SEVEN THESES ON GLOBAL SOCIETY

A Review Essay

AFEF BENESSAIEH

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──────── ABSTRACT ────────

This article critically reviews the literature on global society through global, transnational and local lenses and suggests avenues for further research hitherto neglected in this literature. Accounts of local reactions to globalization are particularly important since this approach valorizes social actors' own understandings of and reactions to global discourses and agendas. I also emphasize the idea that prevailing wisdoms in this literature hold that globalization has expanded the horizon of possibilities for collective social action, without paying due attention to the constraints on social action at the local and the transnational levels.

Key Words ◇ global society ◇ globalization ◇ local activism ◇ possibilities and constraints ◇ social action ◇ transnational civil networks

Introduction

When protests first erupted on the scene in Seattle in late 1999 and caught the attention of the media and an international public audience, the idea of a global society was still considered a fantasy by most. But when the episode recurred in other locations—Washington, Prague, Porto Allegre, and Quebec—protesters demanding citizens' rights to have a say on their nation's economic policies decided *intra muro*, in multilateral meetings, that the topic of globalization called for renewed reflections and analyses. As of today, theorization and empirical research on global society has advanced remarkably, constituting a *corpus* of literature that stretches the globalization paradigm to non-conventional dimensions. But what are the main approaches to global society and what are prospects do they discern for social action at the global level? This article critically discusses the present state of research on global society, organizes the literature around distinct themes or theses, and also identifies several remaining avenues of research which remain underexamined or simply ignored.

Although much of the research on global society is relatively recent, the *idea* of a global society is nothing new. In the discipline of international relations, particularly during the era of the cold war, the English School most explicitly considered the possibilities for an international society of states. However, these previous ideas on the emergence of a worldwide cosmopolitan culture reflected the shared views of a select group of elites engaged in the international community (Bull and Watson, 1985). By contrast, current research on global society has 'popularized' the concept and pointed to the possible formation of global social processes given new impetus by economic, technological, and communicational interconnectedness on a planetary scale. This emergent work argues for the social and cultural dimensions of a globalizing world and questions the established divisions between the domestic and the international. In doing so, these new approaches bring into sharper focus sociological concepts such as 'civil society' and the 'public sphere', which were long considered of marginal interest to the 'core' discipline of international relations.

These concepts have little concerned most mainstream realist international relations theorists. By and large their preoccupation with the international system as the battlefield for states acts as a convenient diversion from the sociological questions they are inadequately prepared to address. However, such questions do concern liberals and a wide range of reflective theorists who are quite willing to disentangle the state unit for the purpose of examining transversal social processes in local and world politics. Importantly (and although a variety of attacks on global society may suggest the contrary), few among liberals, neo-Marxists, neo-Gramscians, constructivists, or postmodernists have ever argued for the existence of a thick, cohesive, global society 'out there'. Instead, most approaches point at the emergence of a 'thin web' as a way to define global society—a web made up of a variety of concrete social movements and coalitions intersecting on various issues, and a great number of diverse (and not necessarily interconnected) civil networks operating across international boundaries.

The contenders are in fact correct. There is no such thing as a global society waiting angrily at the corporate gates, or praying hand-in-hand around the Earth for love and justice. The issue is much more complex: protests, despite their apparent global character are mobilized by local activists, and only a handful of internationalists make it to the stage. In this regard, the term 'global society' may be more of a rhetorical phrase that aims, in the words of Charles Tilly, to present itself as 'willing, numerous and united' (1993–4: 7). Additionally, activists are engaged in much more than gathering occasionally at high-exposure events or calling press conferences on global society's agenda. In everyday life they communicate, exchange, inform, raise funds, collaborate, negotiate, and build coalitions among civil actors located in different and distant places, regardless of whether those players agree or not about the idea of a global society. In

sum, and instead of engaging in the debate over global society's existence or invention, most studies on the topic demonstrate that research on the *processes*, rather than on empirical and definitive *outcomes*, is a more fruitful topic to explore.

Research on global society is situated in three prevailing frameworks— the *global*, the *transnational*, and the *local*. Scholarship in these frames can be further categorized as advancing one of seven distinct theses.[1] In those instances where global society is the unit for analysis, (1) several studies argue for the rise of a community of citizens promoting liberal values (Smith et al., 1997), (2) others point to the emergence of spaces of civil resistance through counter-hegemonic global social processes (Cox, 1999), (3) and yet others raise the critique that the idea of a global civil society is inherently a western, neo-liberal project (Yudice, 1997). Other case studies move away from global society theses, and instead (4) disaggregate the level of analysis into more specific, single, or conjoined transnational civil networks and coalitions, and/or (5) situate globalization as a new oppor- tunity structure for civil action beyond the boundaries of a state (Edwards and Gaventa, 2001; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Within the parameters of the third frame, (6) studies further reduce the level of analysis and discuss the tendency of local struggles' to be affected (or not) by globalization (Brysk, 2000). Proceeding with this 'localist' emphasis, (7) some cultural sociolo- gists argue for hermeneutical understandings of how people imagine globalization to be affecting their everyday social practices (García Canclini, 1999; Mato, 2001), a perspective I embrace. In the remainder of this article, I examine each of these analytical standpoints as 'ideal-types'— in the Weberian sense of an analytic distillate of characteristics not existing in their pure form in the real world—and discuss these seven complemen- tary and sometimes competing understandings of global society. Before doing so, I open the debate with some definitions and reflections on the notion of civil society.

Some Notes on the Notion of Civil Society

A variety of philosophical influences have left their imprint on the thought and theory behind current conceptions on civil society. The idea of civil society was used, in classical political philosophy as a Latin translation of Aristotle's *politike koinonia*, to refer to 'the conditions of living in a "civilized" community sufficiently advanced to have its own legal codes— in Latin, *jus civile*—above that of individual states' (Lipshutz, 1992: 398). In substance, this foundational concept allowed thinkers to conceive of a bounded community of individuals, whose existence apart from the state constituted public life, and to further imagine a global community constructed along such lines. At the same time, however, such thinking also

granted an exclusive character of civility (or 'good behavior') to such a community, in contrast to 'outside' barbarian (or 'uncivilized') cultures.

As Linklater (1992) emphasizes, this inside/outside distinction remains vivid in contemporary work on civil society. In one perspective, the term 'civil society' is generally used to refer to *advanced industrial societies'* cultural, social, economic, and ethical arrangements outside the state (but inside its boundaries) (Marden, 1997), the implication being that non-industrial societies are not necessarily civil societies. From another perspective, multilateral organizations or northern aid agencies in the last decade have begun adopting new policy lines with a view toward 'strengthening' civil society and assisting in its 'consolidation' in developing countries. This emphasis broadens the idea, not very different from Fukuyama's 'end of history' argument, that all societies can eventually transform into liberal civil societies.

Another zone of ambiguity derives from Tocqueville's definition of civil society as the realm of autonomous and voluntary associations, fostering patterns of civility in democracies, an argument recently renewed in Robert Putnam's work on the importance of social capital (e.g. a dense network of civil associations) in democratic polities.[2] Liberals have essentially defined civil society as independent of the state (which ultimately remains in charge of guaranteeing its autonomy; it is a 'space of uncoerced human association and relational networks', filled by business, cultural, religious, and social non-governmental organizations (Walzer, 1997: 8). This definition is also used in part by multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, the US Agency for International Development (USAID, 1998),[3] as well as conservative theorists who welcome the rise of a service-provider or 'third sector' that assumes key functions of the state.

Another classic reference is made with regard to Antonio Gramsci who defined civil society as part of a superstructural sphere, which excludes the market. In this view civil society remains conceptually distinct from the state, which constitutes political society.[4] Gramsci's move in placing civil society outside the state and the market is a departure from classical Marxism, which places civil society in the structural sphere. Current theorizing, which pits Gramsci against Jürgen Habermas, defines civil society as an amorphous space of social interaction, including the spheres of intimacy (family) and voluntary associations (e.g. grassroots, labor, religious, academic, and non-governmental organizations), as well as social movements and forms of public communication (Arato and Cohen, 1992, 2000: 8). (Evidently, liberals do not agree with leaving even bowling associations or entrepreneurial groups outside the realm of civil society.) But more importantly, civil society is a sphere of action that is independent of the state.[5] Emphasizing civil society's capacity to act as a counterweight to the state, liberals stress associational density in arguing for the 'positive effects of civil society on governance' (Foley and Edwards, 1996).

Gramscian or Foucauldian readings do not necessarily support this general idea that civil society is to be conceptualized outside the state. Gramsci in particular saw civil society both as the space for consolidation and normalization of domination, and the sphere of resistance where alternative principles to domination could *potentially* be built for counter-hegemonic purposes in a 'war of position' for cultural hegemony. Michel Foucault's work traces the genealogy of modern, disciplined societies through the constitution of normalized sexuality, the changing characterization of 'madness', and refinements in punishments and prisons. Foucault demonstrates that the emergence of discourses on civil society are concomitant with modernity's emphasis on rights and the state's attempt to 'normalize' society in a regulated sphere by legitimating its capacity to impose sanctions. In this view, norms promoted by civil society only constitute the visible support of a new system of subordination; more pervasive and less visible social disciplines and microtechnologies combine (Cohen and Arato, 2000: 396) to 'normalize' behavior.

In the end, and although a general convention may prevail in current literature on civil society as a sphere outside the state, questions arise regarding the extent to which civil societies and the now celebrated global society are analytically independent from states in world. For instance, is an emerging global society opening up an emancipatory space for social actors or is it expanding a set of norms that regulate and constrain modern societies within liberal frameworks at the level of governance? Why is it that Washington-based international agencies such as the Inter-American Bank, the World Bank, or foreign-aid agencies (e.g. the US National Endowment for Democracy and the Netherlands' Novib) are so eager to 'strengthen' and 'consolidate' civil societies in developing countries? What are we to make of their concurrent interest in supporting transnational networks and global social mobilizations? These questions set the general terms for the ensuing critical discussion of the extant research on global society and transnational civil networks.

The Global: Global Civil Society Theses

Approaches that point to the emergence of a global civil society have been grouped under the rubric of 'globalist theses'. In this view, global society emerges as a result of citizens' increased participation in organizing beyond the boundaries of a particular state either because of (a) shared values that extend beyond the goals of specific movements or (b) converging resistances to corporate and elite-led economic globalization. According to other critical perspectives, these two contending approaches suffer from an over-stated optimism about social actors' increased participation in a global world and the possibilities for change as a result of such participation.

*Thesis 1: Globalization Fosters Agency and the Creation of a Values-
Sharing Global Community*

Most accounts of the rise of a global society rearticulate a liberal view, both
philosophically and politically, that emphasizes an individual's 'right to
have rights' in a democratic society and also expresses confidence in the
potential universality of modern values such as liberty, equality, and plural-
ism together with the notion of core, inviolable human standards. These
accounts generally conceive of global civil society as a thin sphere of partic-
ipative citizens acting transnationally for expanded democratic world
politics, and adhere to Tocquevillian views on voluntary associations and
democratic life. The emergence of worldwide civil networks demonstrate
that associationism is globalizing and leads to the eventual formation of a
civil society of active citizens remapping world politics in the direction of a
global cosmopolitanism (Cohen and Rai, 2000; Lipshutz, 1992). There is
great potential for increased cross-cultural understandings by 'injecting
values and moral pressure into the global market place' (Edwards and
Gaventa, 2001: 19; see also McIntyre-Mills, 2000).

Liberally oriented scholars define a global civil society as a universal
project for social justice, gender and economic equity, and citizens' inclu-
sion and participation in governance (Edwards and Gaventa, 2001: 25).
They regard global social movements and transnational civil networks as
important means to achieving progressive change within the global system.
Studies have documented changes in global norms, institutions, and
regimes resulting from transnational mobilizations for citizenship rights—
human, gender, ethnic, and environmental (Jelin, 1995; Keck and Sikkink,
1998; Sikkink, 1993; Smith et al., 1997). In line with liberals' preferences
for minimal states, these works highlight global social actors' increased
capacity to both bypass and act back on states. In the absence of identifi-
able formal outcomes, such as legal or procedural changes, this strand of
research emphasizes globalization's effects on social actors themselves
either by illustrating how vulnerable or victimized communities have
achieved their goals or by detailing the ways in which they have gained skills
and inspired further action.[6]

*Thesis 2: Globalization Aggravates Inequalities and Triggers Solidarities
toward a Global Counter-Movement*

The preceding liberal-oriented approach conceives of global civil society as
a diffuse associative body composed of (not necessarily) interconnected
movements and networks, operating within the global system. In contrast to
this emphasis on negotiation and progressive change, world-systems theorists
and neo-Marxist and neo-Gramscian scholars lay the stress on structural
change through strategic convergences of anti-systemic movements, which

fits their definition of global society as a thick process and project of converging coalitions that stand in an antagonistic relationship to the prevailing world order.[7] Their focus shifts from the centrality of rights in the constitution of an empowering global citizenship and onto social actors' resistance to neo-liberalism as a disempowering ideology.

World-system theorists suggest that the everyday interests of social actors differ according to their location in the world economy, as reflected in the great variety of social movements operating locally and globally. As a result, a 'great world family' (Wallerstein, 1990b) that draws on a common anti-systemic strategy for challenging the structural determinants of inequalities has not yet manifested itself. However, 'trans-zonal' cooperation across anti-systemic movements (from the center, periphery, and semi-periphery) suggests the potential constitution of a global society capable of transforming the capitalist world economy.

Neo-Marxists have essentially argued that global social movements form a systemic counterbalancing force or 'globalization from below' led by popular and middle class actors responding to corporate-led globalization; these forces open up the possibilities for an alternative world politics driven by ethics over profits (Brecher et al., 2000; Falk, 1993; Houtart, 2001; Waterman, 1998). Their interest in a global civil society is not that congruent with classic Marxism's disdain for civil society or rather the once-prevailing notion of civil society as a bourgeois concept, developed for ameliorating crude struggles between powerless and power-holding classes.[8] It is, therefore, interesting to note that the previous disregard has decreased in the latest refinements of Marxism (see Baker, 1998), Moreover, the long-held wisdom on international proletarian solidarity has given way to an appreciation of multiple class and identity-based struggles worldwide and their convergence against 'globalization from above'.

For their part neo-Gramscians advance slightly different arguments. For instance, some leading scholars are keen to suggest that diverse resistances may articulate a counter-hegemonic global consciousness which in turn translate into a social force (Cox, 1999; Gill, 1995). However, a cautious reading of Gramsci may suggest other interpretations. Gramsci's arguments regarding hegemony as the reproduction of power-holders' values and interests through the cultural education of civil society point to the enormous pressures on social actors to reinscribe relations of domination and subordination. Seen in this light, opening up power-holding institutions to wider participation by civil society is an inducement to contentious social movements to accommodate their demands *within* the prevailing structure which transforms movements from anti-systemic to systemic ones (on US engagement with civil actors in unstable regimes, see Robinson, 1996; on civil society's alignment with the aims of multilateral organizations see Mato, 1998, 2002). It is interesting to note that, in most social mobilizations organized against meetings of multilateral organizations' or world political

summits, protesters not only claim their non-conformity with neo-liberalism but also voice their demands for inclusion and participation in ongoing negotiations or decisions on economic policies. One must, therefore, refrain from characterizing 'anti-globalization' protests as symptoms of a counter-hegemonic social process. Such an argument is in some ways close to Wallerstein's (1990a) disenchantment with 'anti-systemic movements' that cede the 'ideological battleground' to the system's proponents by merely asking for inclusion.

Similarly, global social movements mobilizing for the expansion of citizens' rights may be analyzed as systemic movements softening hegemonic dominance, by providing leftovers to social actors who may otherwise turn to more radical. In this line of reflection, further research on the emergence of a globalizing counter-culture should explicitly articulate alternative interpretations and representations challenging prevailing hegemonic neo-liberal frameworks and convincingly demonstrate that a counter-hegemonic movement is growing. Counter-hegemony may be thought of as a war of position located in the cultural grounds of civil society. The primary goal in such a movement is to gain interpretive *power* in civil society for transforming the relationship of social domination (Touraine, 1984); achieving *power over* the state becomes a secondary question.[9] In this regard, Roland Bleiker rearticulates Gramsci and proposes that social change is possible only 'when a worldview hostile to the prevalent social order has come to be accepted as legitimate and moral by most of the population' (Bleiker, 2000: 174).

(Counter) Thesis 3: Global Society is a Gendered and 'Cultured' Political Project

A critical reading of both liberal and radical globalist theses, embedded in post-colonialist, feminist, postmodern, or poststructuralist perspectives, would pose a number of questions and critiques regarding a global civil society. Generally speaking, such a reading would foreground the notion of a *global society* than a global *civil* society, and question modernist wisdoms on an emancipatory global society. For instance, a post-colonial perspective would argue that civil society is a western (metropolitan), project, and ask if such a global society is conceivable from Third World identities and cultural positions. Paraphrasing Stuart Hall (1997) and inspired by Albert Paolini (1999), a postcolonialist question may well be: 'What would a global society look like that is constructed through things that are different rather than things that are the same?' In this reading a global civil society only perpetuates the hegemonic status and underexamined complementarity of market economies, democratic policies, and civil society.

Feminist readings of this project would identity concepts such as 'global

citizens' as narrowly drawing from hegemonic, masculine standards of public life and participation that persistently omit gender and race from their definition. These standards constitute 'marketized versions of global citizenship' (Tickner, 2001). Postmodernists would concur with these objections, and critique liberals and radicals for granting too much agency to social global actors, and also point out that the grand narrative of global society ignores the proliferation of struggles based on exclusive identities or local parochialisms (Marden, 1997). Furthermore, the global society unit would be argued as unnecessarily coherent, and that attention should be paid to 'transversal' social struggles that span the local, the national, and the international spheres (Bleiker, 2000).

Finally, a poststructuralist reading underscores the discursive fiction of an emancipatory global society as a vicious mechanism that maintains social actors' alienation. This fiction perpetuates the belief that individuals and communities can enact change, when in fact they only act for re-accommodation within global structure. Re-examining Foucault's concept of 'governmentality', critical readings of global civil society question the extent to which civil society perfectly accommodates and provides political legitimacy to neo-liberalism (Lipshutz, 2002; Yudice, 1997).[10] To this extent, global civil society's political role consists of stabilizing disturbances generated by transformative processes of economic globalization, a view shared by most critics of globalist theses.

The Transnational: Globalization is Triggering Transnational Social Action

A second framework for research on global society has disentangled the global unit of analysis in order to concentrate on transnational social processes. According to Keohane and Nye's definition (1972) these processes extend beyond national boundaries and involve interactions between various governmental and non-governmental agents. Research conducted along these lines shares the liberal orientations of cosmopolitan globalists as well as their emancipatory wisdoms on the possibilities for social action in the current era. However, this research has fruitfully extended the concept of global civil society, by tackling questions of the strategic and identity dimensions of transnational organizing around issues such as women's and indigenous people's rights, human rights, environmental politics, child labor, and so on. These approaches have also used constructivist frameworks in emphasizing transformations in the culture and norms of national and world political institutions as a result of civil networks that have mobilized transnationally for such changes. They also argue that globalization constitutes a new opportunity structure for social actions that operate beyond states' boundaries.

Thesis 4: Transnational Civil Networks are Inducing Norms Changes in World and Domestic Politics

One of the most-cited, comprehensive studies of transnational civil networks is Margaret Keck's and Katherine Sikkink's *Activists beyond Borders* (1998), in which the authors explore the social mobilization beyond national boundaries as new possibilities for activists to effect change in institutional policies and procedures within states. The authors make important conceptual distinctions between *social movements*, *coalitions*, and *networks*, which are useful contributions to research on the theme of social action in world politics. According to Keck and Sikkink, the degree of identity cohesion, shared values, and strategic goals appears lower in networks than in social movements, and coalitions only constitute a moment of action in the long-term strategies of social movements who are seeking to build transnational alliances. In the authors' conceptualization, networks are loose constellations of varied actors assembled in transnational campaigns.

Keck and Sikkink clarify the concept of transnational civil networks as 'forms of organization characterized by voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange' (1998: 8), operating beyond national boundaries and motivated primarily by 'shared principled ideas or values' (1998: 30). These networks mainly involve non-governmental international and domestic organizations as central actors, along with local social movements, the media, churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, and intellectuals, parts of regional and international intergovernmental organizations, and parts of the executive and/or parliamentary branches of national governments (1998: 8–9). Other works on transnational civil networks that have either preceded or pursued Keck and Sikkink's emphasis on norms and ideas changes in domestic and international politics include Smith et al. (1997). In this study, the authors argue for the rise of a global civil society and specifically examine transnational networks as its core vectors. Other studies examine the impacts of local and global social movements in influencing the policies of multilateral organizations (Fox and Brown, 1998; O'Brian et al., 2000). Ann Florini (2000) analyzes changes in states policies on issues such as nuclear proliferation, landmines, or dams due to the action of civil society actors operating transnationally, and Martha Finnemore and Katherine Sikkink detail the ways in which international norms set 'standards for the appropriate behavior of states' (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1999: 253).

Thesis 5: Globalization is a New Opportunity Structure for Social Action

Research situated in this perspective aims to show that transnational civil networks matter in world politics, and renews the validity of both

resource-mobilization and policy process approaches. To some extent, these approaches attempt to reconcile new social movements' perspectives that prioritize identity over the strategic aspects of social action. They have refined the heuristic capabilities of social movements theories, hitherto elaborated in domestic frameworks, by extending and applying them to global situations.

Until recently, approaches to social movements that treated aspects of identity and strategy elaborated their frameworks in quasi-independence from each other. Formerly, resource-mobilization and policy-process theorists, such as Sydney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, or Mayer Zald, were more interested in the structural conditions under which social contention was likely to arise, how social actors were able to successful mobilize resources, and the resulting political effects. Culturalist and sociological analysis of the meaning of collective action over a plurality of identity-oriented issues was suggested by the work of Alain Touraine (1984) and Alberto Melucci (1989/1999), These two perspectives have been more happily reconciled in the works of Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato (1992); John Guidry et al. (2000), and Aldon Morris and Carol Mueller (1992), among others. This renewed interest in the ideational, symbolic, cultural, and identity dimensions of the resources and goals of social movements, reflects the understanding of proponents that political, economic, and organizational skills are not sufficient for a fuller understanding of a variety of social mobilizations. Scholars have expanded the notion of resources to include non-material dimensions, and argue that globalization is fostering the resource-mobilization capacities of social movements by catalyzing the re-emergence and construction of collective identities. These identities provide 'frames of action' operating at transnational scales of action (in particular see Guidry et al., 2000; Morris and Mueller, 1992).

More specifically, research on transnational civil networks has magnified the importance of a transnational public sphere as a concept for analyzing the prospects for political change in the global era. In social movements theories, the POS (public opportunity structures) refers to the structural conditions under which organized social mobilizations tend to arise (Tarrow, 1998). It has been specifically analyzed as a political system's degree of vulnerability and receptivity to social mobilizations.[11] Under globalization, states are said to be increasingly open to international and transnational influences and stimuli, either because of specific conditionalities required by multilateral organizations and industrial countries' aid programs in exchange for assistance, or corporate agents' role in pressing for norms and regulations favoring their activities, or increased exposure to foreign actors' access to media and information technologies. Conversely, non-state actors are said to have an increased role to play in domestic and world politics because of increased resources such as faster and cheaper communication technologies and transportation, and because their

governments are increasingly vulnerable to pressures from the 'international community' of which they are part.

Scholars such as Edwards and Gaventa (2001) have delineated this process and the idea of an emerging framework for 'global governance' and wider 'public disclosure and accountability' to citizens' concerns, mainly referring to 'the rules, norms, and institutions that govern public and private behavior across national boundaries' (Edwards and Gaventa, 2001: 3). The process is primarily defined by states and inter-state agencies, but increasingly involves corporate and civil actors. Other scholars have preferred exploring a less normatively charged notion by pointing to the idea of an emergence transnational public sphere, which they define as a 'space in which both residents of distinct places . . . and members of transnational entities . . . elaborate discourses and practices whose consumption moves beyond national boundaries' (Guidry et al., 2000: 6). The work of Cohen and Arato (1992) on 'deliberative' and 'communicative' ethics for analyzing social movements, and of Guidry et al. (2000) over the transnational public sphere as a real and conceptual place for local/national collective action to be transmitted across the globe, are among the recent works that also treat this new possibility for social action.

This literature on transnational civil networks has made fundamental contributions to theorizing social movements and civil society actors in the global era, and provided a rich set of case studies and conceptual tools showing the importance of studying social actors in world politics. There is, however, one main shortcoming in most of this research: in emphasizing civil actors' increasing opportunities for action and in identifying positive outcomes, it has tended to prioritize *agency* and has not paid as much attention to *structure* and *procedural constraints*. Globalization has mainly been examined as an opportunity structure, without corresponding analysis of the phenomenon as a source and a framework of constraints on social action. There is little research that demonstrates the links between globalization, economic disruptions, and impoverishment, and transnational social mobilizations. In fact, most research has focused on the sunny side and the putative 'success' of civil networks' campaigns for principled values, such as the desirability of democracy, minimum standards for the respect for human rights, equality, and environmental quality. Thus, an important research question on economic globalization and grievances remains practically unaddressed in this literature.

Furthermore, while much of the previously cited research into transnational civil networks has re-emphasized the role of ideas and values for understanding social dynamics in the global era, it has not scrutinized the political dimensions of ideas. This work has not asked the necessary questions concerning the extent to which concepts such as civil society, democracy, governance, the role of the state, and so forth, are *arbitrary liberal conceptions* that are granted legitimacy by specific international

institutions. Other questions remain unasked. For instance, is there a problem with having transnational civil society actors such as Civicus or Amnesty International promoting conceptions of democracy and civil society similar to those of the World Bank or USAID? What of the influence and role of international funding agencies and northern NGOs that sponsor civil organizations' campaigns in developing countries? Are these transnational entities engaged in promoting horizontal, egalitarian relationships? In short, the literature reviewed thus far does not offer sufficient conceptual tools for addressing these troublesome issues of power dynamics and agenda negotiations between the different constituents of the civil networks under study.

There are several sources that assess the willingness of multilateral organizations, northern foundations, and aid agencies to engage with civil society organizations in developing countries (Grugel, 1999; Ottaway and Carothers, 1999; Tussie, 1997). These studies are located in development studies and research on the 'Third Sector'. However, most of these studies unproblematically welcome the convergence of interests between northern sponsors and organizations and communities in developing countries. There are a few dissenting voices that call into question the presumed autonomy and/or co-optation of local southern actors and their eventual alignment with sponsors' interests and agendas (Hulme and Edwards, 1997). Neo-Gramscian scholars such as William Robinson (1996) have brilliantly examined US aid programs' recent record in promoting democracy in transition regimes, such as in the Philippines, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Chile. Robinson critiques the extent to which such programs reflect the interests of US transnational elite, particularly efforts that advance the 'consolidation of political systems that function through consensual mechanisms of social control', thereby providing greater guarantees of sociopolitical stability (Robinson, 1996: 37). The promotion of 'low-intensity' versions of democracy on a worldwide scale, through the mechanism of US aid programs, funding agencies, and NGOs, focuses attention on power as the 'capacity to persuade', and on democracy promotion as a critical aspect of the consolidation of hegemony.

The Local: Understanding Globalization from Social Actors' Perspectives

A third perspective, embedded in social anthropology, examines globalization and transnationalism from the standpoint of changing practices, representations, and identity claims of local social actors. Some scholars utilize the opportunity structure hypothesis, and describe how local actors reshape their struggles against the state and project their grievances onto the international stage by means of transnational identity politics (e.g.

Brysk, 2000). Others such as Daniel Mato (2001) examine the production of social representations, and consider the ways in which globalization is transforming how people understand the world, and reorient their action along transnational lines.

Allison Brysk's (2000) compelling study analyzes the impacts of globalization on indigenous groups in the Americas, and the rise of a transnational indigenous movement in world politics. Although Brysk does not explicitly so claim, her research is consistent with grievance theories which identify economic deprivation under neo-liberal reforms in developing countries as a major source for renewed collective social action by and on behalf of vulnerable groups such as peasants, women, indigenous people, and racial and religious minorities (see for instance Eckstein, 1989/2001). On the one hand, Brysk characterizes the rise of indigenous movements as a 'vulnerable, local and radically different population', responding to the deterioration of its conditions of life because of the effects of globalization. On the other hand, and in keeping with the notion of globalization as an opportunity structure, she emphasizes the renewed possibilities for empowerment and greater agency that transnational action offers indigenous groups. She summarizes: 'International penetration introduce[s] new problems . . . but transnational contact sometimes offer[s] new avenues for the solution of both domestic and global grievances' (Brysk, 2000: 62). While her work resonates with theorizing on transnational civil networks, she significantly advances her analysis through a close reading of the grievances and strategies of local groups and organizations and describes their interactions with sympathetic foreign allies and other, publics. By focusing on local-level understandings of the global, by using ethnographic research methods, and privileging the voices of marginalized actors, as central to understanding social change, this study articulates closely with both the aims of feminist scholarship, and the research methods deployed in studying women's mobilizations in Latin America (see for instance Alvarez et al., 1998).

Thesis 6: Globalization Initiates Changes in Collective Representations and Social Practices

The studies of Latin American political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists—namely, George Yudice, Daniel Mato, and Nestor García Canclini—stand in contention against prevailing, complacent understandings of the possibilities for emancipation and empowerment through globalization. This scholarship blends ethnographic methods, conversation analysis, and descriptions of the production of popular culture. The social actors, their representations, and the practice of everyday life are foregrounded in these texts.

García Canclini (1999), in particular, argues for a cultural sociology of

globalization through narrative vignettes exploring migrants' multiple identities and loyalties in the global era. He also delineates processes of transnational cultural hybridity through an analysis of entertainment industries in North America as well as Latin America. Mato (2001) reflects on the social production of notions such as 'identity', 'culture', 'civil society', and 'citizenship', and their role in orienting social practices. His interventions are made with particular reference to North–South interactions between global elite, for example, the World Bank, the IADB, USAID, and local groups they sponsor. Both scholars argue for an understanding of global civil society as an 'imagined community', whose contours can be drawn through inquiries into how social actors 'see' the world, interpret experience, and orient their practices. They open up an important space in the current research agenda on global civil society. For instance, further work would fruitfully compare the range of representations of civil society by differently positioned individuals in transnational networks, or question changes in local actors' attitudes on mobilization as a result of increased interaction with foreigners.

Thesis 7: Globalization Re-Orients Civil Societies toward Liberal Market Democracies

The final thesis related to research on globalization formulates an interesting challenge to most of the proposals reviewed thus far, and provides support to cautions about the promises of globalizing civil society. Yudice (1997) pins down the congruent rise of neo-liberal politics and economic policies and the renewal of optimistic ideas on worldwide civil society. Robinson (1996) first made the case with regard to US democracy promotion and civil society consolidation programs through aid policies. Likewise, Yudice argues that civil societies are *stabilizers* and *legitimacy-providers*, and looks to a variety of Latin American countries that are undertaking economic and political reforms. The main thrust of this argument is that the development of civil society in developing countries is desirable both because sociopolitical instability rises during periods when reforms are being made and because the development of a strong non-governmental private and civil sector allows governments to further cede service-providing activities to these entities. The argument closely reflects Marc Robinson and Gordon White's (1997) analysis of the NGO sector as a service-provider in times of neo-liberal reforms that adhere to the 'New Policy Agenda' of northern aid agencies. Their emphasis is on promoting a market economy, low-intensity democracy and civil society. According to Yudice, 'the function of the State is to manage and not to eliminate civil society forces and then contain 'ingovernability' as demands for more democracy' (1997: 19).

Mato (1998, 2002) offers conceptual tools to help analyze the 'increasing

political currency of the idea of civil society' in local and world politics. Deploying a notion of domination as cultural hegemony and the concept of the microphysics of power, he investigates the transnational transform-ations of Latin American societies. He dismisses conspiracy theories as well as crude readings that claim global agents impose their representations on local actors; however, he argues, global agents are neither neutral nor do they represent universal interests. They are based in specific societies and in particular institutions and as such are subject to the agendas of govern-ments. Mato argues that comprehensive research on the microphysics of transnational reorganization of civil societies must involve an inquiry into the processes of adoption, adaptation, co-production, appropriation, conflict, and active resistance that take place between global and local actors. Such a research program is a huge and important task. It is nothing less than a critical inquiry into civil society as the ideational construct of neo-liberalism, and a vehicle for the disciplinary reorganization of the world along market democracies.

Conclusion

The preceding literature review tracked seven distinct theoretical trends in work on global society, from global, transnational, and local perspectives. Given the current blossoming of the literature on this theme, many more theses or trends could have been added to this review. I do not, however, intend this to be such an exhaustive exercise, and have opted instead for offering an analytical typology for further research. Moreover, these three levels of analysis do not stand in complete isolation from one another; they ought to be regarded as starting points from which to begin analyses of the complex transversal processes that compress the distance between the local and the global. All in all, these different approaches converge in a widely shared project demonstrating that social action is becoming transnational, and transforming the ways and means through which social actors under-stand and experience the world. With this in mind, the analytical task of assessing the impact of such changes is still wide open to a number of possible research agendas.

I also attempted to show that the attacks on the concept of global civil society as a vague, useless, or high-flown theoretical notion are unfounded. Scholars use rather precise terms for pinning down the concept of global civil society. However, these features vary from one approach to the other, and most research has abandoned the idea of dissecting the concrete *object*, 'global society', in favor of examining transnational *processes* that indicate a general pattern of globality. My review has also remained at the level of a theoretical discussion of the literature. In lieu of a set of definitive conclusions which might be derived from my reading, I now raise some

questions and suggest ways in which the premises they offer may be fleshed out in real world contexts, based on the critical frameworks evident in theses 3, 6, and 7.

The first and second theses—globalization as a process fostering the constitution of a global community of values-sharing citizens, and the convergence of local resistances leading to global counter-movements—lend themselves to questions about the intersection of local and foreign actors, their discourses, and organizational strategies. A typology of key terms as defined and employed by activists, identifying a repertoire of actions used in protests would help organize the analysis, and set a framework for replicability in a number of contexts. Even a single case study of one anti-globalization meeting would offer a solid basis for further comparison.

A Gramscian perspective on global society as a counter-hegemonic force involves content analysis of archival materials and data drawn from the discourse of activists, citizens, media, and political elites. Possible research goals are to identify the extent to which discourses for change contend with arguments for maintaining the *status quo*; and whether these perspectives are deeply and widely shared by various actors. A comparative study of a number of societies would represent an important advance in the literature and methodology.

Theses on transnational civil networks, norm change in world politics, and globalization as a new opportunity structure for social action are supported by a number of case studies. However, the power differential between the different constituents of such networks and the dynamics of appropriation, conflict, and resistance occurring within them (see thesis 7 above) are far from being exhaustively studied. Similarly, the argument on norm changes in world politics fails to consider basic questions as to the origin, character, and types of norms that are likely to be granted legitimacy and consideration during the deliberations of multilateral organizations and foundations. Such questions require extensive fieldwork interviews with members of successful and failed transnational civil networks, and even a genealogical or historical analysis of the emergence of prevalent norms advocated by global social actors. Robinson's (1996) framework on democracy promotion is particularly applicable in understanding that the notion of civil society advanced by western-based foundations, government aid programs, and NGOs is critical to relieving 'pressure from subordinate groups for more fundamental political, social and economic change' (Robinson, 1996: 6). Such a critical analysis would provide the missing background in most of transnational civil networks theories, by placing social networks in a relational political and global context.

Finally, in addition to the points I have raised thus far, I want to pose a number of questions that may prove productive for future scholarship on the topic of global civil society. Crucially, how and in what ways is

globalization affecting local social action? Is the globalization of social action a phenomenon reserved solely for a select few activists who can afford to 'go' global? Are similar prospects available to activists in developing countries and other remote locations? How do local activists mobilize globally around parochial, place-specific issues? In the discipline of international relations, understanding globalization from subordinated perspectives plays little part in established research agendas. But more complete understandings of social action in the global era have to theoretically and empirically contemplate these issues using the methods and frames detailed so far. Given global society's conceptual prominence, we would do well to ask: how does it emerge in and through the everyday practices of individuals and communities in various parts of the world?

NOTES

1. In international relations, the 'global' and the 'transnational' are held as two distinct levels of analysis. Generally, scholars refer to the term 'transnational' for interactions between actors located in distinct national spaces, of which one at least is a non-governmental actor (Keohane and Nye, 1972). In research on social movements and civil society in the global era, transnationalism also refers to the idea of 'social action [going] beyond state borders' (Guidry et al., 2000). On globalization and at the global level of analysis, conceptual consensus is more difficult to reach, both in this discipline and in other fields of the social sciences. Although many purists may not agree in considering cultural, sociological, or political dimensions to globalization (as more than just a process of increased economic and financial integration on the world scale), renowned sociologists such as Anthony Giddens have defined globalization as 'action at distance' (Giddens, 2000: ?), while Ulrich Beck refers to the 'intensification of reciprocal dependencies' (Beck, 2000: ?) on a planetary scale, and Roland Robertson proposes the now famous phrase of 'the world as a single place' (Robertson, 1990: ?).
2. For a critical assessment of the work of Putnam and a discussion of the main approaches to civil society in the modern liberal worldview, see Foley and Edwards (1996, 1998).
3. According to USAID: ' "civil society" is the term that best describes the nongovernmental, not-for-profit, independent nature of the organizations that allow for . . . broad citizen participation'. While the term 'non-governmental organizations' tended to be in use from 1945 until recently, in 1998 USAID turned to the term 'civil society organizations' (CSOs), which, interestingly, is the expression increasingly used by activists and the international aid community. USAID sees CSOs' roles as advocacy groups helping to 'give people a voice in the process of formulating public policies' (USAID, 1998: 15). The Agency defines CSOs as made of human rights groups, professional associations, religious institutions, pro-democracy groups, environmental activist organizations, media organizations, and think tanks.

4. For Bobbio (1988), Gramsci introduces a major innovation on Marxism analysis on civil society, by considering civil society as part of the superstructural sphere, but distinct from political society, which corresponds to the state. Gramsci defines civil society as the following:

> What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises through-out society, and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or rule exercised through the State and the juridical government. (Bobbio, 1988: 82, citing Gramsci's *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*)

This notion of a civil society distinct from the state is not all that clear in Gramsci's work, as Bobbio notes, for instance, that in some other passages, civil society is considered another aspect of the state or as the 'hegemonic apparatus of the ruling group which did not have its own apparatus'. Here hegemony essentially means *cultural leadership*, which is further explained in another selection which defines civil society as 'the political and cultural hegemony which a social group exercises over the whole of society, as the ethical content of the State' (Bobbio, 1988: 84, citing Gramsci's *Pasato e presente*). This notion of civil society as reproducing hegemony is developed further in the section critiquing neo-Gramscians' conception of global social movements as counter-hegemonic.

5. This notion of civil society as existing outside the state is not that antagonistic to liberals' wisdoms, although their conclusions widely differ (one train of thought sees civil society as a counterweight to the state, while the other views civil society as a 'school' for governance). Some theorists preoccupied by the political variable have argued that both definitions omit the importance of political association which, in Tocqueville's view, represented a freedom from both 'despotism of parties [and] the arbitrary rule of a prince' (Foley and Edwards, 1996: 44) and emphasize this view by proposing to consider that 'political association is in practice the mother of civil association'. This objection, while theoretically valid, omits the numerous instances where the converse is practiced: international aid and multilateral organizations support political pluralism and autonomy from the state, but refrain from overtly funding political associations in an effort to avoid the perception they are interfering in domestic affairs.

6. Assessing transnational social movements' political impacts is a difficult task, for reasons involving the reluctance of contemporary social scientists in claiming causalities where it appears more appropriate to identify correlations or relationships of influence. Although Keck and Sikkink (1998: 201) have offered a useful typology for understanding transnational social networks' political impacts (ranging from 'discursive commitments' to actual policy change), more interpretive-oriented research has stressed the idea that social mobilization *processes* needed to be studied before addressing the question of their political *outcomes*. In this line, see for instance David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford's piece on 'collective action frames' and the construction of legitimate meanings through social action in Morris and Mueller (1992: 133–55); or Cynthia Cockburn's study on women from distinct nationalities

sharing and learning from their respective war experiences (in Cohen and Rai, 2000: 46–61).

7. According to Gunder Frank and Fuentes (1990), anti-systemic movements are social movements struggling against or challenging the system, or one of its aspects. Here the idea of system refers to the capitalist world economy as a totality, and the location of social actors within one of the three zones (center, periphery, semi-periphery).

8. Various authors have observed that Marx was never particularly keen on the idea of civil society, which he placed in the structural sphere. Foley and Edwards cite Marx's *On the Jewish Question*, wherein civil society is essentially the arena where the human being 'acts as a private individual, regards other men as means, degrades himself into a means and become a plaything of alien powers' (1998: 9).

9. Bobbio's (1988: 92) reading of Gramsci indicates that the contest for hegemony precedes the contest for power.

10. Quoting a 1995 paper from David Ronfeld at the Rand Corporation, Yudice (1997: 18) outlines the following: 'civil society is a space in which contradictions are reconciled and the deformations generated by the market are eased'. In this conservative perspective, civil society's opposition to neo-liberalism through global mobilizations benefits market society, precisely because the 'excesses of the market' are corrected and the system is thereby further stabilized and legitimized. Therefore, global civil society ends up promoting the interests of capital.

11. Michael Lipsky, founding theorist of resource-mobilization in the late 1960s, suggests that an extensive analysis of the POS would consider the degree to which the state is open or closed, the stability or divisions of elite alignments, the presence or absence of elite allies, and the state's capacity and propensity for repression.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

AFEF BENESSAIEH is a PhD candidate in international relations at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. She holds a masters degree in political science from the University of Quebec in Montreal. Her current research is on local activists' international experiences in the case of women and indigenous organizers in Chiapas, Mexico, while affiliated as a visiting scholar to the Center for Research and Superior Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS). *Address*: Apartado postal 355, San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico 29201. [email: benessai@usc.edu]