

"Global Civil Society: Changing the World?"

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Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick,

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Abstract:

Is, as many of its enthusiastic proponents suggest, global civil society the key to future progressive politics? This paper first develops a definition of global civil society and explores the circumstances that have prompted its growth. The paper then considers the consequences of global civil society, particularly in relation to matters of sovereignty, identity, citizenship and democracy. The latter part of the paper proceeds to outline criteria for evaluating global civil society, identifying seven areas of promise and four possible dangers. The conclusion offers several suggestions that could help to maximise the benefits and minimise the pitfalls of global civil society.

Keywords: civil society, globalisation, citizenship, democracy.

Address for correspondence:

Jan Aart Scholte

Department of Politics and International Studies

University of Warwick,

Coventry CV4 7AL

United Kingdom

Email: scholte@warwick.ac.uk

Introduction

The adjective 'global' is put in front of many a noun in the 1990s. As part of this trend, we see the term increasingly appear as a designation of civil society. Moreover, enthusiasts have suggested that global civil society is the way forward for solidarity, citizenship and democracy. What substance, if any, lies behind notions of global civil society, and what implications, positive and/or negative, does its emergence and growth hold?

The present paper suggests that, indeed, we have witnessed a growth of global civil society in the late twentieth century and that it has played an important part in recasting politics. Yet we must not exaggerate this expansion and associated changes. Nor should we uncritically assume, with liberal-internationalist naïveté, that these developments have been wholly positive. Global civil society certainly offers much potential for enhancing security, equity and democracy in the contemporary world; however, a long haul of committed endeavour is still required in order fully to realise those benefits.

To elaborate this argument, the first section of this paper considers what, more precisely, is entailed by the notion of 'civil society'. The second section identifies the distinctiveness of 'global' civil society. The third section examines the forces that have propelled the growth of global civil society in the late twentieth century. The fourth section assesses the impacts that global civil society has had on contemporary politics, including questions of sovereignty, identity, citizenship and democracy. The fifth section highlights seven potential fruits and four possible perils of global civic association. The conclusion makes five general suggestions regarding ways that global civil society might more fully deliver its promises in the future.

What Is Civil Society?

The vocabulary of politics is today strewn with terms such as ‘civil society’, ‘social movements’, ‘non-governmental organisations’ (NGOs), ‘non-profit associations’ (NPAs), ‘private voluntary organisations’ (PVOs), ‘independent advocacy groups’ (IAGs), ‘principled issue networks’ (PINs), ‘segmented polycentric ideologically integrated networks’ (SPINs), and more. ‘Civil society’ is the oldest of these concepts, dating back to English political thought of the sixteenth century.¹ The contemporary proliferation of broadly related terms perhaps in part reflects uncertainty, confusion and disagreement about the meaning of the older notion.

What, indeed, is civil society? The concept has been understood very differently across different time periods, places, theoretical perspectives and political persuasions. Thus, for example, ‘civil society’ for Hegel, as an academic philosopher in Prussia and Baden in the early nineteenth century, has not been the same as ‘civil society’ for a grassroots eco-feminist group in India in the late twentieth century. We therefore need not a definitive definition, but a notion of civil society that, with due regard for cultural and historical contexts, promotes insight and effective policy in the contemporary world.

We might begin by stressing what civil society is *not*. For one thing, civil society is not the state: it is non-official, non-governmental. Civil society groups are not formally part of the state apparatus; nor do they seek to gain control of state office. On this criterion political parties should probably be excluded from civil society, although some analysts do include party organisations (as distinct from individual party members who might occupy governmental positions). Other fuzzy cases arise in respect of non-official actors that are organised and/or funded by the state. At what

¹E.M. Wood, ‘The Uses and Abuses of “Civil Society”’, in R. Miliband *et al.* (eds), *Socialist Register 1990* (London: Merlin, 1990) p. 61. For more on the concept of ‘civil society’, see J.L. Cohen and A. Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); K. Kumar, ‘Civil Society: An Inquiry into the Usefulness of an Historical Term’, *British Journal of Sociology*, 44 (1993) 375–95.

point do such bodies cease to be 'non-governmental'? In addition, some agencies outside government help states and multilateral institutions to formulate, implement, monitor and enforce policies. To what extent can 'civil society' be involved in official regulatory functions? Clearly, the precise boundaries of 'non-governmental' activity are a matter for debate. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that civil society lies outside the 'public sector' of official governance.

Second, civil society is not the market: it is a non-commercial realm. Civil society bodies are not companies or parts of firms; nor do they seek to make profits. Thus the mass media, the leisure industry and cooperatives would, as business enterprises, not normally be considered part of civil society. To be sure, the distinction between the market and civil society is in practice sometimes far from absolute. For example, companies often organise and fund non-profit bodies, including foundations like Packard and Sasakawa that bear a corporate name. Meanwhile business lobbies like chambers of commerce and bankers' associations promote market interests even though these organisations themselves do not produce and exchange for profit. Many voluntary groups engage a salaried workforce in commercial activities like catalogue sales in order to fund their charitable operations. The environmentalist lobby Greenpeace has considered licensing its name as a brand.² At what point does the market presence become so strong that an activity ceases to qualify as 'civil society'? No doubt there are borderline cases, but it is generally agreed that civil society lies outside the 'private sector' of the market economy.

Establishing what civil society is *not* only partly establishes what it *is*. Thus far we have identified civil society as a 'third sector' that, while sometimes being closely related to, is distinct from the state and the market. Yet is this to say that any and all non-governmental, non-commercial activity is part of civil society? Presumably we would not label, for example, the everyday routines of households or idle chatter in a park as

²'The Limits to Growth?' *The Economist*, 348 (1 August 1998) p. 79.

‘civil society’. Negative terminology like ‘*non*-governmental organisation’ and ‘*non*-profit body’ is in this respect not very precise or helpful. What is the *positive* content of civil society?

For the purposes of the present discussion, activities are considered to be part of civil society when they involve a deliberate attempt – from outside the state and the market, and in one or the other organised fashion – to shape policies, norms and/or deeper social structures. In a word, civil society exists when people make concerted efforts through voluntary associations to mould rules: both official, formal, legal arrangements and informal social constructs. ‘Civil society’ is the collective noun, while ‘civic’ groups, organisations, etc. are the individual elements within civil society.

Civil society encompasses enormous diversity. In terms of membership and constituencies, for example, it includes academic institutes, business associations, community-based organisations, consumer protection bodies, criminal syndicates, development cooperation groups, environmental campaigns, ethnic lobbies, foundations, farmers’ groups, human rights advocates, labour unions, relief organisations, peace activists, professional bodies, religious institutions, women’s networks, youth campaigns and more.

In terms of organisational forms, civil society includes formally constituted and officially registered groups as well as informal associations that do not appear in any directory. Indeed, different cultures may hold highly diverse notions of what constitutes an ‘organisation’.³ Some civic bodies are unitary, centralised entities like the Ford Foundation and the Roman Catholic Church. Other civic associations like the International Chamber of Commerce or Amnesty International are federations where branches have considerable autonomy from the central secretariat. Other civic groups

³On these issues more generally, see C. Hann and E. Dunn (eds), *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models* (London: Routledge, 1996).

like the Asian Labour Network on International Financial Institutions (which links trade unions in four countries to campaign on labour rights and welfare issues) are coalitions without a coordinating office.⁴ Still other civic bodies like Slum Dwellers International (which arranges periodic exchange visits between community leaders of poor neighbourhoods in major cities of Africa and Asia) are loose networks that maintain limited and irregular contacts.⁵

In terms of capacity levels, civil society includes some bodies that are very generously resourced and others that struggle for survival, frequently without success. Some civic associations are richly endowed with members, funds, trained staff, office space, communications technology and data banks. Other groups lack these material means. Some civic organisations have a clear vision and value orientation, a powerful analysis, an astutely conceived campaign, a set of symbols and language that can mobilise a broad constituency, and an effective leadership. Other groups lack such human and ideational capital. Some civic bodies can exploit close links with elite circles, while others are completely disconnected from established power centres.

In terms of tactics, civic associations use a wide variety of means to pursue their aims. Many groups directly lobby official agencies and market actors. Others also – or instead – put the emphasis on mobilising the general public through symposia, rallies, petitions, letter-writing campaigns, and boycotts. Some appeals from civil society aim primarily at the heart (with images, music and slogans), while others aim primarily at the mind (with publications, statistics and debates). Quite a few civic associations are adept users of the mass media (even hiring professional communications consultants for this purpose), while others rely wholly on face-to-face contacts. Some civil society organisations make great use of the Internet (including listservs and websites as well as person-to-person e-mail messages), while many others are not connected to

⁴Information provided by Philip Robertson, American Center for International Labor Solidarity, Bangkok, April 1999.

⁵J. Bolnick *et al.*, 'Community Exchanges for Urban Transformation', paper for the NGOs in a Global Future Conference, University of Birmingham, January 1999.

cyberspace. On a broader tactical issue, some civic associations pursue their aims through cooperation with public authorities and/or market agents, while others adopt a confrontational stance and reject all engagement with established power centres.

Finally, in terms of objectives, civil society includes conformists, reformists and radicals. The general distinction is important, although the lines can blur in practice. Conformists are those civic groups that seek to uphold and reinforce existing norms. Business lobbies, professional associations, think tanks and foundations often (though far from always) fall into the conformist category. Reformists are those civic entities that wish to correct what they see as flaws in existing regimes, while leaving underlying social structures intact. For example, social-democratic groups challenge liberalist economic policies but accept the deeper structure of capitalism. Many academic institutions, consumer associations, human rights groups, relief organisations and trade unions promote a broadly reformist agenda. Meanwhile radicals are those civic associations that aim comprehensively to transform the social order. These parts of civil society are frequently termed 'social movements'. They include anarchists, environmentalists, fascists, feminists, pacifists and religious revivalists, with their respective implacable oppositions to the state, industrialism, liberal values, patriarchy, militarism and secularism.

The distinction between means and ends needs to be stressed. It would be mistaken assumed that quiet lobbying, painstaking research, and collaboration with authorities *ipso facto* imply a conformist programme. On the contrary, reformists and radicals can and often do adopt such tactics. Likewise, it would be wrong to suppose that street demonstrations, impassioned television spots, and a refusal to engage with official agencies *ipso facto* imply a radical vision. On the contrary, various business associations have sponsored boycotts and strikes, and some academic institutes have declined on principle to work with governance bodies. In short, when assessing civil

society activity it is important to distinguish between tactics and objectives. The height of the profile sought can bear little relation to the depth of the transformation pursued.

In sum, civil society exists whenever people mobilise through voluntary associations in initiatives to shape the social order. Civic groups have a wide range of constituencies, institutional forms, capacities, tactics and goals. Apart from this broad definition and the acknowledgement that civil society is highly diverse, it is difficult to generalise about the phenomenon.

What Is *Global Civil Society*?

While references to ‘civil society’ go back to the sixteenth century, talk of ‘global civil society’ has emerged only in the 1990s.⁶ Commentators have spoken in a related vein of ‘international non-governmental organisations’, ‘transnational advocacy networks’, ‘global social movements’, a ‘new multilateralism’, and so on.⁷ Such discussions are part of a wider concern with globality (the condition of being global) and globalisation (the trend of increasing globality). Our conception of global civil society is thus inseparable from our notion of global-ness more generally.

As any glance at the burgeoning literature on globalisation indicates, little consensus exists on the precise character of globality. A new vocabulary has arguably developed in response to changes in concrete social relations. However, analysts disagree – often

⁶Cf. R.A. Falk, ‘The Infancy of Global Civil Society’, in G. Lundestad and O.A. Westad (eds), *Beyond the Cold War: New Dimensions in International Relations* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1992) 219–39; R.D. Lipschutz, ‘Reconstructing World Politics: The Emergence of Global Civil Society’, *Millennium*, 21 (1992) 389–420; *Citizens Strengthening Global Civil Society* (Washington: CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation, 1994); M. Shaw, ‘Civil Society and Global Politics: Beyond a Social Movements Approach’, *Millennium*, 23 (1994) 647–67; A.C. Drainville, ‘The Fetishism of Global Civil Society’, in M.P. Smith and L.E. Guarnizo (eds), *Transnationalism from Below* (London: Transaction, 1998).

⁷P. Ghils, ‘International Civil Society: International Non-Governmental Organizations in the International System’, *International Social Science Journal*, no. 133 (1992) 417–31; J. Smith *et al.* (eds), *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics: Solidarity beyond the State* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997); M.E. Keck and K. Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); M.G. Schechter (ed.), *Sources of Innovation in Multilateralism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

quite profoundly – on the nature, extent, periodisation and direction of these changes. The present paper is not the place to engage in a full-scale exploration of the character and consequences of globalisation,⁸ but it is necessary to specify the concept of ‘global’ relations that is operative here.

Five broad kinds of ideas about globalisation can be distinguished. First, many people equate the term ‘globalisation’ with ‘internationalisation’. From this perspective, a ‘global’ situation is one marked by intense interaction and interdependence between country units. Second, many commentators take the word ‘globalisation’ to mean ‘liberalisation’. In this usage, globality refers to an ‘open’ world where resources can move anywhere, unencumbered by state-imposed restrictions like trade barriers, capital controls and travel visas. Third, many analysts understand ‘globalisation’ to entail ‘universalisation’. In this case a ‘global’ phenomenon is one that is found at all corners of the earth. Fourth, some observers invoke the term ‘globalisation’ as a synonym for ‘westernisation’ or ‘Americanisation’. In this context globality involves the imposition of modern structures, especially in an ‘American’ consumerist variant. Fifth, some researchers identify ‘globalisation’ as ‘deterritorialisation’. Here ‘global’ relations are seen to occupy a social space that transcends territorial geography.

Only the last of these five conceptions captures a distinctive trend that sets the world of the late twentieth century apart from earlier periods. The other four notions merely apply a new word to preexistent circumstances. Internationalisation, liberalisation, universalisation and westernisation have all figured significantly at previous junctures a hundred or even a thousand and more years in the past. No vocabulary of ‘globalisation’ was required on those earlier occasions, and it seems unnecessary now to invent new words for old phenomena. In contrast, contemporary large-scale

⁸I undertake such an exploration in *Globalisation: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, forthcoming).

deterritorialisation is unprecedented, and 'globalisation' offers a suitable new terminology to describe these new circumstances.

In the present discussion, then, 'global' relations are social connections in which territorial location, territorial distance and territorial borders do not have a determining influence. In global space, 'place' is not territorially fixed, territorial distance is covered in effectively no time, and territorial frontiers present no particular impediment. Thus global relations have what could be called a 'supraterritorial', 'transborder' or 'transworld' character. (The latter three terms will be used as synonyms for 'global' in the rest of this paper.)

Examples of global phenomena abound in today's world. For instance, faxes and McDonald's are global in that they can extend anywhere on the planet at the same time and can unite spots anywhere on earth in effectively no time. Ozone depletion, CNN broadcasts and Visa credit cards are little restricted by territorial places, distances or borders. Global conditions can and do surface simultaneously at any point on earth that is equipped to host them (e.g. a Toshiba plant or an Internet connection). Global phenomena can and do move almost instantaneously across any distance on the planet (e.g. telephone calls or changes in foreign exchange rates).

This is by no means to say that territorial geography has lost all relevance in the late twentieth century. We inhabit a *globalising* rather than a completely *globalised* world. Social relations have undergone relative rather than total deterritorialisation. Indeed, territorial places, distances and borders still figure crucially in many situations as we enter the twenty-first century. Among other things, territoriality often continues to exert a strong influence on migration, our sense of identity and community, and markets for certain goods. Yet while territoriality may continue to be important, globalisation has brought an end to *territorialism* (that is, a condition where social space is reducible to territorial coordinates alone). Alongside longitude, latitude and

altitude, globalisation has introduced a fourth, supraterritorial dimension to social geography.

If we identify globality as supraterritoriality, then what does global civil society involve? In a word, global civil society encompasses civic activity that: (a) addresses transworld issues; (b) involves transborder communication; (c) has a global organisation; (d) works on a premise of supraterritorial solidarity. Often these four attributes go hand in hand, but civic associations can also have a global character in only one or several of these four respects. For example, a localised group that campaigns on a supraterritorial problem like climate change could be considered part of global civil society even though the association lacks a transborder organisation and indeed might only rarely communicate with civic groups elsewhere in the world.⁹ Conversely, global civic networks might mobilise in respect of a local development like the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

To elaborate these four points in turn, global civil society exists in one sense when civic associations concern themselves with issues that transcend territorial geography. For example, as well as addressing climate change, various civic associations have campaigned on ecological problems like the loss of biological diversity and the depletion of stratospheric ozone that similarly have a supraterritorial quality.¹⁰ Transworld diseases like AIDS have also stimulated notable civic activity.¹¹ Many civic organisations have raised questions concerning the contemporary globalising economy, in relation to transborder production, trade, investment, money and finance.¹² Considerable civic activism has been directed at global governance agencies like the

⁹P. Ekins, *A New World Order: Grassroots Movements for Global Change* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁰J. McCormick, *Reclaiming Paradise: The Global Environmental Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); T. Princen and M. Finger (eds), *Environmental NGOs in World Politics: Linking the Global and the Local* (London: Routledge, 1994); P. Wapner, *Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996).

¹¹P. Söderholm, *Global Governance of AIDS: Partnerships with Civil Society* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1997).

¹²J. Brecher and T. Costello, *Global Village or Global Pillage: Economic Reconstruction from the Bottom Up* (Boston, MA: South End, 1994).

United Nations (UN), the Bretton Woods institutions, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the World Trade Organisation (WTO).¹³ Human rights groups have promoted standards that are meant to apply to people everywhere on earth, regardless of the distances and borders that might lie between them.¹⁴ Some civil society bodies have also treated armament questions like bans on chemical weapons and land mines as global issues.¹⁵

A second way that civic associations can be global lies in their use of supraterritorial modes of communication. Air travel, telecommunications, computer networks and electronic mass media allow civic groups to collect and disseminate information related to their causes more or less instantaneously between any locations on earth. Jet aircraft can bring civil society representatives from all corners of the planet together in a global congress. In this way, for example, an NGO Forum has accompanied the various UN issue conferences of the 1990s as well as the Annual Meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank since 1986. Telephone, fax and telex permit civic groups to share information and coordinate activities across the world as intensely as across town. As noted earlier, much civic activism has also become global through the Internet.¹⁶

Civil society is global in a third sense when campaigns adopt a transborder organisation. According to the Union of International Associations, there were in 1998

¹³T.G. Weiss and L. Gordenker (eds), *NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance* (Boulder: Rienner, 1996); P. Willetts (ed.), *'Conscience of the World' The Influence of Non-Governmental Organisations in the UN System* (London: Hurst, 1996); R. O'Brien et al., *Challenging Global Governance: Social Movements and Multilateral Economic Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁴H.J. Steiner, *Diverse Partners: Non-Governmental Organizations in the Human Rights Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Law School, 1991).

¹⁵R. Price, 'Transnational Civil Society Targets Land Mines', *International Organization*, 52 (1998) 613-44.

¹⁶Cf. H. Frederick, 'Computer Networks and the Emergence of Global Civil Society', in L. Harasim (ed.), *Global Networks: Computers and International Communication* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993) 283-95; E. Lee, *The Labour Movement and the Internet: The New Internationalism* (London: Pluto, 1996); W. Harcourt (ed.), *Women @ Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace* (London: Zed, 1999).

some 16,500 active civic bodies whose members are spread across several countries.¹⁷ As noted earlier, the mode of organisation can vary. Some supraterritorial bodies are unitary and centralised: for instance, the World Economic Forum (WEF), which assembles some 900 transborder companies under the motto of 'entrepreneurship in the global public interest'. Alternatively, the transworld association may take a federal form, as in the case of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). Meanwhile some transborder organisations take the shape of networks without a coordinating secretariat. Illustrative cases in this regard are the Latin America Association of Advocacy Organisations (ALOP), which links 50 groups in 20 countries, and Peoples' Global Action against 'Free' Trade and the World Trade Organisation (PGA), which mainly networks through a website.¹⁸ Other global organisations are ephemeral coalitions that pursue a campaign around a particular policy. For example, on various occasions grassroots groups have combined forces with development and/or environmental NGOs to lobby the World Bank on one or the other of its projects.¹⁹

Finally, civil society can be global insofar as voluntary associations are motivated by sentiments of transworld solidarity.²⁰ For example, civic groups may build on a sense of collective identity and destiny that transcends territoriality: e.g. on lines of age, class, gender, profession, race, religious faith or sexual orientation. In addition, some global civic activity (e.g. in respect of human rights, humanitarian assistance and development) has grown largely out of a cosmopolitan inspiration to provide security, equity and democracy for all persons, regardless of their territorial position on the planet.

¹⁷Union of International Associations, *Yearbook of International Organizations 1998/99, Vol. I* (Munich: Saur, 1998), p. 1764.

¹⁸<http://www.agp.org>.

¹⁹See J.A. Fox and L.D. Brown (eds), *The Struggle for Accountability: The World Bank, NGOs, and Grassroots Movements* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

²⁰For more on these issues, see P. Waterman, *Globalization, Social Movements and the New Internationalisms* (London: Mansell, 1998).

Taking these four manifestations of supraterritoriality in sum, global civil society has acquired substantial proportions in the late twentieth century. To be sure, by no means has all civic association acquired a global character. Nor has the global aspect of civic campaigns been equally pronounced and sustained in all cases. Nevertheless, owing to the contemporary growth of global issues, global communications, global organisation and global solidarities, civic activity can today no longer be understood with a territorialist conception of state-society relations.

Why Has Global Civil Society Developed?

Global civil society, like globalisation in general, is not completely new to the late twentieth century. For example, abolitionists pursued a transatlantic campaign (albeit without global communications) beginning in the eighteenth century. Pacifists, anarchists, the first and second workers' internationals, Pan-Africanists, advocates of women's suffrage and Zionists all held prototypical global meetings during the nineteenth century. In the area of humanitarian relief, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement dates back to 1863.

However, civil society has mainly acquired supraterritorial attributes since the 1960s. To cite but one indicator that the chief increase has occurred recently, less than 10 per cent of the transborder civic associations active in 1998 was more than 40 years old.²¹

In this light Lester Salamon has spoken of:²²

a global 'associational revolution' that may prove to be as significant to the latter twentieth century as the rise of the nation-state was to the latter nineteenth.

While it seems premature to draw quite such dramatic conclusions, Salamon is right to date the principal growth of global civil society in recent history.

²¹*Yearbook of International Organizations 1998/99*, p. 1764.

²²L.M. Salamon, 'The Rise of the Nonprofit Sector', *Foreign Affairs*, 73 (1994) p. 109. See also Salamon *et al.*, *The Emerging Sector Revisited: A Summary* (Baltimore: Institute for Policy Studies, Johns Hopkins University, 1998).

What has prompted this rapid expansion? Insofar as the spread of global civil society has been part of a wider process of globalisation, some of the forces behind growing transborder civic activity are the same as those that have propelled globalisation in general. I have argued at greater length elsewhere that the rise of supraterritoriality has resulted mainly from the mutually reinforcing impulses of global thinking, certain turns in capitalist development, technological innovations, and enabling regulations.²³

All four of these conditions have been vital to globalisation. Global thinking is crucial since people must be able to imagine the world as a single place in order for concrete global relations to be constructed. Without a global mindset civic activists cannot 'see' global issues of the kind named earlier. Capitalist development is crucial since globalisation has largely been spurred by the strivings of entrepreneurs to maximise sales and minimise costs. In addition, global spaces have offered new opportunities for surplus accumulation through sectors like electronic finance and the Internet. Technology is crucial since developments in communications and information processing have supplied the infrastructure for global connections. Finally, regulation is crucial since measures like standardisation and liberalisation have provided a legal framework that encourages globalisation.

Another legal trend has had more specific relevance for the contemporary growth of civil society, both global and otherwise: that is, many governments have in the 1990s rewritten laws in ways that facilitate civic organisation. Countries in transition from state socialism provide an obvious example, though some like Romania and Russia have made slower and more limited reforms than others. Elsewhere, a new constitution enacted in Thailand in 1997 has explicitly promoted the growth of civil society in

²³See further *Globalisation: A Critical Introduction*, ch. 5.

various respects.²⁴ In Japan, too, legislators have recently replaced a highly restrictive code on civic associations with a much more permissive regime.

Further stimulus to civic activity has arisen in the 1980s and 1990s with certain reductions in direct state provision of social security. The finances of many public-sector welfare programmes have come under strain in the late twentieth century. Among the reasons for these difficulties, governments have faced pressures to reduce taxes and labour costs in the name of enhancing 'global competitiveness'.²⁵ In these circumstances states (and also multilateral agencies like the World Bank and the UN High Commission for Refugees) have often contracted transborder civic associations as more cost-effective suppliers of, for example, development aid and humanitarian relief. In other cases NGOs and grassroots groups have stepped into the breach with private donations and voluntary assistance when public-sector provision of social security has become inadequate. This scenario has arisen, for example, in some countries undergoing neoliberal structural adjustment programmes.

Finally, the contemporary expansion of global civil society can also be ascribed in part to a more general altered position of the state in the face of globalisation. To be sure, the rise of supraterritoriality has by no means heralded the demise of the state, but the new geography has ended the state's effective monopoly on governance that developed under conditions of territorialism.²⁶ Large numbers of people have understandably concluded that, in these changed (one might term them 'post-sovereign') circumstances, elections centred on the state are not by themselves an adequate expression of citizenship and democracy. After all, substantial regulation now also occurs through public multilateral agencies like the IMF and the Bank for

²⁴J.R. Klein, *The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 1997: A Blueprint for Participatory Democracy* (San Francisco: The Asia Foundation Working Paper No. 8, March 1998).

²⁵Cf. G. Esping-Andersen (ed.), *Welfare States in Transition: National Adaptations in Global Economies* (London: Sage, 1996).

²⁶I elaborate these points in the next section of this paper and in 'Global Capitalism and the State', *International Affairs*, 73 (1997) 427–52; 'Globalisation and Governance', in P. Hanafin and M.S. Williams (eds), *Identity, Rights and Constitutional Transformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999) 132–53.

International Settlements (BIS) where elected legislators have little direct influence. In addition, some governance of global markets occurs through so-called 'self-regulatory' agencies of the private sector like the International Accounting Standards Committee. Such bodies are even further removed from party politics. Global civil society has therefore also grown in part as citizens have attempted to acquire a greater voice in post-sovereign governance, for example, by directly lobbying global governance institutions.

In sum, then, global civil society first surfaced in earlier centuries and has greatly expanded since the 1960s owing to several forces. Some of the causes of this growth have at the same time been causes for the spread of supraterritoriality more generally. Other causes have related more specifically to civil society. Taken together, these impulses have created momentum on a considerable scale behind increased transborder civic activism. Hence it seems most unlikely that global civil society will shrink in the foreseeable future and all the more probable that it will further expand.

How Has Global Civil Society Affected Politics?

Having assessed causes, what of the consequences? In what ways and to what extent has the growth of global civil society changed the workings of politics? Several broad repercussions can be highlighted: multilayered governance; some privatisation of governance; and moves to reconstruct collective identities, citizenship and democracy. Together these five developments have contributed to the end of sovereign statehood. That said, the extent of these changes should not be overstated. For example, the rise of global civil society has on no count brought an end to the territorial state, national loyalties and party politics. The following paragraphs elaborate these various matters in turn.

Taking the first point first, global civic activism has often contributed to the contemporary turn toward multilayered governance. Prior to accelerated globalisation – and particularly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – regulation was focused almost exclusively on national-level laws and institutions. Governance effectively meant government: the centralised territorial state. However, recent decades have brought a general retreat from ‘nationalised’ governance with concurrent trends of devolution, regionalisation and globalisation. As a result, agencies at substate and suprastate levels have obtained greater initiative and impact in politics. Governance has shifted from a unidimensionality of statism to a multidimensionality of local, national, regional and global layers of regulation.²⁷

The growth of global civil society has not been the sole force behind this development, of course, but civic groups have frequently furthered the trend. Global business associations, grassroots organisations, NGOs, trade unions and so on have directed their lobbying at whatever layer of governance seems relevant to their cause. Thus, for example, transborder development cooperation groups have often engaged with provincial and local authorities in the South. Various women’s organisations have engaged at a regional level with European Union bodies. Several trade union federations have engaged with transworld economic institutions like the IMF and the WTO. Almost all of the major regional and global governance agencies have by now established institutional mechanisms for liaison with civil society, both at their head offices and in their member countries.²⁸ Indeed, it could be argued that, through this engagement, civic associations have – whether intentionally or inadvertently – lent increased legitimacy to suprastate governance.

²⁷I have elaborated this point in ‘The Globalization of World Politics’, in J. Baylis and S. Smith (eds), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 13–30.

²⁸P. Spiro, ‘New Global Communities: Nongovernmental Organizations in International Decision-Making Institutions’, *Washington Quarterly*, 18 (1994) 45–56; Weiss and Gordenker, *op cit*; Willetts, *op cit*; P.J. Simmons, ‘Learning to Live with NGOs’, *Foreign Policy*, no. 111 (Fall 1998).

Regarding the second general consequence, that of privatised governance, global civil society has often become directly involved in the formulation and implementation of regulations. Not only has contemporary governance become dispersed across different geographical levels, but it has also extended beyond the public sector. Various nonofficial bodies have thereby acquired regulatory functions. This trend, too, has reduced state-centrism in politics.²⁹

Global civil society has contributed to this development on several counts. For one thing, as already mentioned in the preceding section, many official agencies have turned to civic associations to help execute policies, especially social welfare programmes. For example, the share of official development assistance from the OECD countries that is channelled through NGOs rose from 4.5 per cent in 1989 to 14 per cent in 1993.³⁰ Likewise, much humanitarian relief has come to flow through transborder organisations like CARE (with an income of \$586 million in 1995) and the aptly named *Médecins sans frontières* ('doctors without borders', with an income of \$252 million in 1996).³¹

Civil society associations have also on a number of occasions entered official channels of policy making, thereby further blurring the public/private divide in governance. For example, some civic organisations have accepted invitations from states like Australia and the Netherlands to occupy places on government delegations to UN-sponsored conferences. The African National Congress, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Palestine Liberation Organisation have held (non-voting) seats in the UN General Assembly. Several proposals in the 1990s have called for a 'People's

²⁹A.C. Cutler *et al.* (eds), *Private Authority in International Affairs* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

³⁰Ghils, p. 422; G. Windsperger, 'NGOs and the IMF: Shared Goals – Different Approaches', *IMF Staff News* (March 1997) p. 7. See also M. Edwards and D. Hulme (eds), *Too Close for Comfort? Donors, NGOs and States* (London: Macmillan, 1996); A. Van Rooy (ed.), *Civil Society and the Aid Industry* (London: Earthscan, 1998); I. Smillie and H. Helmich (eds), *Stakeholders: Government-NGO Partnerships for International Development* (London: Earthscan, 1999).

³¹I. Smillie, 'At Sea in a Sieve? Trends and Issues in the Relationship between Northern NGOs and Northern Governments', in Smillie and Helmich, pp. 17–18.

Assembly' of civil society representatives to be created in the United Nations alongside the General Assembly of states. Certain environmental groups have held observer status in the body that oversees implementation of the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. The International Council of Scientific Unions played an important advisory role in setting up the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 1988. Some critics worry that such incorporation into official governance may limit the critical and creative potentials of civil society.

On further occasions global civil society has promoted a full-scale privatisation of governance, in which official agencies have little or no involvement. For example, the Ford Foundation has insisted that its grants should not be subject to scrutiny or approval by state authorities. In global finance, business organisations like the International Federation of Stock Exchanges, the International Primary Market Association, the International Securities Market Association, and the International Council of Securities Associations have between them loosely filled the role of a transworld securities and exchange commission. The International Accounting Standards Committee and the International Federation of Accountants have developed the main global accountancy and auditing norms currently in use. Such activities take what others have termed 'governance without government' to an extreme.³²

A third general way that the growth of global civil society has altered the contours of politics relates to collective identities, that is, the ways that people form group affiliations and communal solidarity. The period of state-centrism in governance (at its height during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries) was paralleled by a period of nation-centrism in collective identities. Indeed, the two conditions strongly reinforced each other. Although recent decades of large-scale globalisation have not dissolved state-nations (i.e. national communities that correspond to

³²J.N. Rosenau and E.-O. Czempiel (eds), *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

territorial states), this form of collective identity has lost its previous position of overwhelming primacy. In the late twentieth century world politics is also deeply shaped by substate solidarities like ethno-nations and by nonterritorial, transborder communities based on class, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation and other aspects of identity.³³

Global civic activity has clearly contributed to this trend toward pluralism. Many transborder associations have united people on the basis of nonterritorial identity: for example, as workers, people of colour, Muslims or gay men. To take but one specific illustration of this altered identity politics, over 30,000 women in civic groups attended the NGO Forum and Fourth United Nations Conference on Women, held at Beijing in 1995.³⁴ Meanwhile bodies like the World Economic Forum and the Institute of International Finance (IIF, which links over 300 financial service providers headquartered in 56 countries) have helped to forge something of a global managerial class.

Transborder associations have also in various cases promoted the development of ethnic identities. For example, a number of environmental NGOs have supported indigenous peoples' movements in Africa, the Americas and the Indian Subcontinent. Transborder networks have also helped diasporas of Armenians, Irish, Kurds, Palestinians, Sikhs and Timorese to gain political force. Both across and within states, then, global civil society has promoted increased diversity in the identities that stimulate and shape political action.

Shifts in the shape of collective identities under the influence of globalisation have been closely connected with shifts in the construction of citizenship, that is, the set of rights

³³I have elaborated these points in 'The Geography of Collective Identities in a Globalizing World', *Review of International Political Economy*, 3 (1996) 565–607.

³⁴A. Mawle, 'Women, Environment and the United Nations', in F. Dodds (ed.), *The Way Forward: Beyond Agenda 21* (London: Earthscan, 1997) p. 155.

and duties that constitute persons as members of a socio-political community.³⁵ In the statist and nationalist world that prevailed prior to the 1960s, citizenship was a question of legal nationality and the various entitlements and obligations that are associated with that status. Although this national-state framework of citizenship remains important, it has become insufficient by itself in a world of large-scale globalisation. For example, the growth of the global human rights regime since the 1940s has institutionalised numerous supraterritorial entitlements. Concurrently, global communications and global ecological changes have heightened senses of duties beyond borders for 'world citizens'.³⁶ Millions of people have, where possible, resorted to dual or multiple national citizenships to accommodate their post-territorialist lives. Meanwhile some environmentalists, feminists and other radical critics have attacked the very institution of territorial nation-state citizenship, regarding it as antithetical to ecological integrity, gender equality or other vital nonterritorial concerns.

Global civil society has also figured significantly in this reconfiguration of politics. Indeed, many transborder civic activists regard themselves as world citizens in addition to (or even more than) national-state citizens. Such a self-concept has helped, for example, to spur human rights advocates in their promotion global conventions of children's, women's and worker's rights. More recently, civic groups have spearheaded a campaign to establish a permanent International Criminal Court.³⁷ Humanitarian relief organisations, development cooperation groups, environmentalists and various other civil society associations have, both implicitly and explicitly, advanced the notion that people have global civic duties.

³⁵B.S. Turner and P. Hamilton (eds), *Citizenship: Critical Concepts* (London: Routledge, 1994) preface.

³⁶Cf. R. Bauböck, *Transnational Citizenship: Membership and Rights in International Migration* (Aldershot: Elgar, 1994).

³⁷See the website of the NGO Coalition for an International Criminal Court, <http://www.igc.apc.org/icc>.

The various developments described above all raise questions about – and point to changes in – concepts and practices of democracy. Prior to contemporary large-scale globalisation, ‘rule by and for the people’ meant rule of the *state* by and for the *nation*. Yet today governance involves more than the state, community involves more than the nation, and citizenship involves more than national entitlements and obligations. Thus issues of democracy like participation, consultation, open debate, representativeness, transparency and accountability are not adequately addressed in terms of territorial institutions and communities alone.

Global civil society has broadened the scope of democratic practice. Transborder civic associations have created additional channels of popular participation, additional modes of popular consultation, additional forums for popular debate, new sites of popular representation alongside elected councils and legislatures, and new popular pressures for open and responsible governance. These innovations have been especially important in bringing citizens into closer touch with regional and transworld regulatory agencies. That said, global civil society has by no means fully countered the many democratic deficits that exist in contemporary politics, as the next section of this paper will elaborate.

In sum, the growth of global civil society has, in tandem with the spread of supraterritoriality more generally, shifted the framework of politics away from its previous core principle of sovereign statehood. Multilayered and partially privatised governance, pluralistic identity politics, and new forms of citizenship and democracy all contradict traditional practices of sovereignty. No longer does – or can – one site of authority exercise supreme, comprehensive, absolute and exclusive rule over a discrete jurisdiction. The territorial state has lost the attribute of sovereignty (as it was traditionally understood), and no other institution of governance looks likely to take

over this mantle.³⁸ Hence the expansion of global civil society has – together with parallel developments like the growth of global communications, global markets and so on – figured significantly in the shift from sovereign to post-sovereign governance.

Of course the end of sovereignty has to be distinguished from the end of the territorial state: a world without sovereignty does not imply a world without states. Indeed, on the whole the post-sovereign state is as robust as its sovereign predecessor. States can no longer exercise sole and total jurisdiction over an assigned territory and population, but they have retained many other capacities and have also gained some new ones like computerised surveillance.³⁹ Most people and most prevailing laws still define citizenship first of all in terms of state affiliation. Thus states continue to exert major influence over civil society, global and otherwise. (Of course some governments – such as those in the OECD countries – have considerably greater leverage *vis-à-vis* civil society than others – such as those in much of Africa.) Also, given their persistent significance, states continue to be a prime target of civic activism, both territorial and global.

Similarly, in respect of collective identities, the end of nation-centrism in the face of globalisation has on no count heralded the end of nations. On the contrary, state-nations persist across the world, and they have been joined by scores of ethno-nations at a substate level and several region-nations (Arab, European, etc.) at a suprastate level. Indeed, as indicated earlier, global civic associations have often promoted the national projects of indigenous peoples and diasporas. More subtly, many transborder networks have also reproduced the nationality principle by organising themselves in terms of national branches.

³⁸Some authors speak of new practices of ‘pooled sovereignty’, ‘joint sovereignty’, etc.; however, such notions fundamentally contradict the ideas of supremacy and exclusivity that have marked every previous conception of sovereignty.

³⁹See sources cited in note 27; and L. Weiss, *The Myth of the Powerless State: Governing the Economy in a Global Era* (Oxford: Polity, 1998).

Finally, the new forms of collective identity, citizenship and democracy advanced by global civil society have by no means signalled the demise of party politics. True, party memberships and election turnouts have declined during recent years in most liberal democracies. Some global civic associations have followings and funds that dwarf those of most political parties. Many citizens have turned to civic activism at least partly out of disillusionment with traditional party politics. Nevertheless, control of the state still confers substantial power in the contemporary globalising world, and competition within and between political parties remains a key way to gain governmental office in most countries.

In short, the contemporary growth of global civil society has encouraged several important shifts in political institutions and processes, but the extent of those changes must not be exaggerated. In particular, the post-sovereign world includes ample space for states, nations and parties. Global civil society has not replaced older channels of politics so much as opened up additional dimensions.

The Promises and Perils of Global Civil Society

Having considered definitions, causes and consequences of global civil society, we have established some basis for normative judgements. In a word, is the growth of supraterritorial civic activity a positive or a negative thing? As one might expect, this straightforward question does not yield a straightforward answer.

In whatever domain – global, regional, national or local – civil society is not inherently good or evil. Some enthusiasts have depicted the ‘third sector’ as an arena of virtue that counters domination in government and exploitation in the market.⁴⁰ Yet civic associations can themselves be oppressive hierarchical bureaucracies, and civic activity

⁴⁰E.g. D.C. Korten, *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian, 1990).

can involve violence (both deliberate and unintentional) toward vulnerable persons and groups.

Hence we have both civil and *uncivil* society. Civic associations can improve or damage policy. They can increase or reduce human security. They can promote or undermine social equity. They can enhance or impair democracy. In short, we need to assess each association and campaign in global civil society on its own merits.

Of course we need criteria against which to make such judgements. The following paragraphs first suggest seven general ways that civil society can contribute to a positive course of globalisation. Then four potential dangers of global civic activity are highlighted.

One way that civil society can advance a humane course of globalisation is by *securing material welfare*. As noted earlier, voluntary associations can offer an alternative to the state and the market in the production and delivery of goods and services. Indeed, sometimes civil society mechanisms have supplied welfare more efficiently and equitably than the public and private sectors. Many of these civic programmes catch vulnerable circles with safety nets related to education, health, housing, and other material needs. However, the economic initiatives of civil society can also extend beyond the soup kitchen. For example, many civic associations have in the late twentieth century developed schemes of so-called 'micro-credits' for groups like women and the rural poor that commercial lenders tend to overlook.⁴¹ In addition, several development cooperation groups have promoted alternative marketing schemes that provide producers (e.g. of coffee and textiles) in the South with higher returns than commercial dealers offer.

⁴¹Cf. S. Johnson and B. Rogaly, *Microfinance and Poverty Reduction* (Oxford: Oxfam/ACTIONAID, 1997).

Second, global civil society can be an important conduit for *civic education*. In particular, transborder civic associations can improve public understanding of the various aspects of globalisation, alerting citizens to altered conditions of geography, politics, economics, ecology and culture in the contemporary world. Civic groups can in this vein prepare handbooks and information kits, produce audio-visual presentations, organise workshops, circulate newsletters, supply information to the mass media, maintain listservs and websites on the Internet, and develop curricular materials for schools and universities. It is in good part thanks to supraterritorial civil society that the world public has become more (albeit perhaps still not adequately) aware of global issues. As people become gain greater cognisance of the new geography and its effects, the chances that globalisation undermines human security and social justice can be reduced.

Third, global civil society can make positive contributions by *giving voice*. In other words, supraterritorial civic associations can provide channels through which citizens relay information, testimonial and analysis to each other, to market actors, and to governance agencies. In particular, global civil society can hand the microphone to circles like indigenous peoples, smallholder farmers, the urban poor and women who tend to get a limited hearing through firms and official agencies. In this way transborder civic activity can be a significant force for equity and democracy.

Fourth, global civic associations can while giving voice also *fuel debate*. Inputs from civil society can put alternative perspectives, methodologies and proposals on the agenda. For example, a number of civic groups have been instrumental in questioning orthodox economic theory, raising ecological issues, introducing qualitative assessments of poverty, and promoting various proposals for debt reduction in the South. Thanks to such contributions, discussions of social issues become more critical and creative. Wide-ranging, open debate is vital to a healthy democracy and can moreover often produce more clear and effective policy.

Fifth, civil society can enhance politics in the contemporary globalising world by *increasing transparency and accountability*. Many workings of global markets and global regulation have fallen outside public scrutiny, thereby increasing the dangers of abuse. Initiatives by civic associations can help bring into the open, for instance, global financial dealings, the activities of transborder corporations, and the operations of suprastate governance agencies like the BIS and the UN system. As a result, citizens can make more informed judgements about world politics, and actors in positions of power and responsibility must do more to account for their behaviour and policy choices. For example, civil society campaigns have called to book a number of global corporate wrongs like the marketing of baby formula to poor mothers in the South who were ill able to afford it.⁴² Thanks in good part to pressure from a variety of civic organisations, the operations of the IMF and the WTO have since the mid-1990s become far more transparent.⁴³

A sixth positive effect of global civil society can be to *promote legitimation*, especially in relation to suprastate governance. Legitimacy exists when people acknowledge that an authority has a right to govern them and that they have a duty to obey its rulings. As a result of such consent, legitimate governance tends to be less violent and more easily executed than illegitimate authority. Legitimacy is also desirable on democratic grounds. In territorial states, legitimacy has traditionally been established mainly through political parties and popular suffrage; however, mechanisms such as referenda and direct elections of representatives are rarely available in respect of regional and transworld governance. Civil society can help to fill this legitimacy gap (that is, so long as the civic groups concerned maintain their own democratic credentials, an important qualification to which we will return later). With consultation and monitoring

⁴²A. Chetley, *The Politics of Baby Foods: Successful Challenges to an International Marketing Strategy* (London: Pinter, 1986).

⁴³J.A. Scholte, “‘In the Foothills’: Relations between the IMF and Civil Society”, in R. Higgott and A. Bieler (eds), *Non-State Actors and Authority in the Global System* (London: Routledge, 1999); Scholte with R. O'Brien and M. Williams, ‘The WTO and Civil Society’, *Journal of World Trade*, 33 (1999) 107–24.

activities, civic associations can influence the respect accorded (or denied) to the policies of supranational and private regulatory agencies. Likewise, global civic groups can affect the level of resources allocated to (or withheld from) governance institutions. In a word, then, civil society can act as an important check against dictatorship.

Seventh and finally, in terms of beneficial impacts, global civil society can through the various positive influences described above *enhance social cohesion*. Contributions to material welfare, civic education, public discussion and transparent, accountable, legitimate governance can all help to counter arbitrary inequalities and exclusions in society. As a result, conflict can be reduced and social integration can be increased.

In sum, a variety of major positive potentials make the furtherance of global civil society a worthwhile project for the twenty-first century. However, the operative word throughout the preceding discussion has been 'can'. Civic associations do *not* produce the above benefits automatically.

For one thing, to yield its fruits transborder civic activity needs to have adequate capacities in terms of human, material and ideational resources. In many cases to date these means have been lacking. Next to governance institutions and the market, civil society has run a very poor third in terms of supporting staff, funds, equipment and symbolic capital. Compare, for instance, the level of recognition and mobilising power of national flags and corporate logos with that of civic association insignia. So long as global civil society is underresourced, its benefits will remain largely potential rather than actual.

Furthermore, our endorsement of global civil society must be qualified with a recognition that this activism can under certain conditions have negative effects. Thus it is not only that transborder civic associations may fail, owing to capacity shortfalls,

to do good. They may also do actual damage. Civic activity can, in four broad ways, potentially detract from security, equity and democracy in contemporary globalisation.

For one thing, elements of ‘uncivil society’ can be *ill intentioned*. Such associations actively seek to undermine human well-being and social justice. Thus, for example, transborder criminal networks have become significant perpetrators of harm in the contemporary world.⁴⁴ Meanwhile various groups of racists, ultra-nationalists and fundamentalists have used global communications to preach intolerance and violence. In short, it must never be forgotten that civil society is not intrinsically virtuous.

Other initiatives in global civil society can have laudable aims but suffer from a second failing, namely *flawed policy*. Like programmes of action in the public and the private sector, civic campaigns need to be carefully conceived and astutely executed. True, an ill-informed and misdirected civil society effort can – in spite of itself – inadvertently produce beneficial results. Conversely, even the best laid plans can go awry. More usually, however, poor policy preparation and implementation runs a greater risk of causing harm, including to vulnerable social circles that well-intentioned civic associations may be aiming to help. For example, some environmentalist groups have hurt their cause with sloppy treatment of scientific evidence. The arguments of global human rights advocates have sometimes suffered from cultural illiteracy. Some relief organisations have miscalculated client needs. Some business associations have misread public sentiments. Some development advocacy groups have not gone beyond protests to proposals with respect to the workings of the liberal world economy. Some research institutes have not got beyond theoretical models to political practicalities. In sum, global civil society can fall short of its potential – and indeed can have negative impacts – when its inputs are of a low quality.

⁴⁴Cf. P. Williams, ‘Transnational Criminal Organisations and International Security’, *Survival*, 36 (1994) 96–113; J.H. Mittelman and R. Johnston, ‘The Globalization of Organized Crime, the Courtesan State, and the Corruption of Civil Society’, *Global Governance*, 5 (1999), 103–26.

A third potential fault in transborder civic activity relates to *undemocratic practice*. For reasons noted earlier, global civil society is often championed as a force for democracy: it can give voice, stimulate debate, confer legitimacy, etc. Yet civic groups – even those that actively campaign for a democratisation of official institutions and market operations – can fail to meet democratic criteria in their own internal workings. For example, some civic associations offer their members no opportunity for participation beyond the payment of subscriptions. No less than a government department or a business corporation, a civic organisation can be run with top-down managerial authoritarianism. In addition, policy making in global civic associations can be quite opaque to outsiders: in terms of who takes decisions, by what means, from among which options, and with what justifications. Civic groups can be further deficient in respect of transparency when they do not publish financial statements or even a declaration of objectives, let alone full-scale reports of their activities. Moreover, the leadership of many civic organisations is self-selected, raising troubling questions of accountability and potential conflicts of interest. In short, civil society operations are no more intrinsically democratic than programmes in the public or the private sector.

A fourth potential defect in global civil society – namely, *inadequate representation* – is arguably the most difficult shortcoming to redress and warrants more extended discussion. If civil society is suitably to provide welfare, educate citizens, give voice, fuel debate, secure transparency and accountability, establish legitimacy and promote social cohesion, then all stakeholders must have access – and preferably equal opportunities to participate. Indeed, biased access to civil society can reproduce or even enlarge structural inequalities and arbitrary privileges connected with class, gender, nationality, race, religion, and so on. Regrettably, global civil society has in practice all too often manifested these problems, thereby further calling into question its credentials for promoting security, equity and democracy.

Uneven representation in, if not downright exclusion from, transborder civic activity has taken several general forms. For one thing, residents of the North (the OECD countries) have had a far larger and stronger presence in global civil society than people from the South (the so-called 'Third World') and the East (the current and former state-socialist countries). In terms of civilisational inputs, supraterritorial civic activity has on the whole drawn much more from Western Judeo-Christian traditions than from African, Buddhist, Confucian, Eastern Orthodox, Hindu, Islamic and other cultures. In relation to gender and race, parts of global civil society have, it is true, given women and people of colour greater voice than they have generally been able to obtain through the state, the market and political parties. On the other hand, striking gender and racial inequalities have often persisted in sections of civil society like academic institutes, business associations, professional bodies and trade unions. Finally, global civil society has thus far shown a pronounced class bias. The initiative in transborder civic activity has lain disproportionately with urban-based, (relatively) high-earning, university-educated, computer-literate, English-speaking professionals. In sum, participation in global civil society has revealed many of the same patterns of inequality that have marked the globalising world more generally.

This is not to suggest that people from privileged circumstances cannot use global civic activism to advance the lot of their disadvantaged fellow citizens. As indicated earlier, global civil society has done much to advance human security and social justice. Nevertheless, subordinated groups have often lacked adequate opportunities to speak for themselves through transborder civil society, and civic campaigners from elite circles have frequently been remiss when it comes to closely and systematically consulting their supposed constituencies in vulnerable quarters.

In a welcome trend, recent years have witnessed greater sensitivity in some quarters to issues of representation and participation in global civil society. A new rhetoric of the 1990s has underlined 'dialogue' and 'partnership', particularly between South-based

and North-based groups. Illustrating this spirit, a global conference of development advocates in July 1998 produced the Harare Declaration on Development Relationships, with the aim of overcoming a 'parent-child' mode of interaction between Northern and Southern civic activists. Many civic organisations have also become more proactive in promoting women and people of colour to positions of leadership. On the other hand, relatively few initiatives have yet emerged to address civilisational and class inequalities in global civil society. Groups like the International Network of Engaged Buddhists and the Participation Resource Action Network (which has linked poor people across four continents) remain rarities.⁴⁵ In this respect radical critics have grounds to regard global civil society in its current condition as predominantly a 'western' and 'bourgeois' project.

Clearly, then, there are no grounds for complacency regarding the contemporary growth of global civil society. Although this development holds substantial potential for good, it also carries significant dangers. The challenge is to take global civic activity forward in ways that minimise the potential pitfalls and maximise the potential benefits.

Conclusion: Toward the Future

Although its proportions can be overstated, global civil society has become an important feature of contemporary politics. As elaborated earlier, civic engagement with supraterritorial spaces has figured in the emergence of multilayered governance, in some privatisation of regulation, and in redrawing the contours of collective identities, citizenship and democracy. In the process, civic associations have revealed significant potentials both to enhance and to undermine security and justice in the

⁴⁵Cf. Sulak Sivaraksa, *Global Healing: Essays and Interviews on Structural Violence, Social Development and Spiritual Transformation* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development and Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, 1999); J. Gaventa, 'Learning across Boundaries: Strengthening Participation in North and South', paper for the NGOs in a Global Future Conference, University of Birmingham, January 1999.

globalising world. On the (it would seem reasonable) assumption that transborder civic activity is unlikely to disappear and quite likely to expand in the future, we need to consider how its further development can be kept on the most positive possible course. Five general suggestions might be offered in this regard.

First, as intimated earlier, much attention needs to be given to *building capacity*, particularly in respect of global civic groups that represent underprivileged circles. Partly this is a question of increasing funds, in order to relieve the precarious position of many worthy civic associations. However, money is not by itself sufficient. After all, small budgets have not prevented, for example, women's groups from making a major impact on official agendas and public attitudes. Capacity building needs to be carefully targeted, *inter alia* at staff training in advocacy tactics, public speaking, cross-cultural communication, and leadership skills. In addition, civic associations need to develop modes of organisation that most effectively inform and mobilise their constituencies and at the same time most successfully advance their policy goals *vis-à-vis* governance and market actors. Where civic groups currently lack global communications technologies, acquisition of these tools should have a high priority.

Second, increased efforts could be directed at *expanding involvement* in global civil society. Transborder civic activism would better realise the various potential benefits detailed earlier if the campaigns could attract larger followings and higher profiles than most associations have acquired thus far. Greater emphasis on outreach initiatives to the general public would help especially to advance the promise of global civil society in respect of civic education and the development of supraterritorial citizenship.

Third, the future development of global civil society should focus on *enhancing diversity*. As stressed at the close of the last section, transborder civic activism has to date been insufficiently representative. Existing efforts to expand access for women and people of colour should continue, and they should be supplemented by greater

attempts to involve rural circles, underclasses and non-western cultures. Otherwise global civil society runs grave dangers of serving as an instrument of social inequality.

Fourth, other potential shortfalls in democratic practice noted earlier suggest a need for *increasing vigilance* in respect of global civil society. This is not to support intrusive police-state surveillance of transborder civic groups, though democratic governance institutions have as much right and duty to monitor civic associations as vice versa. In addition, civil society workers can be urged to nurture a more self-critical attitude toward their practices, thereby catching and correcting their own democratic deficits. At present most civic associations lack a programme of regular and systematic evaluation, conducted either internally or by external assessors (other than financial auditors).

Finally, for political as well as intellectual reasons, the future development of global civil society would be advanced by further research. In part such investigations need to examine the general dynamics of globalisation, in order that transborder civic groups (and others) can better understand the context in which they are operating. In addition, much more research is required on global civil society itself, especially empirical studies that assess the experiences of concrete associations and campaigns. Particular attention could be given in this regard to providing more marginalised circles of civil society with resources to undertake or commission research that addresses their agendas.

These five suggestions reinforce the theme, expressed throughout this discussion, that global civil society *can* be a force for security and justice in the contemporary world *if* it is carefully moulded to serve those ends. Transborder civic associations have great potential to help steer globalisation toward efficiency, equity, democracy and ecological sustainability. However, complacency about these activities could lead them to promote the opposite results. A long haul of committed endeavour still lies ahead.

