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Chapter 14: Transnational Processes and Movements
Jackie Smith, State University of New York at Stony Brook

Global integration of various types has been occurring for hundreds of years, but recent decades have witnessed an especially rapid increase in the scope and scale of transnational interactions that significantly impact local conditions. The close of World War II ushered in a new set of international institutions designed to advance international political and economic cooperation, and those institutional frameworks have expanded into hundreds of new international organizations and have encouraged the formation of many thousands of transnational non-governmental associations (Boli and Thomas 1997; Chatfield 1997). International cooperation, moreover, has grown beyond the more traditional realms of economic exchange and military security to include a growing array of issues that transcend national boundaries such as the environment, health, and crime. Scholars have only recently begun to explore the consequences of these changes for social movements. This chapter examines the ways that transnational and global processes affect the conditions under which social movement actors seek to advance their claims.

Globalization Processes and Social Movements

Global Institutions and the National State.

Most social movement research takes for granted the assumption that the national state defines the relevant political space for political contenders. However, if globalization is indeed amplifying the importance of remote decision making arenas for local actors, then we must consider how global factors shape the political contests within states.

The proliferation of social interactions that cross national boundaries requires expanded attempts to address collectively the problems arising from these transactions. National states have turned to international institutions increasingly throughout the twentieth century as a means of coordinating responses to problems the cross national boundaries. The quickening pace of global integration, combined with the demise of the Cold War, has helped strengthen attempts by states to both govern international exchanges and to address shared problems through multilateral institutions at the regional (i.e., European Union, NAFTA) and global levels (i.e., United Nations, World Trade Organization).

The expansion of inter-governmental agencies that address substantive issues creates both challenges and opportunities for social movement actors. On the one hand, when governments relinquish part of their authority to global institutions, they undermine the traditional channels of democratic accountability. This leads to what is called the “democratic deficit” of international institutions, which are typically staffed by appointed rather than elected officials who have few if any ties to local or national constituencies. In some instances, particularly within the global financial institutions, international officials are selected for their technical expertise alone, and institutional cultures either ignore or disdain democratic values (See, e.g., Stiglitz 2000). In fact, the World Trade

Organization (WTO) even posts on its web site a “top ten list” of the main benefits of the WTO which includes the supposed “benefit” of “protecting governments from the influences of special interests.”¹

On the other hand, the fact that international institutions are charged with addressing global problems relating to peace, the environment, and human rights means that within these organizations social movements can find important allies as well as material and symbolic resources. In fact, because international agencies lack natural constituencies that can provide them with political support, international officials see a need to build direct links between their agencies and popular groups. The fact that governments have signed international declarations and treaties indicating their support for the values movements advance provides both international and legal legitimacy for activists’ claims as well as political leverage. Although governments may sign treaties with no intention of actually implementing them, no government welcomes – and most actively resist – attempts to bring international attention to their violations of these treaties.² In his study of factors promoting the formation of human rights NGOs, Patrick Ball concludes that the most important cross-national predictor is the presence of some state commitment to human rights, reflected either by a liberal constitutional tradition or by participation in international human rights treaties. He posits a “hypocrisy hypothesis” to account for this phenomena:

[S]tate hypocrisy led to the formation of human rights NGOs. Activists exploited the weakness of the hypocritical position required by the international public sphere in order to strengthen claims for justice. In this use of hypocrisy lies an insight: although noble international agreements made by brutal state leaders may seem cynical or meaningless, in the context of a globalizing regime of international human rights, activists have learned how to hold states accountable for these promises. (Ball 2000:74)

International negotiating forums such as the UN General Assembly, Human Rights Commission, and other treaty monitoring bodies provide key opportunities for confronting the gaps between governments’ normative statements and their practices. Kathryn Sikkink and her colleagues have collected substantial evidence to support a model of institutional change highlighting the ways that international negotiation processes themselves help socialize states into increasing levels of compliance with emergent international norms. They use the metaphor of a “norms cascade” or a “spiral model” of normative change, noting that evidence of a state’s internalization of international human rights norms can be observed along the following continuum:

- 1) Government repression of domestic opposition (norm violation)
- 2) Denials in international forums of norm violations or a refusal to accept the legitimacy of international intervention in domestic matters
- 3) Limited behavioral change(s) consistent with international norms
- 4) Implementation of domestic legal reforms to incorporate international norms
- 5) Rule-consistent behavior– internalization of norms into routine government practices

Evidence about the actual work of social change advocates in international institutions shows that, in many issue areas, it is these actors that are the catalysts that prompt movement along this spiral.³ They do so primarily through “information politics” (Keck and Sikkink 1998), that is by collecting information about violations of international norms or other threats to broader values of peace, security, and human rights and deploying this information in

strategic ways in both the public arenas as well as in more limited inter-governmental arenas.

There is a tendency within social movement research to conceptualize social movement actors as opponents of the state. But a comparative and global perspective demands that we abandon this a priori assumption and conceptualize the state as one of several actors within a field, and there are times when the state (or elements thereof) will be allies of social movements in their struggles against other actors in the broader political field. For instance, Macdonald's study of civil society actors in Central America (1997) highlights the ways that social change advocates had to alter their strategic approach to the state as military dictatorships succumbed to newly democratizing regimes during the 1980s. And Guidry's study of childrens' rights advocacy in Brazil found a blurring of the boundary between the state and social movement. In that case, claims making was based on notions of citizenship rights to protections that were defined largely in transnational contexts, making the state a "fulcrum between conflicting globalizations" (2000:162). Maney (2001) contends that movement alliances with elements of the state are important in determining the outcomes of conflicts over indigenous rights. Within the U.S., McAdam (1982) demonstrates the ways that civil rights activists in the Southern U.S. cultivated ties with federal authorities in their efforts to gain leverage against state and local authorities.

This same dynamic can be seen at the international level when, for instance, human rights activists within a country appeal to international treaties and institutional mechanisms to bring pressure against a given state. Thus, activists from the United States working to oppose the death penalty and police brutality routinely draw attention to U.S. policy at the United Nations Human Rights Commission. To the extent that they can convince a broad public that their demands are consistent with both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with the views of other governments, these activists gain greater legitimacy and symbolic leverage in their struggle to end capital punishment. Keck and Sikkink (1998) use the metaphor of a "boomerang effect" to describe this strategy of using international arenas in attempts to alter the behaviors of particular governments. A key point to remember, however, is that in many areas activists need to defend the state against other rising actors that threaten the aims of social movements, such as militia groups that violate human rights or transnational corporations that fail to observe labor rights or environmental regulations. Without a state that is capable of enforcing domestic and international law, no rights or regulations can exist (See, e.g., Tilly 1995). And increasing globalization has made it easier for sub-national actors to acquire enough resources to make them a threat to the state while it downsizes the state's regulatory and redistributive (but not its coercive) capacities.

While international institutions can serve as allies and opportunities for social movement actors, they are nevertheless the result of agreements among governments, and governments ultimately maintain substantial control their budgets, agendas, and leadership. Powerful states like the United States are often able to have substantial influence over these institutions, even when they reflect a minority position. So having access to some international officials and finding legitimation in international treaties that proclaim support for the values a movement advocates does not neatly translate into real influence. Many activists argue that the limited access provided to international arenas reflects an attempt by states to coopt movement organizations and to channel movement pressure in directions that limit its capacity for achieving fundamental social change. And the fact that states govern the rules of NGO access to international institutions means that the more radical critics are kept outside of this institutional arena

(See, e.g., Fox and Brown 1998; Nelson 1995).

Scholars who have examined the ways that social movements make use of international political arenas in their struggles have used a variety of concepts to capture the dynamics involved. Marks and McAdam (1996) describe it as a system of “multi-level governance,”

[...] European integration combines elements of continued state authority, with the creation of decentralized sub-national power and the development of supranational decision making bodies. The practical significance of this difference should be obvious. Whereas the classic nation-state tended to define the 'structure of political opportunities' for all challenging groups, the emergence of a multi-level polity means that movements are increasingly likely to confront highly idiosyncratic opportunity structures defined by that unique combination of governmental bodies (at all levels) which share decision making authority over the issues of interest to the movement. So instead of the rise of a single new social movement form, we are more apt to see the development and proliferation of multiple movement forms keyed to inherited structures and the demands of mobilization in particular policy areas. (1996:119)

Rothman and Oliver (1999) use the notion of “nested political opportunity structures,” where “[l]ocal political opportunity structures are embedded in national political opportunity structures, which are in turn embedded in international political opportunity structures” (1999:43), creating possibilities for complex patterns of relations among actors seeking political influence. Sidney Tarrow (2001) draws from the historical work of Wayne te Brake to extend te Brake’s notion of the “composite” national state of early modern Europe to the European level. Te Brake describes the early European state as a setting where subjects act in a context of “overlapping, intersecting, and changing political spaces defined by often competitive claimants to sovereign authority over them” (quoted in Tarrow 2001:241). Similarly, as states enter new arrangements with other sovereign national governments, they add another overlapping layer to this already existing composite polity:

[T]he European Union is developing as more than a 'multilevel' polity; it is at the same time crossterritorial, intergovernmental, and multilevel, which opens opportunities for coalitions of actors and states to formulate common positions and overcome their diversity and dispersion to exploit its political opportunities. (Tarrow 2001: 243-44)

Finally, in their discussion of relationships between economic structures and other elements of society, Boyer and Hollingsworth observe a shift from a post-WWII international economy where national institutions were “embedded” in an emergent global economy towards a “nested” global system where we see a more complex set of intertwined relationships that are multi-directional (Boyer and Hollingsworth 1997:470).

In summary, existing work on global institutions and movements highlights the importance of recognizing that national polities are nested within a much broader system of institutional relations that will vary across issue, time, and place. Scholars must consider the extent to which this influences any given political conflict by providing source of alliances, symbolic or material resources, and/or political leverage for both challengers and authorities.

It is also important to emphasize the ways that, through their challenges, social movement actors contribute to institution-building at the international level. Histories of international organizations reveal important roles of social movement actors, such as peace or human rights activists, in shaping international structures like the League

of Nations and later the United Nations (Chatfield 1997; Robbins 1971). As noted above, they have also been crucial to the articulation, institutionalization, and implementation of international norms (Finnemore 1996; Smith 1995; Wapner 1996). Wielding “soft power” in the form of a knowledge and communication, social change advocates have helped advance a global system of norms and have developed a variety of mechanisms for pressing states to conform to these norms (Sikkink 2002). An important site for this kind of social movement activity has been the global conferences, which have helped draw the attention of scholars to the fact that international institutions created a new set of political opportunities for groups seeking to influence government behavior.

Global Conferences. Many studies of transnational social movement activity point to the importance of the United Nations inter-governmental conferences, especially those held in rapid succession during the 1990s, in shaping activists’ thinking and organizational strategies. These conferences provided opportunities and some resources for activists to come together at the sites of international government meetings to identify strategies for addressing global problems. They served as training grounds in global politics, networking arenas, spaces for information exchange and dialogue, and targets for local and national political campaigns (Archer 1983; Benchmark Environmental Consulting 1996; Clark, Friedman, and Hochstetler 1998; Feraru 1974; Willetts 1996). Moreover, as they seek to address shared global problems, the social processes manifest in global conferences explicitly aim to cultivate international community by generating shared understandings of problems and their causes and a shared set of objectives and commitments to address them. By fostering commitments to a peculiar set of transnational organizing forms, skills, and activities, they cultivate global identities. As Riles concluded from her work on transnational organizing for the 1995 UN Womens’ conference in Beijing, “more than any place or society, what the persons and institutions described here share is a set of informational practices [that include attending meetings, networking, coordinating, fundraising, organizing information, and drafting and re-drafting international texts]” (Riles 2001:xv).

Transnational and now, increasingly, national or local associations send representatives to these global conferences to participate in NGO parallel conferences on the problem at hand, to network with other NGOs, and to gather information about government positions and decisions. Because the UN conference structure provides limited time and space for civil society actors to address government delegations, NGOs have been forced to develop routines for developing consensus statements. These common positions require extensive amounts of work before the conference itself to identify the shared goals of NGO representatives, but they help convey more unified demands from civil society while providing focal points for advocacy work in different countries. Accounts from observers, participants, and from a survey of NGOs participating in global conferences document the importance of global conferences as spaces where activists develop their agendas as well as cultivate transnational strategic frames and the collective identities that underlie them (See, e.g., Krut 1997; Foster and Anand 1999; Riles 2001).

Many transnational organizations use global conferences to network and to hold meetings of their own organizational leadership. Groups can more readily raise funds for travel to United Nations conferences from a variety of private and government sources, whereas travel to a site for an organizational meeting is less likely to be funded. Thus, piggy-backing meetings is a common organizational strategy, and it suggests that global conferences have a multiplier effect on global civil society by focusing strategic planning and discourse around a

set of problems and policy proposals as well as by structuring opportunities for transnational consensus-building and organizing work.

But not all social movement organizations can attend or actively participate in international conferences, thus missing out on this multiplier effect. Among respondents to a survey of transnational human rights organizations, fewer than half (47%) of all groups attended the global conference on Human Rights in 1993.⁴ And far fewer attended conferences on issues less central to these organizations' missions. We would expect large gaps between participation from relatively wealthier Northern regions and that of Southern groups, and in absolute terms that is what we see. However, a larger percentage of transnational groups based in the global South attended the United Nations Conferences on Children (New York, 1990) (12% vs. 7%), Human Rights (Vienna, 1993) (52% vs. 45%), Population (Cairo, 1994) (25% vs. 13%), and Women (Beijing, 1995) (45% vs. 37%). This may be due in part to the presence of funding from the United Nations and other bodies to help overcome inequities in North-South representation at global conferences.

The significance of global conference extends far beyond the groups that actually attend them. Many groups work to develop positions regarding the conference agenda, or they sign the common statements, often using these statements to shape their own advocacy agendas. Many delegates from NGOs return home from global conferences energized and eager to report back to their colleagues at home about the outcomes of global meetings and the new networks that they cultivated at the conferences. Through this process, the strategic thinking and campaigns taken up by many local and national groups are infused with ideas from transnational dialogues taking place alongside global conferences. Such dialogues help identify variations in interests and the objections that people from different regions of the world bring to the topic, contributing to an ongoing process of building relationships, new identities, and consensus among diverse activist groups.

Riles's study of women's organizing around the UN conference in Beijing provides a useful examination of the social processes behind what Keck and Sikkink (1998) have called transnational "information politics." Her close work with activists revealed the ways that Fijian organizers came to internalize organizational practices and forms that were largely defined within global settings. The conference process allowed groups to become socialized in the skills of international conferencing: For instance, she found that activists from Pacific countries learned at the 1992 conference on Environment and Development that they needed to focus more on the process of drafting the inter-governmental conference documents than on the content of the issues themselves. They also learned through the conferencing process and through attempts to raise funds from international agencies and private foundations that they needed to cultivate networks and to present information in particular ways if they were to be successful in global settings:

[F]orm generates consensus where content and doctrine could never do so. [. . .] On the one hand, [. . .] the UN conferences subvert critique of the aesthetics of politics by rendering it impossible to imagine a political life without 'aesthetics.' Conversely, in the world conferences and the designs described in this book, we find design already 'politicized' and even generating political commitment from within. (Riles 2001:182)

But while global conferences encourage activists to adopt transnational organizing forms, they also encourage

conscious efforts to develop connections between global processes and local practices. Thus, when Fijian activists left the Beijing conference, their transnational networks provided templates and encouragement for them to work locally to harmonize the practices of the Fijian government with the set of government commitments made in Beijing. Guidry and his colleagues describe this phenomenon as the emergence of a “transnational public sphere,” or a

space in which both residents of distant places (states or localities) and members of transnational entities (organizations or firms) elaborate discourses and practices whose consumption moves beyond national boundaries. . . . [T]he transnational public sphere is realized in various localized applications, potentially quite distant from the original production of the discourse or practice in question. (2000:6-7)

The World System and the National State

An appreciation for the institutional and cultural contexts of international politics must not ignore the underlying structural factors that define relations among states. Specifically, as World-Systems theory claims, the system of states is highly stratified between the “core” or early-industrializing states and the “periphery” states that were, through colonization or through some other form of unequal economic relations, relegated to a tertiary role in the world economic system. “Semi-peripheral” states lie somewhere in the middle, as they have substantial enough resources to influence world market relations but they lack enough influence to play a leadership role in this system (See, e.g., Chase-Dunn 1998). This global hierarchy is reflected in global financial and political institutions, and although it does not always account for policy outcomes, it clearly impacts institutional dynamics. In short, a state’s position in the world-system hierarchy will impact the opportunities for social movement mobilization both domestically and internationally.

A key assumption in World-System theory is that the hegemony of the core states in the world economic system depends upon the extraction of labor and other resources from the periphery to support both high levels of consumption among core workers as well as the maintenance of core hegemony in the world economy. According to Chase-Dunn:

It is clear that many core workers do benefit from the exploitation of the periphery in a number of different ways. They are able to buy peripheral products cheaply. The territorial division of labor between the core and periphery enables a larger proportion of core workers to have cleaner and more skilled jobs. The profits from imperialism enable some core capitalists to respond more flexibly to worker demands for higher wages. The greater affluence of the core allows core states to devote more resources to welfare, and to maintain a relatively greater degree of pluralism and democracy. (1998: 42-3)

Thus, structural features of the world economy give citizens in core states comparatively higher levels of political opportunity and resources for collective action. Moreover, the high standard of living for citizens of the core helps sustain the legitimacy of the system by which core states exploit the periphery:

Perhaps even a stronger statement is warranted. It may be that the democratization of the core of the world

economy owes a great deal to the control of sufficient resources to pay for the extension of rights, while that extension helped secure democratic popular assent for global domination. (Markoff 1999:255)

The demand of the capitalist world economy for cheap labor from the periphery contributes to the political exclusion and repression of lower- and working classes in those states.⁵ The repressive and exclusive character of many periphery states can be traced back to their colonial origins. Whereas European state development was an outcome of the interplay between military-coercive agents, the bourgeoisie, and the broader populace, the geographic and institutional dimensions of states in the periphery were defined by imperialist states for the purposes of economic exploitation. As a consequence of this history and of the Cold War politics of military aid, states in the periphery tend to be highly coercive and to have an inordinate coercive capacity in comparison with other actors in society (Tilly 1990:chapter 7). As contemporary experience shows, countries where the military is the strongest social institution face tremendous obstacles to democratization.

Further contributing to the limited opportunities for political mobilization in the periphery is the fact that core states intervene in the domestic political processes of key periphery states in order to support regimes that are favorable to their economic interests. Ironically, such activity is often legitimated by a claim that it is helping to support democratic development in a subject country. William Robinson (1996) refers to this intervention as the promotion of “low intensity democracy” or “polyarchy,” where electoral competition and governance is restricted to those alternatives that do not threaten the economic interests of the core. This generally means that politicians must agree to open their nation’s markets to foreign goods and investments and to continue making payments on international debts.

Not only are domestic political opportunity structures for social movements limited in the periphery, but also those political opportunities as well as grievances are more strongly determined by global-level processes than are the domestic opportunities of core activists. In other words, it is much harder for activists in the periphery to ignore global processes and institutions than it may be for activists in the core. Arrighi notes how the advance of neoliberal economic policies under Thatcher and Reagan exacerbated existing core-periphery inequalities. He notes that Thatcher-Reaganism used “a bloated state to deflate the social power of first world workers and third world peoples in an attempt to regain confidence and support of [the owners of transnational capital].” The important shift in this time period was not the rising power of transnational corporations vis-a-vis states, but rather of “differences in power relations . . . between western states and non-western peoples.” (Arrighi 1999:129). Thus, many analysts trace the origins of contemporary resistance to neoliberal forms of economic globalization not to the 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, but rather to the countless “IMF riots,” or protests in the global South beginning in the 1980s to oppose the economic policies imposed on their governments by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Walton and Seddon 1994). At the same time, the world system hierarchy makes both elite and social movement actors in the periphery (or the “global South”) far less able to affect the global economic and political decisions that shape their environments than their counterparts in the core (or the “global North”).⁶

Globalization, States, and Citizens

[A]s our institutions are increasingly nested in a world of subnational regions, nation-states, and continental and global regimes, do we have the capacity to govern ourselves democratically? Clearly one of the major challenges of our time is to create a new theory of democracy for governing institutions nested in a world of unprecedented complexity, one in which subnational regions, nation-states, and continental and global regimes are intricately linked. (Boyer and Hollingsworth 1997:477)

Considering transnational institutional and economic processes as we have above, we see a variety of opportunities and obstacles for social movements within and beyond national polities. Before examining how these processes affect social movement mobilizing dynamics, I want to consider some of the implications of global integration for our traditional understandings of state-society relations. Global integration can be conceptualized in a variety of ways, drawing from Herman Daly's work, we might think of two principal alternatives as: (1) "Globalization" or "the global economic integration of formerly national economies into one global economy . . . the effective erasure of national boundaries for economic purposes;" and (2) "Internationalization," or "the increasing importance of relations between nations: international trade, treaties, alliances, protocols, etc." With internationalization, "[t]he basic unit of community and policy remains the nation, even as relations among nations, and among individuals in different nations, become increasingly necessary and important" (Daly 2002).

While the globalization view is most consistent with the World Systems or structural perspective discussed above, internationalization emphasizes the interactions taking place within global political institutions and the nested character of national and international polities. Proponents of neoliberalism have advanced the "globalization" model of global market governance, and this produced over the 1980s and 1990s a shift within the global financial institutions⁷ towards policies that reduced the regulatory capacities of governments in favor of unregulated markets. While the states of the core largely adopted these policies out of a desire to make their companies most competitive in the global economy (Moody 1997; Sklair 2001), the states of the global South were compelled to do so under the conditions attached to their World Bank and IMF loans as well as international aid packages (Walton and Seddon 1994).

As they promoted neoliberal practices through international financial institutions, proponents of the "globalization" model also worked to marginalize the United Nations and other international institutions that subordinated market considerations to other values and identities— that is, ones that operated under the "internationalization" model. Walden Bello (1999; 2000) and Phyllis Bennis (1997) document the ways that U.S. policy during the 1980s and 1990s served to systematically weaken United Nations institutions and to strengthen international financial institutions operating under a market-driven logic. By the time the WTO came into being in the mid-1990s, social movement activists who had worked to strengthen international treaties for human rights, peace, and the environment were beginning to realize that the financial institutions were capable of trumping many of the political agreements for which they had fought so long and hard. The protests in Seattle and elsewhere reflect this recognition of a fundamental "institutional contradiction" (cf. Friedland and Alford 1991) between the internationalization reflected in UN and its various treaties and the globalization emphasis of the international financial institutions.

The contradictions between globalization and internationalization have important consequences for state-society relations. As national boundaries give way to transnational flows of goods and capital, we must ask about the consequences for our understandings of citizenship and political participation around the world. When national governments relinquish some of their authority to international institutions and as they privatize their traditional tasks of protecting and providing public goods, what are the consequences for our understandings of citizenship and the rights to political participation and other protections that citizenship implies (Markoff 1999; See, e.g., Tilly 1995)? Moreover, as states of the global south find themselves further incapacitated by their increased participation in the global political economy, can we assume that the populations of those regions will remain committed to the democratic national state as the main form of social organization?

Social movement scholars must consider how these changes affect future prospects for social change activism. While the proliferation of international regimes for human rights, environmental protection, and equitable development may expand opportunities for participation, the neoliberal emphasis on market governance and the expanding influence of international financial institutions has reduced the political power of citizens as it excludes them from decision making arenas that have increasingly significant implications for their lives. Is it possible to overcome the democratic deficit of global institutions? And can political community of the nation coexist alongside emerging transnational communities? What role will social movements play in the process of reconciling the need for transnational governance structures with the desire to preserve local democracy? These are all crucial questions for social movements research to address. The historical analyses of the role of social movements in shaping the modern democratic state and the processes of representation should provide important guidance for attempts to answer these questions (See, e.g., Tilly 1984; Markoff 1996; Tarrow 1998; and Clemens 1996).

Transnational Processes and Xenophobic Movements. Marxist and World-Systems perspectives on the world economy anticipate that increased global economic integration will generate greater inequality and class polarization, as it exacerbates social conflicts by undermining the ecological basis of the economy. As inequality increases and as states are pressed to scale back their redistributive functions, and as the poorest people tend to be ethnically distinctive as immigrants and other minorities, political parties and entrepreneurs are tempted to engage in exclusionary and anti-immigrant politics. Political mobilizations around identities rather than material interests complicate efforts to resolve conflicts in a peaceful and democratic way. Conflicts that are portrayed as zero-sum contests between groups yield solutions like deportation, segregation, separatism, or genocide, and the future peaceful coexistence of the parties is unlikely. This dynamic, intimately linked to global economic processes, presents a crucial challenge for existing democracies (Markoff 1999:250).

Further complicating efforts to understand the ways that globalization affects social conflict is the processes by which these conflicts are portrayed in the globalized mass media that is dominated by Western companies. Van der Veer examines the ways that Western discourses on fundamentalism prevent the wider appreciation of the ways that globalization is implicated in the violent conflicts being mobilized in the Indian Sikh and Hindu communities: "Western discourse on fundamentalism is important not so much in explaining mass movements as in framing them in a global language of modernization that opposes religion to secularity as backwardness and forwardness" (Van der Veer 2000:335-6). In other words, these struggles are framed as "clashes

of civilizations” over fundamental values and identities rather than expressions of more retractable, interest-based conflicts. Van der Veer argues that both of the Indian struggles he examines (and other “fundamentalist” conflicts) are best understood as an outgrowth of neoliberal policies of the Indian state which encouraged a media and consumer culture while privileging other religious identity groups. The inter-group conflicts encouraged by the Indian state structure, moreover, extend back to the days of British colonial rule.

In summary, this reflection on transnational processes suggests strongly that our understandings of social movements in an increasingly global era must continue to account for a role of the national state. Whereas many discussions of globalization highlight the ways that globalization weakens or reduces the significance of the state, it is more plausible to argue that the role of states is changing, and that various actors in the international arena – including transnational corporations, intergovernmental organizations, and social movements– are struggling to define its place in a globalizing society. States continue to affect the mobilization and strategic prospects for social movement actors. But their capacities for doing so vary. Scholars must differentiate among states to consider how a state’s location within a global system of institutions and structural relations shape movement opportunities and constraints (See, e.g., Maney 2001).

At the same time, we should consider the specific ways in which the inter-state system conditions and channels activism. Drawing from observations of transnational activism to end apartheid in South Africa, Seidman found that activists self consciously ‘shifted the ground’ upon which they framed their struggle, selecting global or national/local frames according to their strategic calculations. Her conversations with participants revealed that they had a strong sense of belonging to a *global* community rather than a local or national one. Seidman’s and other case studies reveal that activists work deliberately to make connections between global processes and local contexts. But the institutional circumstances in which activists find themselves do not always favor the mobilization of transnational identities:

[T]he institutional fact that international bodies are generally composed of national representatives forces potentially global identities into national frames. But it need not blind us to the possibility that activists might under other circumstances frame their concerns more globally. (Seidman 2000: 347)

Under what conditions are activists likely to adopt global as opposed to national frames and identities? If global frames are indeed more common today than they were in the past, what factors best account for this? And how have the global framing of identities and conflicts affected transnational political processes and institutional dynamics? Answers to these types of questions require more systematic investigation of particular interactions between social movements and global institutions.

Transnational Movement Dynamics

The above discussion shows that global integration has dramatically altered the political contexts in which social movement actors must operate. One response to this changed environment has been the proliferation of transnationally organized social movement organizations, or TSMOs, which combine activists from multiple

countries around common social change goals (Sikkink and Smith 2002; Smith 1997; Smith 2002). In addition, we increasingly find that national groups are participating in more informal transnational networks or coalitions as they discover that achieving their organizational aims requires engagement at the transnational level. Lois Barber, a founder of U.S.-based 20/20 Vision, moved from doing national-level organizing to transnational activism in the early 1990s. Although 20/20 Vision had been very successful in recruiting members and mobilizing political action, Barber was convinced that the national focus of the organization would not resolve the problems that motivated her own activism:

I was getting turned on to global issues. . . . I was beginning to see that these issues [on which 20/20 was working] were attached to these larger issues that were global in nature. And even if 20/20 was wildly successful and got everything it wanted, the planet would still be in deep trouble. . . . So [I was thinking] how do I take 20/20 and turn it into an international idea, organize people all around the world to influence policymakers.

Barber went on to help launch EarthAction, a transnational coalition of organizations working on peace, environmental and human rights issues. Other national organizers may find that they can readily merge the efforts of their national organizations with emerging transnational coalitions and networks. For instance, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which won a Nobel Peace Prize for its international work, drew heavily upon the resources of a national organization, the Vietnam Veterans of America, to advance its work. National groups can now more readily join a growing number of formal and informal transnational organizations and campaigns. Global conferences and international agencies help facilitate the networking of national and even local associations with transnational groups working for change.⁸ Below I briefly review how global processes affect transnational organizing, including resource mobilization and political strategies.

Resource Mobilization

Although the preceding argument suggests plenty of reasons why activists might turn to transnational organizing forms in order to pursue their aims, we must not forget that transnational organizing is considerably more difficult and costly than more localized work. What leads activists, then, to globalize their political struggles? Tarrow (2001) identifies four key mechanisms generated by the presence of international organizations that can enhance the material, knowledge, and symbolic resources available for transnational activism. As national governments have turned increasingly to international institutions to address problems of governance, they have created opportunities for challengers to mobilize new allies and resources within a broader, inter-state polity. Specifically, the mechanisms operating within international institutions to alter the possibilities for movement influence are:

- 1) Brokerage— the making of connections between otherwise unconnected domestic and/or international actor that produce (at least in the short term) new identities and framings of conflicts;
- 2) Certification— the recognition and legitimation of actors and activities that are new to a particular site;
- 3) Modeling— the adoption of norms or forms of collective action or organization in one venue that have been demonstrated in another; and

4) Institutional appropriation– the use of an institution’s resources or reputation to serve the purposes of affiliated groups. (paraphrased from Tarrow 2001:15)

Brokerage provides important relational resources for movement actors, and it takes place primarily through major international meetings such as the UN conferences discussed above as well as through the ongoing work of international agencies and TSMOs. International agencies’ need to collect specialized information brings them into regular contact with non-governmental actors, including social movement groups. Occasionally, individuals working within international institutions may use their positions to facilitate connections among social change groups as a means of addressing some broader, officially recognized goal. TSMOs may also serve as brokers, helping link local groups with international institutions and with other activist networks.

Certification has important effects on national political struggles, as international institutions can help demonstrate that activists’ struggles are supported by the international community or that a movement’s claims are seen as appropriate by those outside the country in question. Whereas groups lacking transnational contacts might find themselves either ignored or repressed by their own national governments, those whose struggles are somehow recognized by international actors can gain political leverage in their domestic contexts. For instance, Reimann (2001) found that Japanese environmental groups gained new access to their national officials only when their government hosted the global Climate Change treaty negotiations and was thereby pressed to abide by UN norms of allowing citizens’ groups a voice in such international conferences.

Modeling is evident in the earlier discussion of Riles’s work on the Beijing Women’s conference. The organizing forms developed for use in international conferences can be readily transferred to new groups and activists, allowing them to more quickly assimilate understandings of inter-state political processes and the appropriate strategies for influencing these. In other words, modeling helps reduce the start-up costs for new transnational activists. Moreover, it contributes to innovation as forms are adapted to fit different spacial or temporal contexts. TSMOs and more informal transnational networks are also important places where modeling, or the diffusion and adaptation of organizational and action forms can happen, since these groups make an explicit effort to help members find ways to engage in effective political action in their diverse locales.

Finally, institutional appropriation is another important and common mechanism in international settings. This mechanism helps legitimate activists’ claims in the eyes of a broader public. It can also contribute to new flows of resources or new alliances, thereby fundamentally altering the balance among actors in a struggle. For instance, groups working to promote broad access to medications for the treatment of HIV/AIDS appealed to the United Nations in pressing their claims against multinational pharmaceutical companies. This appropriation of international agencies highlighted the contradictions between international humanitarian norms and the international trade and investment regime. Similarly, social movement actors cultivate ties with international treaty bodies, and sometimes these ties produce funding for activism in support of a treaty’s environmental or humanitarian goals. But with or without material resources, institutional appropriation can provide important symbolic capital for a movement, as we saw with the previously mentioned example of anti-death penalty activists in the United States.

Within transnational organizations and campaigns, we find considerable evidence to support the notion that transnational activism generates new leadership and skills among activist populations. Transnational meetings and seminars help cultivate "the technology to unite us" [. . . such as] techniques for speaking in groups, listening to each other, forming networks around a concrete issue, [and] thinking strategically at the grassroots level about specific actions" (Sperling, Feree, and Risman 2001: 1172). Given the complexities of the multi-level political arenas described above, such knowledge and skills sharing is an important resource for many groups, particularly those from countries with fewer opportunities for political participation.⁹ Transnational SMOs can help provide information about global policy making processes and guidance about how activists can seek to influence these processes. Many transnational groups sponsor formal training sessions to help reduce the costs of mobilizing around transnational issues. The experience of transnational activists, moreover, can lead to their appointments in international agencies or on national delegations, where they become key resources for movement actors as they provide access to information and other resources.

Case studies suggest that we should not view the resource flows within transnational alliances as only moving from the wealthier, more established democracies of the North to the global South. Often it is information or analyses provided by activists in the global South that flows to the North rather than visa-versa. Macdonald, for instance, demonstrates learning by international groups working in Latin America that derives from the work of local activists to help them better appreciate the ways that international aid affected their countries. Rothman and Oliver (1999) document a similar phenomenon as environmental activists from the global North were challenged by Brazilian activists to transform their environmental thinking in ways that paid greater attention to human rights and to the ways that political inequalities affected decision making on the environment.

One final point that should be made regarding resources in transnational movements is that while globalizing processes provide various new sources of resources, they also encourage competition among social movement actors, just as is true in national social movements (Zald and McCarthy 1980). Important sources of funding for transnational social change campaigns can come from international agencies charged with promoting certain international treaties or their implementation; national governments and their international aid agencies, which might fund transnational advocacy groups as a means of promoting particular foreign policy goals; and private foundations or corporations. Competition for public or private funding is enhanced as more activists gain the skills needed to compete for grants. Observers also found that the same people and groups tend to receive funding, while those outside these developed networks have difficulties gaining access. Finally, the grant proposal-writing process itself encourages hierarchy within organizations, and it also tends to emphasize projects whose effects can be readily documented. This serves to drain resources from grassroots level organizing and from educational and mobilizing work that is most needed in many areas.¹⁰

Transnational Strategies

Globalization has altered the playing field on which many social movements operate. Even within countries, movements may find it difficult to mobilize for major social changes without considering the transnational sources of a policy or condition. Thus, we are increasingly aware that activists have adopted new

strategies as they try to influence this globalized polity. I discussed above the ways that movement actors have used global institutions to gain leverage in their efforts to change state behaviors, and I noted the common and important strategy of the “boomerang” effect, whereby groups can use international norms as a lever to try to change state behavior. And we found that social movement actors have served as key catalysts in the process of developing and promoting international norms in the first place.

Given this notion of the relationships between global institutions and social movements, we must consider whether this mutually supportive relationship is likely to continue, especially in light of more recent and very confrontational protests *against* the global financial institutions.

In his broad overview of NGO relations with global institutions, Charnovitz (1997) observes a cyclical pattern of NGO mobilization around international organizations that corresponds with governments’ and IGO needs for the information or popular legitimacy that NGOs provide. He and other analysts have anticipated a decline in NGO access as governments respond to the overwhelming expansion of NGO involvement in IGOs during the 1990s (Otto 1996). I suspect that the trend since the 1990s is towards greater restrictions on NGO access to global institutions, and this is partly a response of governments to the earlier success of NGO participation.

A 1995 survey of NGOs active in international arenas concluded that, while a substantial proportion of groups attending inter-governmental conferences actively engaged in efforts to lobby governments and/or international officials:

[a] competing characteristic of the new global system is that NGOs are more interested in creating direct citizen to citizen links at and around international events than in attempting to alter what apparently is perceived to be the relatively weak or weakening existing intergovernmental machinery. (Benchmark Environmental Consulting 1996:54)¹¹

Some of the tension and rationales dividing the two approaches is manifest in more recent debates among NGOs. For instance, an important actor in the mobilizations at global financial institutions, People’s Global Action (PGA),¹² has been highly critical of “NGOs”- by which they mean formalized organizations that generally have large budgets and focus on lobbying global institutions as opposed to mobilizing grassroots opposition:

Seattle marked the end of a period. [PGA’s initial focus was on the WTO and free trade. But t]he discourse is easily recuperated [sic.] by the NGO reformist community which goes hand in hand with governments playing the trick of ‘dialogue with civil society.’ Most agree we need to extend our discourse and analysis if we don’t want to end up contributing to the stabilisation and modernisation of capitalism. (People’s Global Action 2000: 23).

In other words, activists with longer experience in global politics have recognized that “summit hopping” – or focusing a substantial amount of organizational energies on international conferences – can limit their achievement of their goals. Also, younger activists in the global arena may have little patience for the slow, polite, and politically limited tactics of international diplomacy. In electronic discussion lists, some activists have derided the “CONGOs,” or “coopted NGOs,” for losing touch with the needs of people at local levels and for seeking agreements with authorities that do little to resolve the movement’s broader concerns about inequity and exclusion.

This tension between more radical and militant activists and those seeking to “work the system” parallels divisions within national movements. As is also true within countries, in practice, these two models may not be mutually exclusive, and often groups explicitly engage in both strategies: they lobby to gain access to information they need to mount effective protests against these complex, secretive institutions (cf. Minkoff 1995). There may be a “radical flank effect” at work here, whereby the militancy of some activists opens new channels of access for more moderate groups (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Haines 1988). Remaining questions are whether sufficient consensus exists for groups to make effective use of the lobbying skills of some groups, while maximizing the pressure for change by groups seeking new forms of political and economic representation, and whether the goal of promoting multilateralism will sustain the lobbying efforts of a substantial number of activists.¹³

In summary, transnational movement strategies parallel national ones in important ways. We find, for instance, tensions over questions of whether to work within or outside the system as well as a substantial number of activists who frequently cross over this boundary to engage in both insider and outsider strategies of influence. Activists and analysts wonder whether working relationships between elements of governments and social movement actors lead to institutional transformation or to movement cooptation. Other strategic tensions involve questions of whether or not to focus on single issues or more complex framings of multiple, interdependent issues. A recent study of changes in the population of transnational SMOs shows a rise in the percentages of multi-issue groups, which may reflect new understandings of global problems and their multifaceted sources (Smith 2002). While it may be difficult to predict the future course of relations between social movements, international institutions, and national governments, what we can say is that it is the interactions among these actors that will determine the future structure of the global political arena.

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Notes

¹www.wto.org

² Note, for instance, the outrage of the U.S. government over its failure to be elected to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in 2001 and the extensive lobbying of the People's Republic of China to block the Commission's introduction of resolutions critical of its human rights practices.

³ See, for instance, the case studies in Willetts (1982; 1996); Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco (1997); Keck and Sikkink (1998); Risse, Ropp and Sikkink (1999); O'Brien et al. (2000); Edwards and Gaventa (2001); Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink (2001).

⁴ Following the human rights conference, the next highest percentage of groups (40%) reported attending the Beijing conference on Women's rights in 1995. For details on the survey, see (Smith et al. 1998; Smith 2002).

⁵ Gregory M. Maney (2001) provides a thorough review of world systems research along with an assessment of what this literature tells us about the opportunities for social movement mobilization in different world regions.

⁶ Several respondents to a survey I conducted of affiliates of a transnational organization, EarthAction, captured this sentiment as they described a sense of being doubly disenfranchised: they had little effective access to their domestic political leaders, and their governments had little impact on the United Nations, which they saw as being dominated by the United States (Smith 2002).

⁷ International financial institutions include the World Bank, IMF, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which became the World Trade Organization in 1994.

⁸ Indeed, the presence of large numbers of national and local groups at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) led to the modification of UN rules for nongovernmental organizations' participation in formal UN conferences. Following UNCED, local and national groups could participate in the annual meetings of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the body formed to carry out the agenda developed at UNCED. This set a precedent for a further relaxing of UN rules that allow only transnationally organized groups to obtain formal consultative status in the organization.

⁹ For instance, a survey of national and local affiliates of a transnational organization showed that groups based in the global South relied more heavily on the international action kits the group provided (Smith 2002).

¹⁰ For in-depth discussion of the challenges of fund-raising among groups, see, e.g., Sperling et al. (2001); Riles (2001); and Macdonald (1997).

¹¹ The non-randomized survey yielded 500 responses, 54% of which were from organizations in the global South. 62% were from organizations that did not have formal Consultative Status with any United Nations agency.

¹² Peoples Global Action is a decentralized, grassroots-oriented transnational organization that grew in response to the Zapatista struggle. Its organizational structure has remained very informal and fluid, as rotating regional "conveners" serve limited terms. It has relied heavily on the Internet and on regional and global meetings. PGA initiated the first calls for "Global Days of Action" under names like J18, N30, etc.

¹³ Even among groups that have focused on supporting multilateral initiatives as a means of promoting changes in the behaviors of governments, there is growing discontent with the UN. Many in the activist community have grown wary of a growing corporate influence in the UN, which began during the mid-1990s, and the International Forum on Globalization articulated this fear most directly when it hosted a meeting to parallel the UN Millennium Forum entitled, "Can the UN be Salvaged?" These groups are especially critical of a recent initiative called the "Global Compact," which seeks to augment the UN budget from private sources and ostensibly seeks to gain voluntary cooperation from corporations with UN environmental, labor, and human rights principles. In practice, however, the neoliberal mantra of deregulation has prevailed, and the Compact has deliberately excluded provisions for monitoring the behavior of corporate "Partners."