

TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS:

Contention and Institutions in International Politics

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ABSTRACT

Recent scholars have broadened the study of transnational relations from political economy to include contentious international politics. This is a refreshing trend, but most of them go directly from “globalization” or some other such process to transnational social movements and thence to a global civil society. In addition, they have so far failed to distinguish adequately among movements, non-governmental organizations and transnational networks and do not specify their relations with states and international institutions. In particular, few mechanisms are proposed to link domestic actors to transnational ones and to states and international institutions. This paper argues that mass-based transnational social movements are hard to construct, difficult to maintain, and have very different relations to states and international institutions than more routinized international NGOs or activist networks. These latter forms may be encouraged both by states and international institutions and by the growth of a cosmopolitan class of transnational activists. Rather than being seen as the antipodes of transnational contention, international institutions offer resources, opportunities and incentives for the formation of actors in transnational politics. . If transnational social movements form it will be through a second-stage process of domestication of international conflict.

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INTRODUCTION¹

For two exceptional centuries," declares Charles Tilly,

European states and their extensions elsewhere succeeded remarkably in circumscribing and controlling the resources within their perimeters... But in our era...at least in Europe, the era of strong states is now ending (1993:3).

Tilly happily admits that his declaration is informed by a "series of speculations, conjectures, and hypotheses". But let us, at least for the moment, assume that his instinct is right; that the strong, consolidated Westphalian state really *is* in decline. The question for students of contentious politics and international relations is whether the resulting gap a) is cyclical, and will thus be filled by states' oft-proven capacity for adjustment and renewal; b) is being filled by forms of non-territorial institutional governance; or c) is providing space for social movements and other non-governmental forms of collective action to thrust forward into political space formally occupied by institutions; or d) some combination of the three.

While some scholars have predicted increased power for new agencies of international governance (Young ed. 1997); many others see the new world of transnational politics in more contentious, social-movement terms. Some boldly foresee global social movements reaching across transnational space to contest multilateral economic institutions (O'Brien, et al., eds. 2000), creating something resembling a "global civil society" (Wapner 1996) or bringing into

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existence a “world polity” (Boli and Thomas eds. 1999). Others, more modestly but still predicting major challenges to the world of states, see “transnational activist networks” representing the interests of resource-poor actors (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Still others see a combination of governmental and non-governmental, state and international actors intersecting (Risse 2000).

My point of view is that these predictions go too directly from “globalization” or some other such process to transnational social movements and thence to a global civil society. They fail to adequately define social movements, non-governmental organizations and transnational networks and do not specify their relations with each other or with states and international institutions. In particular, few mechanisms are proposed that link domestic actors to transnational ones and to states and international institutions. I will argue that mass-based transnational social movements, which I define in terms of contentious collective action, are hard to construct, difficult to maintain, and have very different relations to states and international institutions than the less contentious family of international NGOs or activist networks. These latter forms are encouraged both by states and international institutions and by the growth of a cosmopolitan class of transnational activists. If transnational social movements form it will be through a second-stage process of domestication of international conflict in which international institutions serve as a magnet. Rather than being seen as the antipode of transnational contention, international institutions may offer resources, opportunities and incentives for actors in transnational politics.

Three Cautions

Before turning to these issues, it won't hurt to remind ourselves of three lessons from history – too often forgotten by those who see a global civil society appearing in short order:

- States remain dominant in most areas of policy -- for example, in maintaining domestic security -- even if they have become weaker in their ability to control capital flows (Krasner 1995; Risse 2000; Spruyt 1994:ch. 9). States still control their borders and exercise legal dominion within them. Citizens can travel more easily than they did; they can form networks beyond borders (Keck and Sikkink 1998); but they still *live* in states and -- in democratic ones, at least -- they have available the opportunities, the networks, and the well-known repertoires of national politics (Tarrow 1998; Tilly 1995). Those are incentives to operate on native ground that the hypothetical attractions of "global civil society" cannot easily match.
- Although transnational action is frequently linked causally to the recent wave of "globalization" (Rosenau 1990, 1999), we really do not know yet if the former is increasing and the latter has been around for at least a century -- even longer, if we include the "Atlantic" revolution of the 18th century or the Protestant reformation (Jacobson 1979:11; Keck and Sikkink 1998:ch. 2). These are not mere historical quibbles; since transnational organizations appeared well before "globalization", they suggest that we will need to specify mechanisms other than today's version of economic interdependence as the sources for increases in transnational organization and contention today (Waltz 1999).
- Nor are social movements, transnational networks and NGOs the only agents operating transnationally: *States* have always reached beyond their borders and played a key transnational role (Huntington 1973). They are doing so increasingly -- notably by signing international agreements, interfering in the internal lives of [usually weaker] states, and building international institutions. These state-led institutions are usually designed to fulfill state purposes, often to respond to transnational activities that states cannot control (Keohane and Nye 1974) or to provide "insurance" that other states will not defect from

their commitments (Keohane 1989). The dominant states in the international system have a profound effect on transnational relations, not only by controlling non-state actors but often by subsidizing them (Uvin 2000:15), and providing models of transnational politics around their own domestic templates (Huntington 1973). In both respects a key role is played by the United States, at once the target of much transnational organizing and the state most supportive of NGO activity (Uvin 2000: 21).

I will begin this review with a rapid survey of the changes in the treatment of transnational politics in the International Relations literature since the 1970s in (for similar efforts see Jacobson 2000 and Risse 2000). In Part Two, I will outline the contributions of a new group of scholars – students of contentious politics – to this literature. In Part three, I define the three main types of transnational actors that appear in the literature – transnational social movements (TSMs), international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), and transnational advocacy networks (TANs) – and distinguish them from each other. In Part four I turn to the hypothetical relations between transnational contention and international institutions. I will close with a number of research questions about the study of transnational contention.

FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW TRANSNATIONALISM

The last three decades have seen a paradigm shift in the way political scientists and others have looked at transnational politics. Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane – who popularized the term in the early 1970s – were reacting against the “realist” paradigm in international relations (1971: 372-379). In that well-known paradigm, international organizations “are merely instruments of governments, and therefore unimportant in their own right” (1974:39). Nye and Keohane criticized the realist approach and its assumption that states are

unitary actors, and proposed an alternative one – what they called the world politics paradigm: (1971:379-395). Their work triggered a debate that has gone through many phases in international relations theory since then.

Realism – with its emphasis on states as the only important actors in international politics -- has remained the stated or unstated target of much of the field of transnational politics. This fixation is unfortunate, since it has made it difficult for students of transnational politics to assess the role of states without looking over their shoulder at the realists (Risse 2000:2). For example, few analysts since Huntington have made much of the fact that the world's remaining hegemon has a concept of international relations that is fully congruent with its dominant pluralist model of domestic politics (but see Uvin 2000).

The debate on transnational politics has taken several stages. After, first, focussing in their edited book *Transnational Relations and World Politics*, on *all* forms of transnational activity (“contacts, coalitions, and interaction across state boundaries that are not controlled by the central foreign policy organs of governments”, 1971:xi), Keohane and Nye narrowed the concept of transnationalism to the international activities of nongovernmental actors (1974:41) – distinguishing these from “transgovernmental actors” -- a term they now use to refer to “sub-units of governments on those occasions when they act relatively autonomously from higher authority in international politics” (p. 41) – and from “international organizations”, which they define as “multilevel linkages, norms, and institutions between governments prescribing behavior in particular situations.”

Though it was tighter than their original one, even Keohane and Nye's sharpened 1974 concept of “transnational relations” covered a lot of ground. It was useful in directing attention to “the tremendous increase in the number and significance of private international interactions in recent decades and the much larger and diverse number of private individuals and groups

engaging in such interactions” (Huntington: 335). But it had three unfortunately narrowing effects:

- First, since their work coincided with the discovery, or rediscovery, of the field of international political economy, this influenced scholars to focus mainly on transnational *economic* relations and, in particular, on the multinational corporation. Indeed, many of the contributions to *Transnational Relations and World Politics* did exactly that. Even Keohane’s 1996 reader with Helen Milner is limited largely to economic relations (Keohane and Milner 1996). To the extent that students of transnational relations looked at contentious politics, it was thus usually in the form of resistance to transnational economic penetration (Arrighi and Silver 1984; Walton 1989); to the extent that they studied states’ internal politics, it was mainly through foreign economic policy-making. This political economy focus distracted scholars from recognizing until recently that much of transnational organizing deals with political and humanitarian issues like refugees, violence against women and children, and human rights (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink eds, 1999).
- Nye and Keohane recognized transnational contention only under the narrow heading of *the diffusion of ideas and attitudes*, treating them separately from their more sustained discussion of “international pluralism” – by which they meant “the linking of national interest groups in transnational structures, usually involving transnational organizations for purposes of coordination“ (1971:xviii). This disjunction of transnational contention from transnational nongovernmental organizations has persisted (Jacobson 2000); as a result, there was no integration between the field of transnational politics and the growing field of contentious politics until the 1990s, and some IR specialists, despite their interest in “global social movements” barely draw on this literature (O’Brien, et al., eds., 2000).

- Although they did not explicitly say so, Nye and Keohane's emphasis on free-wheeling transnational interaction left the implication that transnational activity occurs at the *cost* of national states. This implication – vigorously combated by Huntington in his critique of their work (1973: 342-ff) – left several questions about the role of states in transnational politics unasked: When will states stimulate transnational activity in their interests and on behalf of which internal interest groups? When will they create international institutions that provide a forum for nonstate actors? When they will provide models for transnational activity isomorphic with their own way of conceiving the world? And when they will advance the interests of nonstate actors?

It was the waning of the cold war and the enormous diffusion of transnational non-governmental organizations in the 1980s and 1990s (Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucci 1997; Boli and Thomas ed, 1999) that opened up the field of transnational politics beyond political economy and took it in new directions. This was reflected in three streams of work in the 1980s and 1990s: work by sociological institutionalists like John Meyer and his associates from Stanford (see Boli and Thomas ed., for a full bibliography); research on the domestic structures underpinning transnational relations by political scientists; and a newer turn towards constructivism that brings IR specialists and students of contentious politics together.

Sociological Institutionalism

We can deal briefly with the Stanford school of institutional sociology (see Boli and Thomas ed., 1999) for a full treatment and bibliography). Early in the 1980s, coming out of a world systems perspective, John Meyer observed that institutions and the norms that they embody are frequently observed in widely dispersed parts of the world. World systems theorists had noticed this too but assigned responsibility for it to the profit-making needs of

core capitalism. Meyer found isomorphism in so many sectors of human activity – from educational institutions to welfare systems to state structures -- that he detached the phenomenon from capitalism and assigned it to a global process of rationalization.

The discovery of transnational isomorphism in norms and institutions could lead investigators to examine the role of actors of diffusion, and this could connect directly with the processes of transnational politics. But although some students developed models of diffusion (see Strang and Soule 1998 for a review), this was not the main thrust of the Stanford school. Meyer and his collaborators and students were more concerned with *mapping* isomorphism than in understanding the mechanisms of diffusion – and in fact, the diffusion process in their work is more frequently inferred from the presence of similar structures than traced through the actions of concrete actors. Some scholars influenced by Meyer (for example, Martha Finnemore 1996) do focus on actors and organizations; others (like Yasemin Soysal (1994) focus on political norms, like citizenship with implications for political action; and others infer intra-national causation from transnational/national correlations (Loya 2000). For the most part, however, the Stanford school has contributed more to our knowledge of the commonalities of norms and institutions between borders than to our understanding of the social mechanisms and political processes that cross them.

Domestic Structures and Transnational Relations

Meanwhile, new work by international relations specialists focussing on domestic structures attempted to open the field of transnational politics beyond the old realist/non-realist debate (Risse-Kappen, ed. 1995). Risse-Kappen and his colleagues revived attention to “*transgovernmental* politics” (see especially the chapter by Cameron); they included transnational economic relations but also went beyond them; and they related transnational politics to international institutions and domestic politics. Two changes in particular were notable, both in

their book and in the new literature that followed it: first, a deliberate attempt to deal with the intersections between transnational relations and “domestic structure”; second, a more normatively charged concept of transnational relations.

Nye and Keohane – and especially the latter – had called for attention to the domestic sources of transnational politics (see especially Keohane’s Presidential address to the ISA in Keohane 1989). But the early transnational literature provided little purchase on which non-state political variables might prove important in tracking the domestic scope and directions of transnational politics. Risse-Kappen and his collaborators attacked this problem deliberately: “Under similar international conditions,” he wrote; “differences in domestic structures determine the variation in the policy impact of transnational actors” (1995:25). In order to gain impact, transnational actors must, first, gain access to the political system of their target state and, second, generate and/or contribute to winning policy coalitions (p. 25).

Risse-Kappen and his collaborators’ approach generated predictions about how variations in domestic structure would affect the impact of transnational actors. For example, Risse-Kappen argued, political systems that are open and decentralized and societies that are more pluralistic will be more open to transnational penetration than closed and hierarchical ones. However, as Matthew Evangelista showed, the need for coalition building in such systems can pose formidable obstacles to transnational actors once they gain a purchase; conversely, the “closed” Soviet system was harder for transnational arms control advocates to access but – once contacts were established – they could have great impact (Evangelista 1995; 1999).

There were three main weaknesses in the “domestic structure” argument:

- First, it was extremely generic, including elements as general as “political culture,” “openness” (eg., openness to *whom?*) and pluralism

- Second, it could not predict why some transnational actors operating in the same context succeed while others fail (cf., Keck and Sikkink 1998: 202)
- Third, it made no clear distinctions between different types of transnational actors – indifferently lumping INGOs, social movements, and transnational advocacy networks together.

Those who followed Risse-Kappen and his colleagues after 1995 offered a partial answer to these problems: with a constructivist turn that focussed attention on the resonance between transnational goals and domestic norms.

The Normative Turn

The move towards norms in the study of transnational activism was part of a more general discovery of “constructivism” by IR scholars in the 1990s (Risse 2000:2).² In various areas of international relations, norms were defined as "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity" (P. Katzenstein 1996: 5). This re-kindled the controversy with realism but gave it a new twist (Checkel 1997). If norms could be shown to have an autonomous role in structuring international debate irrespective of the policies of strong states, and it could be shown that interests are constituted and reconstituted around learning, norm-diffusion, and identity shift, then non-state factors in transnational space could be shown to have teeth – and not only hegemonic states.

Much creative work has grown out of the concern with norms and identities in the international system:

² For a review and some stimulating hypotheses, see Finnemore and Sikkink 1998. Also see Finnemore 1996, Katzenstein 1996, Klotz 1995, Price 1997 and Thomas forthcoming.

- First, transnational normative consensus could be shown to result in international agreements that were capable of constraining state behavior (Klotz 1995; Price 1997).
- Second, international normative agreements could create political opportunities for domestic actors living under governments which would otherwise be reluctant to tolerate dissidence (Thomas forthcoming, Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999).
- Third, even where international normative consensus was lacking, strong states could endow international institutions with the authority to enforce behavior consistent with these norms – as in the U.N. and NATO interventions in Yugoslavia.
- Fourth, norms could contribute to the construction of new identities, which – in some cases – could bridge national identities, providing a normative basis for transnational coalitions or principled issue networks.

But the focus on norms could become a problem. First, what of the considerable amount of transnational activity that is driven by material interests – for example like labor internationalism (Blyton et al 2000; Waterman 1998). Second, as in the broader constructivist paradigm, the problem of where norms are *lodged* in transnational relations is not always clear.. Third, the assumption of normative consensus underlying much of this work is challenged by the often-contested nature of international norms. Finally, if norms are more than the result of contingent coalitions of interest, it will have to be shown that they are actually translated into state policies (Fox 1999; Risse 1999). Like sociological institutionalism, the normative turn is better at mapping changes in world culture than in tracing the mechanisms through which transnational factors influence domestic politics.

These three developments in the study of transnational politics have had an unexpected benefit: helping to provide a bridge between international relations scholars and

a previously-distinct tradition -- the field of contentious politics. In the 1980s and early 1990s, this group of scholars had already absorbed and profited from constructivism (Melucci 1988, 1996; Snow et al 1986); it also had a well-grounded tradition of studying the impact of domestic structures of opportunity and constraint on social movements (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, eds. 1996; Tarrow 1998); and increasingly, social movement scholars were becoming conscious of transnational and international influences on transnational contentious politics (McAdam 1998; Tarrow 1998: ch. 11; Tilly 1993). Let us turn to this tradition's contributions to the new transnational politics.

CONTENTIOUS TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS³

The marriage between social movement and international relations scholars was scattered but dramatic. It had four main sources in real-world politics: grassroots insurgencies, like Chiapas, which framed their claims globally and sought international support from sympathetic foreign groups and INGOs; international protest events like the "Battle of Seattle" which brought together coalitions of transnational and national groups against highly visible targets like the World Trade Organization or the IMF; the successes that some transnational activist coalitions gained against some national states in some situations -- for example, in aid of the Brazilian rubber tappers (Keck 1995), and the activism of international NGOs within and around international institutions (Fox and Brown eds, 1998; Jacobson 2000; O'Brien, et al., eds., 2000; Stiles, ed. 2000; Willetts, ed., 1996) and international treaty-writing (Price 1997).

³ For an on-line bibliography on which this section is based, see Tarrow and Acostavalle 1999.

These are very different kinds of evidence at different levels collected through a variety of methods. The first type of evidence relates to fundamentally *domestic* contention that is framed by activists as transnational and enjoys international support. The second type depends very much on particular domestic and international opportunities and resources and -- as the Washington and Philadelphia follow-ups to Seattle showed -- is difficult to sustain. The third type is mainly the result of elite coalitions using the leverage of either third-party states or international institutions, often with weak domestic support in targeted states. And the fourth type involves transnational activists in cooperative relations with states and international institutions.

An important source of data came from former activists, who brought energy, real-time information and commitment to studying contention to the field. They also brought perspectives from comparative politics, cultural anthropology, and sociology to a field that had been restricted to professional international relations specialists until then. From the early 1990s on, a creative cross-fertilization began to develop between IR specialists interested in transnational relations and social movement scholars interested in transnational contention.

The new work can be divided roughly into five groupings, with some overlap between them:

- Some examined the development of a wide spectrum of non-state actors who organized transnationally (Boli and Thomas eds., 1999; della Porta, Kriesi and Rucht, eds., 1999, Keck and Sikkink 1998, O'Brien, et al., eds., 2000; Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco, eds. 1997; Stiles, ed., 1996);
- Others focussed on particular movement families -- like the peace movement (Rochon 1998) human rights and democratization (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999; Loya 2000), the environment (Young, ed. 1997), conflicts over dam-construction (Khagram 1999,

Khagram, Riker and Sikkink, forthcoming), immigrant rights (Soysal 1994) or indigenous peoples' movements (Brysk 1998);

- Some focussed on organizations, either particular ones (Finnemore 1996, Wapner 1996), in the aggregate (Chatfield 1997; Boli and Thomas 1999) or on transnational networks of organizations (Keck and Sikkink 1998);
- Others studied international treaties which either legitimated and provided resources to nonstate actors (Thomas forthcoming), or in which activists played a constitutive role (Price 1997), or against which they mobilized (Ayres 1998);
- And some looked at particular binational or regional contention in the context of international agreements or institutions (Ayres 1998; Fox 2000; Imig and Tarrow 1999, 2000, and Imig and Tarrow, eds. forthcoming).

From a field that had been heavily influenced by transnational economic relations and was harnessed to a debate with realism, the study of transnational politics has begun to overlap increasingly with the study of contentious politics. But as in any marriage between partners coming from different traditions, assumptions are not always the same and the casual adoption of the language or conventions of others can lead to misunderstandings. The most general problem was the adoption of the language of “globalization” with its shifting combination of economic, political, and cultural meanings⁵. The fusion of the various

⁵ For reasons of space, we cannot hope to deal fairly with the massive literature on globalization that has appeared over the past few years. For a survey on globalization and politics, see Berger 2000. For a strong claim that global social movements are forming, see O'Brian et al., eds., 2000. For a more skeptical view, see the review of major works in the globalization tradition see Yashar 2000.

meanings of globalization is an important tool for organizers trying to mobilize scattered followers into social movements, permitting them to access broader frames and target distant enemies. But its adoption by scholars has had two unfortunate effects: fostering insensitivity to the *regional* – and certainly not “global” -- scope of much transnational activity; and producing a conceptual confusion between the global *framing* of an activity and the empirical scope of the activity (see the critique in Tarrow 1998:ch. 11).

Second, coming to the field from a commitment to the goals of particular social movement sectors – especially from the peace, the environment, feminist and indigenous rights movements -- many students saw the universe of non-state actors through the lens of “their” particular sector. They also tended to focus on “good” movements – like the peace or human rights movements -- giving much less attention to the more dangerous sectors of transnational activism – for example, militant fundamentalism. (For an exception, see Rudolf and Piscatori eds. 1997.) For some of the same motives, the role of states was often seen as unremittingly hostile to transnational actors, when empirical data show conclusively that states – particularly western states – are deeply implicated in the funding and promotion of many transnational actors (Uvin 2000). Finally, scholars shifting their research interest from domestic activism to the transnational level were quick to transfer the ideologically-attractive category “social movement” to activities that would be more recognizable as lobbying, communication, and educational and service activity if they were observed at home. Let us turn to these important distinctions and the relations among different actors in transnational space.

FORMS OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTION

Are the actors on the transnational scene social movements? International non-governmental

organizations (INGOs)? Or some looser configuration like “transnational advocacy networks (TANs)? Analysts in this burgeoning field have been better at describing activities than in conceptualizing them in clear analytical terms. For example, one group of scholars declares their interest in the impact of “global social movements” on multilateral economic institutions, but proceeds to focus empirically on INGOs (O’Brian, et al., eds. 2000). Before scientific progress can be made in any new empirical field, the nature and variety of the units need to be carefully defined. As Keck and Sikkink observe, “to understand how change occurs in the world policy we have to understand the quite different logics and process among the different categories of transnational actors” (1998: 210).

Transnational Social Movements

Though some investigators define social movements in terms of their “social change goals” (Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco 1997), this opens them to the danger of including institutionalized, passive, and service-oriented groups within their definition. The danger can be seen in the case of so-called “European social movements” that operate in Brussels., which often turn out to be tame, EU-subsidized lobbies (Imig and Tarrow, eds. forthcoming). There is a solution to this definitional puzzle: to define social movements – not in terms of their goals – which they share with many non-social movements -- but in terms of the kinds of actions in which they routinely engage -- contentious politics -- which I define as

Episodic, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when at least one government is a claimant, An object of claims, or a party to the claims and
b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants
(McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly forthcoming).

Social movements are a particularly congealed form of contention within this universe which I define as:

Socially mobilized groups engaged in sustained contentious interaction with powerholders in which at least one actor is either a target or a participant.

To be transnational, a social movement ought to have social and political bases outside its target state or society; but to be a *social movement*, it ought to be clearly rooted within social networks in more than one state and engage in contentious politics in which at least one state is a party to the interaction. This produces a definition of *transnational social movements* as

Socially mobilized groups with constituents in at least two states, engaged in sustained contentious interaction with powerholders in at least one state other than their own, or against an international institution, or a multinational economic actor.

The strategic advantage of this definition is that it will allow us to observe the behavior of groups as they interact with other groups and institutions, examine as an empirical question the relations among social movements and other institutional forms and trace potential transitions between these various forms. The major other forms are INGOs and transnational advocacy networks.

International Non-Governmental Organizations

A truism of transnational politics is that international nongovernmental organizations are growing rapidly. John Boli and George M. Thomas enumerate nearly 6,000 INGOs founded between 1875 and 1988 (1999:20). They find not only a growing founding rate of INGOs after 1945, but a declining rate of dissolution. But for a term that has gained great currency in recent debates, it is surprising how little consensus there seems to be on the

definition or operationalization of INGO's.⁶ Boli and Thomas offer three descriptions: they see INGOs as "the primary organizational field in which world culture takes structural form" (p. 6), as "transnational bodies exercising a special type of authority we call rational voluntarism" (p. 14), and groups whose "primary concern is enacting, codifying, modifying, and propagating world-cultural structures and principles" (p. 19). Their operational definition is "the entire population of INGOs classified as genuinely international bodies by the Union of International Associations" -- that is, all "not-for-profit, non-state organizations" (p. 20).

I propose a definition that will be broad enough to include in the INGO category a wide range of organizations but also distinguish them from social movements. *International nongovernmental organizations* are

organizations that operate independent of governments composed of a membership base coming from two or more countries, that are organized to advance their members' international goals and provide services to citizens of other states through routine transactions with states, private actors and international institutions.

Starting from this definition, the main distinction between INGOs and social movements becomes primarily behavioral. While both may have social change goals, transnational social movements engage in sustained contentious interaction with states, multinational actors, or international institutions, while INGOs engage in routine transactions with the same kinds of actors and provide services to citizens of other states.

⁶ Evelyn Bush points out that the Union for International Associations, the major source of data on transnational associations, has recently urged that the term INGO be dropped for "transnational associational network", since the former includes so many mixed, intersect organizations including various degrees of governmental involvement. I retain the term because it is in common usage.

Making a clear analytical distinction between the two categories will make it easier to examine the relations between them, to ask whether transitions are occurring from one type to the other, and compare their relationship to grassroots social movements.

This last issue is particularly crucial: even the briefest examination of INGOs will show that their composition is largely made up of dedicated, cosmopolitan and well-educated people who can afford to travel around the world, are adept at languages, and have the technical, intellectual and professional skills to serve and represent the interests of those they support with international institutions and powerful states. Though social movements need leaders as well – and have become more professional in recent decades (Meyer and Tarrow eds. 1998) -- by our definition at least, they are based on “socially mobilized groups engaged in sustained contentious interaction with powerholders.” Conflating INGOs with social movements makes it impossible to examine this key behavioral distinction as well as the fundamental question of whether a shift is taking place from social movements into INGOs or if the latter are responsible for changes in the former.

Transnational Activist Networks

Except for their service activities – where they are normally independent -- INGOs frequently operate in temporary or long-term alliances with other actors, both state and non-state, transnational and domestic – to advance their policy goals. This has added a new and dynamic category to the study of transnational politics – *transnational activist networks*. As Keck and Sikkink define it

A transnational advocacy network includes those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services (1998:2).

Such networks, continue Keck and Sikkink, "are most prevalent in issue areas characterized by high value content and informational uncertainty" (ibid: p.2). They thus draw on the "normative turn" in international relations theory described above – with special relevance to such heavily-normative areas as human rights (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999).

Transnational advocacy networks are not alternatives to social movements or INGOs; on the contrary, they can *contain* them, in the loose way that networks contain anything – as well as containing governmental agents in either their official or unofficial capacities. They are the informal and shifting structures through which NGOs, social movement activists, government officials, and agents of international institutions can interact and help resource-poor domestic actors to gain leverage in their own societies. In Keck and Sikkink's model, resource-rich NGOs -- working through either their own states, international institutions, or both – try to activate a transnational network to put pressure on target state. Keck and Sikkink's "boomerang" effect illustrates the potential relationships within these networks (1998: 13).

At this stage, Keck and Sikkink's important work suggests a number of research problems:

- It is unclear how they see TANS relating to the existing state system. Do their operations depend incidentally – or fundamentally -- on the power of the states they come from? The majority of their member groups come from the wealthy states of the North; does the power of these states lie behind the capacity of network activists to persuade other states to accede to the claims of resource-weak allies within them?
- Most of the empirical work on TANS has been oriented to highly normatively-oriented groups; does the same logic of coalition-building and deployment of the power of third party states and/or international institutions occur when the basis of support is material interest?

- Are TANs occasional interlopers in the relations between states and their citizens or are they becoming core links in the formation of transnational social movements among citizens of different states?
- Finally, how do TANs relate to international institutions? In Keck and Sikkink's paradigm, these are intermediate links between activist networks and their allies. But if the activists depend on these institutions, how far beyond their policies can their campaigns go? If they do not depend on them, what is the major source of their leverage on the states their local allies challenge? Institutions deserve more specification than they have been given so far by students of transnational contention.

TRANSNATIONAL CONTENTION AND INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The "global civil society" thesis derives transnational social movements directly from trends in economic interdependence (O'Brian, et al., eds. 2000; Wapner 1995). That thesis is unspecified, deterministic, and undifferentiated. A more mediated, institutionally-routed and more probabilistic model made up of a chain of hypotheses seems more appropriate:

First, though economic and cultural trends create objective reasons to posit a growth of transnational actors, social movement theory shows that objective interests or conflicts do not on their own. The obstacles are of three types: the weakness or absence of social networks outside people's neighborhoods, towns, cities, social groups and political allegiances; the weakness or absence of transnational collective identities; and the absence of mechanisms to overcome or counter the political opportunities of national politics (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, eds., 1996; Tarrow 1998);

Second, states have created international institutions to serve their collective interest and monitor each other's behavior. Once created, these institutions are mandated to intervene in

selective sectors of their societies, thus impacting on relations among domestic groups and between them and their governments. This creates internal incentives for transnational activism;

Third, once created, international institutions' officials crave legitimization and sources of information, which induces them to create external incentives for transnational activism (Jacobson 2000:155);

Fourth, these internal and external incentives combine to create a cosmopolitan transnational activist elite which staffs INGOs and comes together within and against the policies of international institutions;

Fifth, these elites form alliances with powerful states, elements within international institutions and domestic social movements to form transnational activist networks capable of reaching into societies to intervene in their relations with their governments, international institutions, and multinational economic actors;

Sixth, the influence of TANS on these societies is hypothesized as encouraging domestic groups to adopt the norms, model their behaviors, and frame their claims around issues that are domesticated from international politics (Jacobson 2000:156);

Seventh, but only as a long-term probabilistic result of these processes and mediated by the nature and constraints of their national states, domestic social movements from these countries become aware of their common interests and values, encounter one another through common campaigns against international institutions, and thus form transnational social movements.

While the argument from international institutions seems parallel to the "global civil society thesis, it differs in three important ways: first, it specifies an increase of transnational contention through the resources, incentives and opportunities of international institutions – and not directly through "globalization." Second, it also offers an explanation for the wide

variations we see between sectors of transnational activity. As Thomas Risse argues, “the higher the degree of international institutionalization in a given issue-area, the greater the policy impact of transnational actors” (1995, 2000:27) Third, it makes problematic and non-deterministic the growth of transnational activism.

An institutional approach to transnational contention suggests several mechanisms through which domestic activists can find one another, gain legitimation, form collective identities, and go back to their countries empowered with alliances, common programs and new repertoires of collective action. We can identify at least four such mechanisms: *brokerage*, *certification*, *modeling*, and *institutional appropriation*. These terms need some elementary definition:

- By *brokerage* I mean making connections between otherwise unconnected domestic actors in a way that produces at least a temporary political identity that did not exist before (Smith 2000)
- by *certification*, I mean the recognition of the identities and legitimate public activity of either new actors or actors new to a particular cite of activity
- by *modeling*, I mean the adoption of norms, forms of collective action or organization in one venue that have been demonstrated in another
- by *institutional appropriation*, I mean the use of an institution's resources or reputation to serve the purposes of affiliated groups.

No single international institution is going to provide the mechanisms to facilitate all of these steps (indeed, most of them fall well short of that threshold). But the list provided above can help scholars to begin to specify the ways in which non-state actors with weak resources and opportunities in their own societies can develop transnational ties that can be “boomeranged” on behalf of their own claims.

CONCLUSIONS

International institutions serve as a kind of “coral reef”, helping to forge horizontal links among activists with similar claims across boundaries.⁶ This leads to the paradox that international institutions -- created by states, and usually by powerful ones -- can be the arenas in which transnational contention is most likely to form against states. I do not maintain that states create international institutions in order to encourage contention; states are more likely to *delegate* than to fuse sovereignty. But because international institutions seek autonomy as they mediate among the interests of competing states, they can provide political opportunities for weak domestic social actors, encouraging their connections with others like themselves, and offering resources that can be used in intra-national and transnational conflict. We see a highly-developed version of this process in the case of the European Commission, which actively subsidizes citizen lobbies in Brussels and – on some occasions -- encourages them to lobby their own governments and create legitimacy for European projects (Imig and Tarrow eds., forthcoming).

But there are questions. The first derives from the fact that – in this model – INGOs broker temporary coalitions with international institutions and third party states to strengthen their intervention in domestic conflicts. But as everybody knows, brokerage involves compromise, if not dependency. How independent of these institutions and states INGO activists can be in their interventions in national settings is an empirical question that has not yet been answered.

A second question follows from the first: to the extent that INGO activists are dependent on powerful external actors, how do they relate to domestic social movements? As simple resource providers, partners in the development of their claims and identities, or big

⁶ I am grateful Ron Jepperson for suggesting this metaphor.

brothers? When their campaigns wind down, what remains of the domestic links in the TANs they have formed? Do their domestic allies collapse into repressed quiescence, become empowered but wholly national actors, or – as the final stage in the institutional model above hypothesizes – transnationalize their own activities?

Third, what are the analytical stakes in this growing area of research? Provided researchers can be convinced to define their terms precisely and consistently and relate these actors and agencies to one another over time, we may be able to answer the question that is too often taken as an assumption in the literature: “Is there a trend towards non-territorial governance in the world system, and if there is, will it take an interstate, a supranational or a civil-society dominated form?”⁷ For example, in the European Union, states increasingly serve as pivots between domestic groups and European institutions; this looks less like a “global civil society” than a multilevel or a composite polity (Imig and Tarrow eds., forthcoming).

A final provocative thought: if the process of “transnationalization” described above is robust, then a global civil society will not come about as the result of domestic groups moving outward from their societies and replacing government with governance; but from the reflux of their activities around state-created international institutions back on domestic contention,

⁷ I do not consider here a hybrid alternative suggested by Craig Murphy in a personal communication: that “transnational social actors have an impact...on the creation and reform of intergovernmental organizations which, in turn, end up having a great deal of influence in specific realms. I am grateful for this important addition, which space considerations make it impossible for me to consider here. For an example, the International Landmine Treaty, see Price 1997.

institutions, and identities. And if that is the case, then the distinction between international relations and domestic politics will really need to be challenged!

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