Civil Societies and Social Movements
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Civil Societies and Social Movements
Domestic Transnational, Global

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Introduction

In recent years, the annual gatherings of Western political leaders, global corporate executives and international financial institutions have not been complete without a crowd in the streets and a parallel conference down the road. Seattle, Geneva, Gothenburg, Genoa: these are all familiar city names, each conjuring up images of protestors and policy, of banners and broken windows, even injury and death. As I wrote these words in the summer of 2005, the annual meeting of the G8 countries had just taken place at the Gleneagles resort, near Edinburgh, Scotland, to the sounds of hundreds of thousands of activists denouncing both governments and globalization. Although G8 leaders and others now meet in secret, easily-secured locations as protection against the masses, whether such protests have much more than a nuisance effect on the presidents and prime ministers in attendance is debatable. Nonetheless, such activities, and the movements and organizations participating in them, are symptomatic of a larger political phenomenon – a global polity on the move, discontented with the features of globalization, attempting to fashion a new global politics – whose ultimate features cannot yet be fully determined.

The contemporary study of civil society, social movements and transnationalism is generally seen to reflect the relatively recent emergence of such forms of political participation, best captured in the term ‘1960s’ (James Field, Chapter 3). The movements of that decade seemed to follow a quiescent period in all industrial democracies – a largely inaccurate depiction of the 1950s – and they were all the more surprising given the general economic prosperity of the times. But even a cursory look at the historical record – see, for example, Adam Hochschild’s recent book, *Bury the Chains* (2005), which recounts the rise and success of the British abolitionist movement or Reinhard Koselleck’s *Crisis and Critique* (1988), which addresses the role of non-political ‘secret societies’ in the advent of the French Revolution – suggests that none of these forms of political activism is very new (Charles Tilly, Chapter 1; John Boli and George Thomas, Chapter 4). Indeed, as we shall see, there is good reason to think that what many (including this author; see Ronnie Lipschutz, Chapter 10) have called ‘politics outside of the state’ is deeply imbricated with the construction and maintenance of a complex relationship between the liberal state, the capitalist market and bourgeois society (Leslie Sklair, Chapter 18).

The essays in this volume represent only a small fraction of the many on civil society and social movements that have appeared over the past 35 years (see the references in each essay as well as the list of selected sources at the end of this chapter). Some of the pieces that appear herein are seminal; others are not. But given the very broad remit of my assignment – civil society and social movements – I have judged it necessary to construct a ‘story,’ so to speak, one that seeks to illuminate not only debates about and analyses of ‘popular political action’ (PPA) but also some of the politics in and behind those debates and analyses.¹

¹ The reader of this Introduction will note that my conception of politics is rather more complex than the conventional definition or, rather, that I regard power as having multiple forms that range from direct to discursive and productive (see Lipschutz, 2005a, 2005b).
For example, the first in-depth discussions of transnationalism, appearing in a special issue of *International Organization* in 1971, edited by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (see, for example, Field, Chapter 3), was as much a product of developing turbulence in the study of international relations as it was a reflection of turbulence in the real world (Sidney Tarrow, Chapter 7; Rosenau, 1990). Similarly, much of the literature from the 1990s suggests a rather optimistic vision of the progressive potential of PPA, in line with widespread hopes for global multilateralism following the end of the Cold War (for example, Lipschutz, Chapter 10). That normative optimism was darkened somewhat after 11 September, 2001, when it became evident that transnational social activism could cut many ways. But, because the larger, historical story of PPA has not yet been told in any detail, and the contemporary story has yet to be concluded, this volume can only offer a selective view of what is, properly understood, one fragment of a very complex and somewhat fractured global mosaic.

I begin this essay with a historical summary of how civil society was perceived historically within political theory. For most of the theorists who considered the relationship of civil society to state and market, social movements were seen as threatening to the powerful (Tilly, Chapter 1; Sandra Halperin, Chapter 2) – and they often were. Civil society, by contrast, was believed to be more concerned with protection of its own interests, which usually (but not always) helped to support and reproduce existing hierarchies and institutions (Mustapha Kamal Pasha and David L. Blaney, Chapter 19). The partial domestication of social movements during the twentieth century, especially in industrialized states, reflected the broadening of democracy through universal suffrage as well as broad social compromises (Halperin, Chapter 2), but that element of the social contract has, in more recent decades, begun to break down (Robert O’Brien, Chapter 16) – not that it ever applied universally.

I then turn to an analytical question: why does PPA happen, especially (but not only) in democratic or democratizing societies (including global society)? Is it a response to the limited parameters of democratic representation, of grievances with existing institutions, of anger against injustice (see Mario Diani, Chapter 6; Tarrow, Chapter 7)? Or is there something structural about the contemporary organization of social life that, in a Foucauldian fashion, ‘produces’ PPA as an expression of the power diffused through the social body (Foucault, 2004)? The first sightings of civic associations (Koselleck, 1988), in the absolutist states of the eighteenth century, suggest something rather more complicated: a struggle among unequal but developing social forces to demarcate the boundaries between public and private property and to impose limits on the authority of state and market to expropriate said property. To put the point another way, and recalling the frontispiece of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, PPA is about the efforts of sovereign individuals in liberal societies to escape the king’s body and gain autonomy over themselves, their possessions and their futures. This is a Whiggish view of a highly non-linear history, but it is key to accounting for the configurations of modern society and struggles to change it.

In the third part of this introduction, I summarize the various theories and frameworks, offered in this volume and elsewhere, on the origins and motivations of civil society and social movements. Analytically, the two have been assessed through two somewhat different epistemological and ontological perspectives although, on closer examination, they tend to collapse into one. The social movements literatures, represented by the work of Sidney Tarrow (1998), Doug McAdam (Diani and McAdam, 2003), Alberto Melluci (1989), Charles Tilly (2004) and more recently, Jackie Smith (Smith and Johnston, 2002) and Margaret Keck
and Kathryn Sikkink (1998), among many others, have tended to see PPA in oppositional, contentious, and sociological terms. By contrast, ‘civil society’ is a much older concept, dating back to the Greeks. Its first modern appearance is in the work of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Ferguson, Smith, Marx and Hegel (see Nicholas Onuf, Chapter 9). Since the early 1990s the concept has been examined and expanded by Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato (1992), Michael Walzer (1995), John Keane (2003), and Mary Kaldor (2003). More recently it has been institutionalized in the series of Global Civil Society yearbooks, edited at the London School of Economics (for example, Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor, 2001, et. seq.). The return of civil society to the lexicon of political science was triggered by the work of Adam Michnik (1985) and his efforts to categorize the relationship between the socialist states of Eastern Europe and an increasingly restive society. As with ‘social movement’, civil society can be either normative or analytical (or both), but it has broadly come to connote action outside of the purview of states and their institutions (see, for example, M.J. Peterson, Chapter 5; Lipschutz, Chapter 10). This, as we shall see, and as has been noted by the many critics of the normative view of civil society (Pasha and Blaney, Chapter 19; Neera Chandhoke, Chapter 17), is far too simplistic.

In the fourth section, I examine the internationalization of (global) civil society and (transnational) social movements (see Catherine Eschle and Neil Stammers, Chapter 8; John Keane, Chapter 11). Here, we run into an epistemological problem: if PPA is structurally related to the state (as I shall argue), and there is no global state, how can there be PPA? Those who write about this seeming contradiction (or conundrum) generally take one of two approaches. The first is to deny that there is anything truly ‘global’ going on: what we see are cross-border alliances and coalitions, whose member components remain ‘national’ in both a cultural and political sense (Tarrow, Chapter 7; Sonia Alvarez, Chapter 12). ‘Global’ connotes homogenization or absorption, generally of Southern activists by Northern ones, and so it must be steadfastly denied and resisted. Not everyone agrees: politics is messy and does not always lend itself to definitional precision (Tarrow, Chapter 7).

The second approach is to argue that, notwithstanding the absence of a global state, there exists an increasingly globalized system of political rule and economic regulation (Skilair, Chapter 18; Halperin, Chapter 2; Lipschutz, 2005a). The precise form of that rule is contested (even as it is being constructed), both in academia and international conference halls, but it is rule nonetheless. Global civil society thus comes to bear much the same relation to this rule as national civil society bears to the state (see Richard Price, Chapter 13). Both approaches have something to recommend them, especially insofar as the international system is, for the time being, an especially heteronomous one, whose eventual forms and functions we cannot hope to predict. Neither, however, is able to locate civil society in its structural relationship to what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) called Empire and Justin Rosenberg more accurately entitled The Empire of Civil Society (1994).

I conclude with a review of several critiques of global civil society and transnational social movements as contemporary political phenomena. Here, we find not so much attacks as reminders – some gentle, some not – that even PPA is not necessarily progressive. Sometimes, not only are activists uncivil, they can also be quite violent. Liberal society values ‘civility’ and peaceful contestation, if only to legitimate the existing social order and to minimize serious threats to power (see, Skilair, Chapter 18; Pasha and Blaney, Chapter 19; Chandhoke, Chapter 17). Yet, as will become clear, capitalism is a source of constant change, destabilizing
the liberal order and subjecting it to all manner of internal tensions and contradictions (see, Craig Murphy, Chapter 20). It is no surprise, then, that some engaged in PPA would like to restore the *status quo ante* while others seek teleological ends that not everyone would find very attractive.

History

There are two, rather broad conceptualizations of civil society in tradition and literature. The first is associated with the market and the private sphere (Ferguson, Smith, Marx), the second, with politics and the public sphere (Hegel, Gramsci, Colás). Although we tend to view Ferguson (1776/1995) and Smith (1776/1982) as the intellectual antagonists of Marx (1932/1970), all three understood civil society, first, in terms of a separation between state (public) and market (private) and, second, as a realm of civil association beyond the reach or authority of the state. As propagated by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1835/1966), the liberal version of civil society visible in the United States provided both public goods that the state was unable to supply and private goods and affiliations that could only be obtained through the market and outside the state. Marx understood civil society in much the same terms, but regarded it as the cat’s paw of the bourgeoisie, which enforced a very visible separation between state and market in order to fence its private property off from the grasp of the masses. In Marx’s teleology consequently, when the proletarian revolution finally arrived, not only would the state wither away but so would civil society. With them would go private property as well as the market.

The competing version of civil society’s origins is associated with G.W.F. Hegel (1821/1942) and Antonio Gramsci (1970; see also Adamson, 1980, 1987/88) and was elaborated more recently by Alejandro Colás (2002). In this view, social norms and practices originate within certain elements of society (bourgeois or national) which are infused into the state through the force and actions of civil society. But there is a critical distinction between ‘political’ and ‘market’ civil society. Colás (2002, p. 47) argues that ‘civil society has historically found expression in two predominant forms – one linked to the private sphere of the capitalist market, the other to the struggles against the all-encroaching power of the state’. The former is populated by those organizations and actors who pursue their self-interest through the mechanisms of the market; the latter by those who seek to challenge and change the ethical structures and politics of the state. Inasmuch as both ‘social movements’ and ‘civil society’ as we understand them today may have these two features – sometimes in the selfsame group or organization – the distinction may be, perhaps, less important than it is often made out to be (but see Tarrow, Chapter 7).

When did social movements and civil society first appear? In Charles Tilly’s (Chapter 1) view, ‘real’ social movements appear only in the nineteenth century, in a national form and in a social form. A ‘national’ movement is what we would call, today, an ‘ethnic’ group (but see Crawford and Lipschutz, 1998); other movements addressed a range of social issues rather than purely political ones. Both, argues Tilly (p. 12), are products of ‘the nineteenth-century growth of popular electoral politics on a national scale’. Sandra Halperin (Chapter 2) would disagree. For her, social movements – and especially the labour movement – arose precisely because of a lack of ‘popular electoral politics.’ Rather, social struggle and conflict were ubiquitous throughout Europe until, following the two World Wars, the state and capital were
forced to admit workers into the political process (2004a, p. 284; see Halperin, 2004b for details). Certainly, through the great Socialist and Communist Internationals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the labour movement became a transnational one, although it crashed and burnt on the shoals of the First World War and has had considerable difficulty acting in true transnational fashion ever since (O’Brien, Chapter 16).

Transnationalism never really disappeared, even during the worst of the interwar period (or, for that matter, during the World Wars themselves). As James Field wrote in that 1971 issue of International Organization, both private transnational organizations and individuals ‘reaching across state boundaries’ were quite conspicuous, beginning in the eighteenth century and extending through the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. They included ‘the Marquis de Lafayette, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, Tom Paine, and the “titled freebooter” Lord Cochrane and such groups as the Philhellenes, Girabaldians, Fenians, and Zionists’ (p. 71). Based on a ‘world culture’ framework, John Boli and George Thomas (1997, 1999) document a century of ‘international non-governmental organizations’ and show that, with the exception of the war years, there has been steady growth in their creation and numbers. Finally, M.J. Peterson (Chapter 5) provides an overview of the literature on ‘transnational activity,’ noting (p. 125) in conclusion that ‘various forms of transnational activity can also produce increases in state capacity’, by playing a role in the creation of new government measures (as in abolitionism and counter-terrorism). But, as we shall see in the final section of this introduction, not all transnational groups and movements are, necessarily, contributors to some imagined ‘public good’. Or, rather, not everyone’s imagined public good is necessarily the same.

Ontogeny

The existence of PPA, in the form of civil society and social movements, says nothing about its origins or causes. Those who first observed the ‘existence’ of society – Margaret Thatcher’s admonition notwithstanding – were already deeply enmeshed in it. The best-known accounts are those of Hobbes (1652), Locke (1690) and Rousseau (1754), each of whom speculated on the origins of the state. But each was also deeply engaged in a political project of his own – Hobbes to rationalize the need for monarchical authority on grounds other than the Divine; Locke to justify the existing regime of private property; Rousseau to explicate a doctrine of Natural Law that would, eventually, become the basis for opposition to the absolutist state. None of these philosophers, or any of their contemporaries, seem to have been aware of the historical conditions that gave rise to the particular state–society–market relationships characteristic of their particular eras.

Although we cannot pinpoint a specific date, decade or even century when ‘civil society’ begins to take on something of a familiar form and recognizable social movements start to appear, it seems safe to say that, by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the conditions were ripe (Tilly, Chapter 1; Halperin, Chapter 2). In a liberal system moreover, civil society is concerned not only with social reproduction in the ‘private sphere’, but also with ensuring that neither state nor market take complete control of the bourgeoisie and its ‘life, liberty, and property’. From a Marxist perspective, the division between public and private, and the structural reasons for that distinction, are foundational to capitalism, the liberal state and the activities of capital. Justin Rosenberg (1994) and Ellen Meiksins Wood (1995) both argue that capitalism represents a separation of the political and the economic, the public and the private,
that is historically unique. Political authority over segments of the public realm is hived off into the private sphere, where property rights are guaranteed by, but insulated from, the state’s direct and structural power.

For Karl Marx, the ethics governing society clearly arose out of the desires and interests of capital (and the bourgeoisie), and the public sphere was, in any event, at their service. For Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith, society’s morals were primarily religious ones whose source was transcendent and, consequently, not open to debate, challenge or alteration; as Smith (1759/1982, p. 170) wrote, the idea that we may always be ‘exposed to the punishment of God…is a motive capable of restraining the most headstrong passions’ (see Anderson, 1988). Businessmen would meet and plot, and to expect otherwise would be naïve, if not downright foolish. Their activities would have to be regulated, preferably via the moral force of religion but, if not, through public regulation (although not too much of it – this is why trust is seen as so central to capitalism; Fukuyama 1995). Because such regulation comes primarily through the authority of the state, whose continuing legitimacy is dependent on public approval, in effect, through PPA, civil society determines what can be privatized and what cannot.

Insofar as there is never final agreement on this point, the liberal state is continuously subject to social forces engaged in a struggle over the maintenance, reproduction and alteration of that public–private boundary. To wit, the expansion of the private realm can take place only under the authority of the state and at the expense of a contraction of the ‘public’, as seen, for example, in the privatization of formerly state-provided services and protections. This particular and peculiar organization of liberal societies, with public and private constituted as distinct realms of authority and activity, relies heavily on civil society to maintain and reproduce the boundary and the distinction. Of course, the ‘right’ to contest and define that boundary is also a focus of struggle.

If we look at the English and French cases, we can see how this particular right was instantiated, thereby establishing civil society’s role in the liberal state–market–society formation. In the English case, the key period is the seventeenth century, during the religious wars that, ultimately, were resolved in the ‘Glorious Revolution’. By the time Locke wrote his Treatises, the power of bourgeois society was well-established in parliament, through a coalition of the middle class and British aristocracy. In France, this shift did not take place until the French Revolution, almost a century later, although the formation of bourgeois secret societies (including the famed Bavarian Illuminati in 1776) became the basis for the eventual assertion of society’s ‘natural’ rights (Koselleck, 1988). In neither of these cases did civil society develop in a linear fashion. Rather, the social struggles that ultimately resulted in the universalization of the liberal state had more the character of a Foucauldian ‘genealogy’ in which social forces made short-term common cause with each other, only later to discover they had not achieved what was hoped or intended. Thus, some polities became ‘liberal’ later than others; some merely adopted the trappings while remaining, for the most part, absolutist.

During the two centuries following the French Revolution, issues and instrumentalities have changed, capitalism has become much more extensive in spatial and commodity frontier terms, and there are more liberal democracies than ever before. Nonetheless, the basic formulation remains the same: markets appropriate, states regulate and social groups in civil society seek to accumulate power, provide services and protect their property. Some of these social groups find themselves oppressed, stymied by power, or at risk from states and markets (or they ‘take
up arms’ on behalf of others in these positions) and coalesce as social movements. Some of these movements are relatively peaceful in seeking their aims, while others are contentious and even violent. How these groups and movements behave is the focus of various theories and frameworks discussed in the next section.

Frameworks

For many scholars, why PPA happens is less important than how it happens (although, for some, the distinction is not that important). To coin a phrase, there is a spectre haunting theories of social activism, and that spectre is the problem of collective action. Recall that, according to Mancur Olson’s highly-influential 1965 book, *The Logic of Collective Action*, social movements of the sort so visible during the 1960s really ought not to exist. According to Olson, it was too easy to free-ride or defect when there were no material rewards linked to successful group action. As with all collective action that was not explicitly interest-oriented, went Olson’s line of reasoning, social movements could only be maintained if someone was willing to pay the costs of acting. Of course, some social movements, such as the one against the Vietnam War, did involve real material interests, but why, then, were young women so involved? They were not at risk and they did not yet have husbands or male children who might be drafted. Moreover, the likely benefits to participating individuals from other social movements, such as environmentalism, were so small as to be greatly outweighed by the time and energy required. As a result, social movement theorists, especially those in the United States, found it necessary to specify the relative costs and benefits to organizing and participating in PPA and to pinpoint, in particular, who was paying the costs.

Two somewhat different schools of thought emerged to address this conundrum. One, ‘resource mobilization theory’, posited the need for ‘both leaders with previous political experiences and strong, often professional, organisations’ (Diani, p. 132), whose sunk costs in activism would greatly reduce the burden on other members. The second, ‘political opportunity structure theory’, viewed activism in more entrepreneurial terms, as something whose launch depended on opportunistically minimizing start-up costs. It makes little sense to become an anti-war activist when there is no unpopular war taking place. Paradoxically perhaps, scholars in both of these schools took groups, rather than individuals, as the problem to be explained. Individuals were natural; groups were not. And that which could not be quantified did not count.

In all of this, social movements came to represent the articulation of society’s demands and discontents. The standard argument about social movements is that they arise because of material and normative grievances and dissatisfaction. Their members seek to seize opportunities and mobilize resources to challenge those in power. Finally, they attempt to change norms, beliefs and practices so as to alter the broad social sensibilities of what is

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2 A third, the ‘new social movements’ school, was largely European, although also much favoured by American leftists (for example, Epstein, 1991), and tended to focus on class, identity and meaning (see Diani, this volume, p. 133). Its advocates never paid much attention to Olson’s arguments.

3 More recent work deriving from these two schools has focused on norm and values propagation as the instrumental ends of social activism (for example, Sikkink, 1993; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Khagram, 2004)
'right' (Diani, Chapter 6; Tarrow, Chapter 7). Ultimately, if enough of the polity is swayed by social activism, these changes in consciousness will percolate upwards into institutionalized politics and lead to the desired changes. But this may be too linear and instrumental. It might also be too limited.

Some scholars (Tarrow, Chapter 7) differentiate, in particular, ‘contentious politics’ from other forms of social activism. That is, a social movement must involve more than efforts to modify society’s ‘opinions and beliefs’ (Diani, p. 132); concrete behaviours and action must be involved. What is less clear is whether a collective social effort to transform public beliefs and behaviours through institutionalized educational, economic and political mechanisms – such as anti-sweatshop campaigns (Lipschutz, 2005b) – can truly be called a ‘social movement’. If active contention against state power is required, the universe of social movements radically contracts. Moreover, if transnational contention is required (Tarrow, Chapter 7), the constraints are even greater, for there is no world state.

As a whole, the social movement literature is very constrained by its focus on the behavioural aspects of PPA. That is, coming out of sociology, theorizations of social activism tend to concentrate almost wholly on agency. Structure is not ignored, to be sure, but it is seen merely as a set of static constraints that define opportunities at any given time. What tends to be overlooked, or forgotten, is that ‘really-existing politics’ is a very messy business. Insofar as the ‘liberal state’ is, structurally, representative of the polity and plays a central role in the shaping of the rules that govern the political economy, its rule and rules (Onuf, 1989) are never wholly or finally fixed. Even constitutions are subject to continual (re)definitional struggles that, at times, break out into open warfare among competing factions. Of course, on the one hand, if all such struggles start to look like social movements, the concept loses all analytical utility. On the other hand however, to select out those movements that are particularly contentious in their struggles serves to exclude the many others that populate the political landscape.

This is why the concept of ‘civil society’ seems more useful, even if broader and less easily specified. There is, of course, some disagreement about what the term means. From a perspective ‘inside’ a liberal onotology, its reach is much more limited than from a viewpoint ‘outside’. The former emphasizes, in particular, the civil, here in the sense of rule-governed and well-behaved. The members of civil society are civil towards each other, because each and every one has an interest in maintaining the social and political conditions that permit pursuit of individual interests. This, of course, was Hobbes’s argument and it appears in Lipschutz’s ‘Eureka’ (Chapter 10) as well (see also Keane, p. 270). Whether civil society’s groups are merely functional, as in Robert Putnam’s (2000) bowling leagues, or also political, as in Paul Wapner’s (1995) ‘politics beyond the state’, can be debated; Onuf (Chapter 9; see also 2006), for one, argues that ‘addressing or responding to needs is always a political act’. What is not open to question is their civility (Keane, Chapter 9). I return to this last point in the final section of this introduction.

Much of the literature on global civil society focuses on the structure, motivations and activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both domestic and international. The global number of NGOs is quite large, perhaps in the hundreds of thousands or even millions,

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I recognize that many states are hardly representative in any meaningful sense. Still, every state makes some claim to represent its inhabitants and to manage economic matters to their benefit.
if small, locally-based groups are counted. As commonly understood, NGOs almost certainly do not include the myriad civil and civic associations that are largely apolitical, although even these organizations play a role in the structuring and maintenance of state–market–society relations and do, now and then, engage in political activities. Nor is the notion of NGO ordinarily extended to market actors, such as corporations, even though growing numbers of business associations and companies are deeply involved in activities similar to both NGOs and social movements. And there is the perennial question: who elected the NGOs (Pauly, 1997)? Whom are their members? Whom do they represent? And don’t the wealthier, more influential NGOs from the ‘North’ dominate the poorer NGOs from the ‘Global South?’ Finally, many NGOs themselves are constituted as ‘businesses’, since they must generate income in order to go beyond voluntary status. Some offer retail goods and services for sale and have annual expenditures greater than $100 million. This is small by corporate standards but quite respectable for many academics and even institutions of higher education (excluding Harvard, Berkeley and other such wealthy universities).

How, then, are such NGOs distinguishable from corporations? Although this question is not answered in the essays included here, the distinction may be one without a difference. NGOs and corporations have both taken on what used to be seen as state functions; they both make normative claims to be serving the greater good; corporations often have non-profit divisions while NGOs may have profit-making arms. The everyday terms used to separate the two – private good versus public good, profit versus non-profit, social versus economic, politics versus markets – are helpful only in a limited sense (Levy and Newell, 2005).

Cases

The complexity and complications of PPA, both as (transnational) social movements and (global) civil society, can be seen in specific cases. I have selected five illustrative essays to include in this volume, chosen for their geographic range, issue focus and analytical diversity. As will be seen, the authors of these essays hardly agree on what it is they are studying, although they all concur that PPA is central. For some, social movements and their constituent organizations are the only phenomena worth studying, for it is only here that one truly finds opposition to institutionalized politics (Alvarez, Chapter 12). For others, it is transnational civil society that counts, able to mobilize both public opinion and governments behind global campaigns (Price, Chapter 13). To assume however, that social movements and civil society are always progressive is to conflate agency and structure: the sources of PPA say nothing about its content or goals (Ziad Munson, Chapter 14). Moreover, even the good intentions of NGOs and global civil society may not be enough to generate progressive outcomes (Steven Robins, Chapter 15); their liberal ‘civilizing mission’ may, in fact, generate uncivil behaviour. And, deeply imbricated within a global capitalism that has rendered the national political arena more problematic, some social movements are finding it necessary to adapt to new conditions in order to survive (O’Brien, Chapter 16).

As a social movement that has waxed and waned over the past 200 years, feminism (aka ‘women’s rights’) has long ‘crossed borders’. The (re)emergence of feminist politics in the countries of Latin America since the 1960s was driven, in large part, by the dictatorial regimes established throughout the continent, often with covert or overt assistance from the United States. The return of democracy during the 1980s and 1990s, according to Sonia Alavarez
(Chapter 12), both multiplied and divided the movement, exposing class divisions, forging bonds across borders and bureaucratizing those groups and coalitions (‘NGOization’, as Alvarez calls it) that offered vocations as well as avocations. But, although ‘Latin American feminisms’ may ‘go global’, they remain ‘transnational’, for to ‘be global’ is to subsume one’s particularity in homogeneity, and to lose both distinctiveness and discursive power. Thus, the groups and organizations at the heart of this social movement, as most others, seek to maintain their identity and cultural roots in specific places, which may be nations, states, ethnic groups, or the like.

By contrast, Richard Price uses the term transnational civil society to refer to ‘a set of interactions among an imagined community to shape collective life that are not confined to the territorial and institutional spaces of states’, (p. 331) although it is evident that he has ‘global’ in mind. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) consisted of over 600 NGOs in 40 countries (p. 337) and was organized in a network that lobbied governments and international organizations, educated the public, and publicized its goals through the media. By the end of 1997, the ICBL had succeeded in engineering an international convention, signed by more than 120 countries. While some states refused to support the agreement – most conspicuously, the United States – the role of global civil society in instantiating a new ethical principle in the international body politic was clear for all to see.

Some civil society movements offer more than merely politics and services. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is, historically, an archetype for a sort of ‘parallel social formation’ that could offer the basis for the eventual taking of state power (Munson, Chapter 14); the electoral victory of Hamas, an MB offshoot, in the Palestinian elections of 2006 is certainly an illustration of this strategy. In many ways, moreover, the MB has been the template for, and source of, the rise of Islamist and Salafist jihadi cells and groups around the world, rooted in the religious ethics and practices that permeate Muslim society.\(^5\) Established in Egypt in 1928, the MB originally ‘devoted its energy to membership recruitment, private discussions of religious and moral reform, and building a social service organization’. By the late 1930s, it began to turn in a more political direction (p. 362). Although the MB supported the overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy in 1952, by mid-decade, it had a falling out with Nasser’s Arab Socialist government, which was seen as secular and corrupt. The MB was outlawed and its leaders executed. Today, the movement and related movements have ‘spread to every state in the Islamic world and claimed the allegiance of millions from virtually every segment of society’ (p. 361).

One realm in which social movements and global civil society are deeply enmeshed is that of so-called indigenous peoples, culturally-based and usually marginalized groups, which are largely excluded from political and economic participation, whose presence in particular states pre-dates European colonization. Among such groups are the ‘Bushmen’ of the Northern Cape Province of South Africa (Robins, Chapter 15). During the 1990s, one such group was able to successfully pursue a land claim against the state, on which, with the help of NGOs and international donors, it sought to re-establish its historical way of life. As Robins tells the story (p. 386), however, conflict developed between ‘traditional’ and ‘western’ bushmen over ‘genealogies, language, “bush knowledge”, bodily appearance, clothing and so on’. Donors

\(^5\) This is not, however, to argue that the violence associated with the jihadi movement(s) is integral to Islam.
and NGOs, both agents of global civil society as it were, unwittingly played a contradictory role in this conflict. On the one hand, they tried to provide support for ‘tradition’ even as, on the other hand, they defined this particular group in ethnic terms (in the post-apartheid state!), expecting it to develop ‘viable livelihood strategies’ (p. 400) for surviving and thriving in a liberal political and economic system. This seeming contradiction is hardly limited to South Africa: indigenous groups the world over are using both constructed tradition and modern sovereignty claims to gain control over resources that can be bartered and sold in international markets for the hard currency needed to maintain their ‘traditional’ ways of life.

And what about the ‘old’ social movements? The international labour movement may not be the oldest – early Protestantism or, perhaps, abolitionism pre-date it – but labour was certainly one of the most powerful and most threatening for many decades (recall Marx’s and Engel’s ‘spectre haunting Europe’). Following the Second World War, international unionism fell prey to the East–West conflict while national unions struck wage bargains with state and industry in return for the cessation of struggles for political power. For several decades, that bargain appeared highly-rewarding – at least for skilled and semi-skilled workers – but the advent of globalization, technological change, neo-liberalism, outsourcing and offshoring gradually eroded union membership and undermined union power (O’Brien, Chapter 16). In recent years, both national unions and international union federations have become more actively engaged with international organizations and global capital, although there are few signs of a post-social democratic Fifth International that could unite workers from different countries in common cause. Today, international unionism is less a social movement struggling for the workers’ state than an aspirant to membership in global civil society where, at least, it might gain a meaningful seat at the UN table.

Critiques

Critiques of social movement theory and arguments about global civil society fall into two general categories, to which I will add a third. First, there is the question of representation, raised above. Second, there is the matter of civility. And, third, there are the matters of reform, resistance and revolution. These are not all the critiques and questions that might be raised, but they do warn us not to be too idealistic about either PPA or the ease with which social change comes about.

Even if there are 1 million PPA groups, organizations and movements in the world, each averaging 100 active supporters, that still amounts only to a couple of per cent of the world’s population. Undoubtedly, as numerous surveys and polls suggest, many more people support the goals and activities of social activists, and have even internalized their norms and ethics. Nonetheless, can transnational social movements and global civil society truly claim to be representatives of national and global polities? Who, after all, elected or appointed them? While these questions carry substantial weight in the domestic context – especially in democratic societies – they might be less germane in the international arena, where mechanisms of popular representation are tenuous and rely on a chain of authority running from international organizations through national governments to electoral politics. (In the case of the global activities of capital, there is not even the pretence of such representation; see, for example, Pauly, 1997). But, even democratic systems based on proportional representation do not represent everyone living within particular territorial boundaries, and the interests of those
whose elected representatives sit in national legislatures are not always met. They are only one type of power constellation, and there is nothing to say that they mark ‘the end of history’. These points do remind us that politics is an arena of struggle and that politics does not end at the electoral booth or in parliament. As Neera Chandhoke (Chapter 17) argues, politics is about power, power is exercised through action and activities, and power, both direct and discursive, is central to the constitution of PPA.

The contradictory nature of both social movements and civil society is evident in Leslie Sklair’s (Chapter 18) Gramscian analysis of what he calls ‘social movements for global capitalism’. Even the dominant class cannot be assured that it will retain its power indefinitely; the maintenance of hegemony is hard work. Resistance (to which I will return, below) is always present, and not only in the form of social struggle. The consuming polities of capitalist societies are always subject to what Joseph Schumpeter (1942) called the ‘churn’, which tends to undermine their support for business. Moreover, according to Sklair (p. 471), ‘under capitalism, the masses cannot be relied upon to keep buying’. Because system legitimacy is so critical to its continuation and expansion, the ‘transnational capitalist class’ seeks an ideological unity, articulated through business associations (for example, the International Chamber of Commerce), transnational organizations (for example, the World Economic Forum), transnational think-tanks (for example, the Trilateral Commission), and consumerist elites and media (for example, CNN). It is a fairly short step from those ‘civil society’ groups directly engaged in the project of constructing a global liberal social formation to those providing social services in support of its parts.

PPA is not always civil. It is evident that, as Mustapha Kamal Pasha and David Blaney point out in Chapter 19, many social movement groups in civil society are not well-behaved and engage in contentious, if not overtly violent, activities. From within liberalism, terrorists and criminals are simply anathema; from outside, the story is not so clear. After all, how distant are the ‘contentious politics’ of anti-logging actions or Commandante Marcos from the murderous activities of Al Qaeda and Colombian death squads? Even if the latter are a cancer on the Western body politic, are not the jihadis a ‘transnational actor network’ of the type described by Keck and Sikkink (1998)? And where do we draw the line between pay-offs to politicians by corporate executives and the money-laundering of criminal cartels (both of whom often use the same offshore banks)? For that matter, why can the president of the United States, on the basis of an analysis written by conservative lawyers, decree that the Geneva Convention is no longer the law of the land and that his executive authority is not subject to the constitution? To define civil society merely by its ‘good behaviour’ is to opt for a well-disciplined and silent politics in which all arrangements are given and all that remains is the counting of fallen bowling pins.

Craig Murphy (Chapter 20) makes this quite clear in his Gramscian analysis of the relationship between egalitarian social movements and world politics and economics. Struggle and conflict are driving forces not only in reforming global orders, but also in transforming them. To put the point in abbreviated form, the continual ‘churn’ of capitalism must be tempered by political regulation of its sharper edges (Lipschutz, 2005a) if the system as a whole is to survive. But churn is not an autonomous process; it reflects, in part, the political power and successful struggles of some social groups seeking to frame political economies in their favour and against others (Drahos, 2002). Nor, under capitalism, does churn ever cease; struggles are ongoing and the rules governing the political economy are never finalized (Sklair, Chapter 18;
Halperin, Chapter 2). The losers in these struggles – often workers, the poor, the Third World – do not simply give up, however; in coalition with other forces whose position is shaky or uncertain – sometimes, members of a bourgeoisie in decline – they construct egalitarian social movements and seek to redress the structural imbalances of the political economy. Strikes, protests in the streets, even violence and civil war may be part of this process. Murphy links waves of social movements to transitions between ‘industrial eras’, periods when churn is especially turbulent. Those are the times when, as Gramsci (1971, p. 276) put it, the old order is not yet dead and the new one cannot yet be born.

According to Murphy (p. 516), we seem to find ourselves in such a period: the ‘Automobile Age’ of heavy Fordist mass production has come to an end and the ‘Information Age’ of electronics, biotechnology and intellectual property is beginning (see Lipschutz, 2000, ch. 2). Perhaps. Paul Krugman (1994) once wrote that it would take 50 years before the turbulence associated with this most recent transition died down. If Krugman is correct, we have another 25 years or so of national and global PPA to look forward to before things begin to ‘settle down’. This, I would venture to suggest, may be an optimistic view.

Acknowledgement

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