Landless Movement (MST) in Brazil, Via Campesina and the protests against MAI in 1997–98. However, although the global justice movement addresses neoliberalism as its main adversary (and this may be the most important unifying principle), it is a mistake to see it simply as a response to neoliberalisation. Considering many of its participating networks, organisations and movement intellectuals, there is a great deal of continuity with post-war anti-colonial movements in the Global South and with solidarity movements in the Global North. Looking at it in a different way, it could even be argued that neoliberalism was in part a response to some of the achievements of the historical predecessors of the present global justice movement.

The continuity between post-war transnational social movements and the global justice movement becomes particularly evident when

we look at perhaps the most important predecessor to the contemporary global justice movement – the transnational anti-apartheid movement. In fact, the anti-apartheid movement provides an important historical case in our efforts to understand both the continuities and discontinuities between post-war and current global civil society mobilisation, particularly vis-à-vis social movement formations such as the World Social Forum, but also about the possibilities and constraints regarding the task of democratising globalisation.

The transnational anti-apartheid movement

The broad transnational anti-apartheid campaign was initiated in December 1958 at the All Africa People's Conference in Accra, when the South African Congress Alliance made a call for an international boycott of South African goods (Thörn, 2006a). In March 1960, the campaign was fuelled by the Sharpeville shootings. As the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) were forced into exile, they intensified their efforts to create a transnational anti-apartheid network. Labour unions all over the world responded and solidarity movements were formed. At its high point during the 1980s the transnational anti-apartheid action involved people on all continents, in countries including Japan, Holland, India, Sweden, Guyana, Britain, Ghana, Jamaica, Cuba, New Zealand and the United States. Through a wide range of demonstrations, actions, networks and organisations and the successful global boycott of South African goods, millions of people were involved in anti-apartheid action.

In terms of its democratic agenda, the anti-apartheid movement aimed first and foremost to achieve democracy on a national level in South Africa. But as a transnational social movement it formed an important part of the emerging global civil society during the post-war era. Including liberation movements, labour unions, solidarity movements, women's and human rights organisations, anti-apartheid was a movement of movements. And in terms of the contemporary World Social Forum debate, it was both an open space and a social movement. An important part of the networking was about sharing information and experiences and debating strategies as well as ideology. Different sections of the movement were allowed a great deal of autonomy with regard both to ideology and strategy, but this did not prevent the coordination of successful global movement campaigns and events – such as the Boycott Shell campaign and the Free Mandela campaign – which were important for the movement's success.

In the process of waging its transnational campaigns, the anti-apartheid movement targeted supra-national organisations, such as the UN, the Commonwealth and the EU. In the UN and the Commonwealth, apartheid presented a dilemma to the leading nations of the Western bloc: on the one hand apartheid profoundly contradicted the values that were the cornerstones of the liberal hegemony of the Western world after World War II. On the other hand, South Africa was regarded as an ally in the Cold War struggle. This led the US, Britain and France to publicly condemn apartheid while at the same time blocking sanctions against South Africa in the UN Security Council. As the movement operated simultaneously in the context of different national civil societies *and* in the context of global civil society, it also made democratic claims that were related both to national and to global publics. The most important strategy in this respect was the consumer boycott. For example, the leading solidarity organisation, the British Anti-Apartheid Movement, defined the boycott act as ‘voting for sanctions’ and referred to opinion polls showing overwhelming popular support for boycotts. In this process the movement claimed that there was also global popular support for its cause, referring to successful transnational boycott campaigns and petitions. For example, at the Commonwealth meeting in the Bahamas in 1985, Abdul Minty of the British AAM presented a declaration urging for sanctions, which was signed by organisations representing 18 million people.

The anti-apartheid movement was also involved in conflicts *within* global civil society. As consumer boycotts extended to corporations with subsidiaries in South Africa, the anti-apartheid movement was challenged by a coalition of actors presenting a counter-strategy to sanctions – ‘constructive engagement’, part and parcel of the emerging ‘code of conduct’ approach. In 1977 Leon Sullivan, a Baptist minister, successfully launched principles for US firms with affiliates in South Africa – ‘the Sullivan Principles’ (an action that subsequently led to his appointment as the first black director of General Motors). It was argued that the presence of corporations that subscribed to these principles would assist democratisation in South Africa. Key anti-apartheid organisations regarded this strategy as a cover for doing ‘business as usual’ in South Africa. In the mid-1980s ‘constructive engagement’ was abandoned even by many of its influential Republican supporters in the US because of lack of any visible results (Massie, 1997), while the sanctions campaign gained ground and in the end also made a difference. It was, for example, considered as a hard blow to South Africa when Chase Manhattan Bank, which had been targeted by a divestment cam-

paign, announced in 1985 that it would not grant South Africa any further loans. The same year the EU finally decided to go for (limited) sanctions.

To sum up, the impact on the transnational movement, which existed for more than four decades, was not limited to the South African context, as it created transnational networks, organisations and collective action forms that made – and still make – an impact on national as well as transnational political cultures.

From the anti-apartheid movement to the World Social Forum

In comparison with the transnational anti-apartheid movement, the global justice movement represents activism in global civil society on a different level. This is of course related to structural change during recent decades, resulting in new opportunities for global interaction, particularly the increasing availability of the Internet and cheaper air travel. Further, the number of participants at the World Social Forum represents a qualitative jump also in terms of global civil society gatherings; despite the number of organisations that were part of the anti-apartheid network, the number of activists at global gatherings was a matter of hundreds rather than tens of thousands.

The fact that the globality of the World Social Forum is without historical parallel doesn't mean that it lacks historical links to previous post-war social movements in the Global South and North. A number of movement organisations, networks and individuals that took part in the anti-apartheid struggle are present in the global justice movement. Particularly, South African activists have played an important role in defining the identity of the movement, for example launching the term 'global apartheid' as a mobilising concept (Bond, 2001). Among them are Trevor Ngwane, a former anti-apartheid grassroots activist from Soweto. In Nairobi in 2007, he was visible outside the main gate as he had joined the protest by the People's Parliament and other groups demanding that the gates should be opened so that Kenyans from the low-income areas ('the people's settlements') could participate in the Forum. Dennis Brutus, a well known anti-apartheid activist who started SAN-ROC (the South-African Non-Racial Olympic Committee, which led the international campaign for a sports boycott on South Africa) was a speaker at the Forum in Nairobi. These are only a few – and indeed anecdotal – examples. But they point, nevertheless, to an important aspect of social movement politics and to the relevance of

a historical perspective on global civil society: In the practices of social movements, collective experiences are made, which to their individual participants, organisations and networks constitute learning processes that may be carried into other contexts.

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'Civil society' has emerged as one of the essentially contested concepts in political modernity. It includes a variety of differing and conflicting views and perspectives. These are visible beyond the academic debate also in the context of political theory and struggles. For some, global civil society represents a forceful and promising response to the 'democratic deficit' as one of the hitherto most problematic aspects within the globalization process. But more critical objections are also prominent. They concern the enthusiasm about the notion of a global civil society (as well as the use of the concept of civil society as such) and the various developments it represents. These contradictory positions are inviting for further reflections.

Most contributors to this special issue of Development Dialogue were part of a panel organised by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens Jubiléumsfond) Sector Committee for Research on Civil Society at the WSF in Nairobi 2007. At this event a closer collaboration with the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation was established. The contributions to this volume testify to the contested nature of the concept and invite for further reflections.

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