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Building Global Civil Society 'From Below'?

David Chandler

Whereas state-based political action is held to reinforce frameworks and hierarchies of exclusion, new social movements, said to constitute a global civil society 'from below', are seen to herald new forms of emancipatory political action that recognise and include diversity and build new forms of global 'counter-hegemonic' politics. This paper seeks to examine and challenge these claims. It suggests that, rather than expanding the sphere of inclusiveness, global civic activism tends to undermine community connections. This is because the political ethics it advocates are deeply corrosive of social engagement and prone to elitist rather than inclusive consequences. The argument that the individual should have no higher political allegiance beyond their own moral conscience merely reflects and legitimises the radical rejection of collective political engagement and its replacement by elite advocacy and personal solipsism.

Global civil society is a new concept which even its leading proponents describe as 'fuzzy and contested'.¹ It is used both descriptively and normatively; empirically referring to the growing numbers of non-state actors operating 'beyond the confines of national societies, polities and economies', and normatively referring to new global norms and values variously ascribed to these actors or derived from their interaction.² One way of distinguishing separate approaches to this concept is to highlight the distinctions between those theoretical frameworks which emphasise the role of global civil society in the generation of new forms of global governance,³ and those which focus on the operation of global civil

1. A. Giddens, 'Foreword', in *Global Civil Society 2001*, eds. H. Anheier, M. Glasius and M. Kaldor (Oxford: Oxford University Press), iii.

2. H. Anheier, M. Glasius and M. Kaldor, 'Introducing Global Civil Society', in *Global Civil Society 2001*, 3-22; see also D. Chandler, *Constructing Global Civil Society: Morality and Power in International Relations* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2004), 1-18.

3. For example, in the work of cosmopolitan democracy theorists, such as David Held, Daniele Archibugi and Richard Falk.

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society 'from the bottom up', foregrounding new forms of autonomous political action outside any governance mechanism of formalised rights and international law.⁴

The approach that sees global society constructed 'from below' locates a radical ethics of global civil society in the methods and organisation of its members: from their refusal to play by the rules laid down by state-based territorial politics.⁵ Advocates of this approach suggest that these radical movements bring politics and ethics together by expanding the sphere of moral concern and by developing political strategies which avoid and bypass state-based constraints on what constitutes the political.⁶ This social movement approach sees global civil society as morally progressive in so far as its demands do not 'seek to replace one form of power with another' but instead have the 'objective of "whittling down" the capacity of concentrated centres of power'.⁷ The emphasis is on 'the struggle to reclaim space' or to create 'zones of autonomy' and thereby to 'create counter powers to the state'.⁸

From this perspective, political activity at the level of the state is inherently problematic. States, far from being the focus for political organisation and political demands, are the central barrier to emancipatory political practice. Operating on the terms of the state can

4. Note that for many authors these approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For more on this distinction see G. Baker, 'Problems in the Theorisation of Global Civil Society', *Political Studies* 50, no. 5 (2002): 928-43; Chandler, *Constructing Global Civil Society*, pt. 2; M. Kenny, 'Global Civil Society: A Liberal-Republican Argument', *Review of International Studies* 29, Special Issue (2003): 119-43; and D. Otto, 'Nongovernmental Organizations in the United Nations System: The Emerging Role of International Civil Society', *Human Rights Quarterly* 18 (1996): 107-41.

5. This 'movements of movements' is described by David Graeber as 'not lacking in ideology', rather 'new forms of organisation are its ideology'. 'The New Anarchists', in *A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Possible?*, ed. T. Mertes (London: Verso, 2004), 212.

6. For example, R. A. Falk and A. Strauss, 'The Deeper Challenges of Global Terrorism: A Democratizing Response', in *Debating Cosmopolitics*, ed. D. Archibugi (London: Verso, 2003), 209-10; and M. Pianta, 'Democracy vs Globalization: The Growth of Parallel Summits and Global Movements', in *Debating Cosmopolitics*, 237.

7. N. Stammers, 'Social Movements and the Social Construction of Human Rights', *Human Rights Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (1999): 1006.

8. See, for example, P. Kingsnorth, *One No, Many Yeses* (London: Free Press, 2004), 319; Notes from Nowhere, ed., *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (London: Verso, 2003); and N. Klein, *Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate* (London: Flamingo, 2002), 220.

only legitimise and perpetuate discourses and practices of political regulation which are built on—and maintained by—exclusion and war.⁹ According to Andrew Linklater, global civil society seeks to challenge the 'totalising project' of the state, which is based on 'accentuat[ing] the differences between citizens and aliens in order to meet the challenges of inter-state war'.¹⁰ Here the state's drive to war necessitates the exclusionary practices of citizenship. For Mary Kaldor, a key advocate for global civil society, this relationship is inverted, with states manipulating the fear of external threat to ensure political debate takes place within the narrow confines of the status quo.¹¹ Either way, an intimate link is established between territorially-tied, state-based politics (of any political complexion) and exclusion, war and conflict.

It is the rejection of state-based approaches which marks out this project as distinct from those of the past, and its development can be traced from the post-1968 'new left' through the 1980s civic 'oppositionists' in Eastern Europe to the Seattle protests and the anti-globalisation and anti-capitalism movements of today. To date, critiques of global civil society theorising have largely focused on the problems of conflating normative desires with empirical claims for the existence or influence of global civil society, or have worried that radical 'bottom-up' approaches will be subsumed beneath attempts to restore state-based forms of global governance.¹² There has been little critical analysis of the emergence of radical 'bottom-up' approaches and markedly little examination either of their claims for extending the ideas and concerns of political community beyond the state, or of the limitations of their demand for a new type of political activism which prioritises the ethical individual over political collectivity.

9. M. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76* (London: Allen Lane/ Penguin, 2003), 98-9; W. E. Connolly, 'Democracy and Territoriality', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 20, no. 3 (1991): 465-6; T. Pogge, 'An Egalitarian Law of Peoples', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 23 (1994): 198; and D. Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

10. A. Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 6.

11. M. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 36.

12. See for example, N. Chandhoke, 'The Limits of Global Civil Society', in *Global Civil Society 2002*, eds. M. Glasius, M. Kaldor and H. Anheier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35-53; S. Hopgood, 'Reading the Small Print in Global Civil Society: The Inexorable Hegemony of the Liberal Self', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 1 (2000): 1-25; and Baker, 'Problems in the Theorisation of Global Civil Society'.

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The following sections draw out the historical development of the core ideas at the heart of radical 'bottom-up' global civil society approaches, focusing on the grounds for the rejection of the formal political framework of state-based politics, the centrality of individual autonomy, and the importance of the global or transnational dimension. The concluding sections dwell on the limitations of this political approach, highlighting the problems involved in privileging individual ethics over societal accountability and the consequences of this approach in legitimising highly individualised political responses, which tend to fragment and atomise political practices rather than constitute a new and more inclusive form of politics.

Bypassing the State

The post-1989 genesis of global civil society is often rooted in the revival of the concept of civil society by East European and Latin American opposition movements and groupings, which operated in the context of authoritarian state regulation.¹³ In the 1990s, however, it was not just under the circumstances of the struggle against an authoritarian state that the opening up of 'independent spaces' was held to be necessary. As Kaldor notes: 'This concept was taken up by Western radicals who saw civil society as a check both on the power and arbitrariness of the contemporary state and on the power of unbridled capitalism'.¹⁴ She sees the recent rise of interest in—and support for—global civil society as intimately connected to current Western concerns 'about personal autonomy, self-organization [and] private space', which were initially given political and ethical importance by oppositionists in Eastern Europe as 'a way of getting round the totalitarian militaristic state'.¹⁵

This argument that it was the strength of the contemporary Western state and the 'power of unbridled capitalism' which led to a focus on empowerment through the search for 'personal autonomy' and

13. See Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*; and G. Baker, *Civil Society and Democratic Theory: Alternative Voices* (London: Routledge, 2002).

14. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 21.

15. *Ibid.*, p.4. It should be noted that while advocates of global civil society from below argue that the state is too dominant over society, advocates of global civil society within a cosmopolitan democracy framework—i.e., 'from above'—focus on the lack of power of states to influence society under the conditions of globalisation. While some theorists argue that there is not necessarily a contradiction—e.g., Rob Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 170—I suggest elsewhere that global civil society theorists are more than happy both to have their cake and eat it. Chandler, *Constructing Global Civil Society*, 156.

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'private space' is open to challenge. There were other factors at work drawing global civil society theorists to the experience of East European dissidents: one factor was their similar experience of social isolation.

After 1968, the main form of [East European] opposition was the individual dissident. The dissidents saw themselves not as precursors of a political movement but as individuals who wanted to retain their personal integrity. Dissidence was about the dignity of the individual as much as about politics. It was about the possibility of honest interaction even at a private and personal level, about being able to read, think and discuss freely.¹⁶

For Adam Michnik in Poland, the task of the opposition was 'not to seize power but to change the relationship between state and society'. This was to be achieved through 'self-organization', with the aim of creating 'autonomous spaces in society'.¹⁷ While the term 'civil society' was used in Poland, perhaps more explanatory is the similar concept of 'anti-politics', the title of a book by Hungarian dissident George Konrad.¹⁸ For Kaldor, 'anti-politics is the ethos of civil society'.¹⁹

The realm of 'anti-politics' or the parallel polis was one where the individual would refuse such [political] collaboration. . . . In all these discussions, the role of the individual and the importance of personal links, something that was central to individual dissidence, were considered primary, overriding claims to political authority. . . [A]nti-politics . . . was a new type of politics because it was not about the capture of state power; it was the politics of those who don't want to be politicians and don't want to share power.²⁰

The dissident movement was one of political refusal rather than political participation. The individual ethical rejection of the 'political' was held to be potentially more inclusive than political engagement through formal representative parties, leading advocates to argue the virtues of the 'non-party political process'.²¹ This rejection of political engagement has enabled global civil society activists to assert that they represent the disengaged and marginalized in ways that formal political parties could never do. According to Rajni Kothari:

16. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 53.

17. *Ibid.*, 55.

18. G. Konrad, *Anti-Politics: An Essay* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Janovich, 1984).

19. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 57.

20. *Ibid.*, 56.

21. *Ibid.*, 85.

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[T]his is a whole new space. It is a different space, which is essentially a non-party space. Its role is to deepen the democratic process in response to the state that has not only ditched the poor and the oppressed but has turned oppressive and violent. It is to highlight dimensions that were not hitherto considered political and make them part of the political process.²²

Global civil society has become increasingly popular as the concept, once associated with liberal protest against the lack of democracy in Eastern Europe, has become explicitly transformed into a post-liberal critique of the limitations of democracy. This was not difficult as the East European intellectuals were no supporters of mass politics 'anti-politics' was, in fact, a reflection of their disillusionment with the masses. Their 'refusal' was more about engagement with mass society than any reluctance to deal with the bureaucratic regimes themselves. Kaldor acknowledges this impulse behind East European intellectual dissent: 'They described themselves not as a movement but as a civic initiative, a "small island in a sea of apathy"'.²³

It is this disillusionment with the people, rather than the dissidents' hostility to the state per se, which is highlighted by Kaldor's application of Konrad's 'anti-politics' and Havel's ideas of 'post-totalitarianism' to Western democratic life. She quotes Havel approvingly:

It would appear that the traditional parliamentary democracies can offer no fundamental opposition to the automatism of technological civilisation and the industrial-consumer society, for they, too, are being dragged helplessly along. People are manipulated in ways that are infinitely more subtle and refined than the brutal methods used in post-totalitarian societies. . . . In a democracy, human beings may enjoy many personal freedoms, . . . [but] they too are ultimately victims of the same automatism, and are incapable of defending their concerns about their own identity or preventing their superficialisation.²⁴

Beneath the surface of post-liberal radicalism, which seems to condemn the state as the site of power and control, stands a more traditional conservative thesis on the limits of popular democracy. It becomes clear that it is the disillusionment with mass politics, rather than the critique of the strong state, that has been the key to the concept's appeal to

22. Cited at *ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, 56.

24. *Ibid.*, 57.

radical Western activists. According to Richard Falk, '[t]he modern media-shaped political life threatens individuals with a new type of postmodern serfdom, in which elections, political campaigns, and political parties provide rituals without substance, a politics of sound bytes and manipulative images, reducing the citizen to a mechanical object to be controlled, rather than being the legitimating source of legitimate authority'.²⁵

Ronnie Lipschutz similarly argues that mass politics cannot lead to emancipatory progress because 'in a sense, even societies in the West have been "colonized" by their states'.²⁶ William Connolly writes that Western mass politics are a form of 'imprisonment' because progressive demands can be derailed by national chauvinist sentiments:

Today the territorial/security state forms the space of democratic liberation and imprisonment. It liberates because it organises democratic accountability through electoral institutions. It imprisons because it confines and conceals democratic energies flowing over and through its dikes. The confinement of democracy to the territorial state . . . consolidates and exacerbates pressures to exclusive nationality. . . . The state too often and too easily translates democratic energies into national chauvinist sentiments.²⁷

Advocates of global civic activism assert that the state-level focus of old movements limited their progressive potential: '[I]t was through the state that "old" movements were "tamed". This was true both of workers' movements, which became left political parties and trade unions, and anti-colonial struggles, which were transformed into new ruling parties'.²⁸ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for example, write that sovereignty is a 'poisoned gift', where ostensible revolutionaries 'get bogged down in "realism"', resulting in 'the opposite of the nationalist dream of an autonomous, self-centered development' as new structures of domestic and international domination become established.²⁹ Their critique of national sovereignty puts a question-mark over the political and ethical legitimacy of the liberal democratic process:

25. R. A. Falk, *On Humane Governance: Toward a New Global Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 253.

26. R. Lipschutz, 'Reconstructing World Politics: The Emergence of Global Civil Society', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21, no. 3 (1992): 392.

27. Connolly, 'Democracy and Territoriality', 476.

28. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 86.

29. M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 133.

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The entire logical chain of representation might be summarized like this: the people representing the multitude, the nation representing the people, and the state representing the nation. Each link is an attempt to hold in suspension the crisis of modernity. Representation in each case means a further step of abstraction and control.³⁰

The critique of the constraints of electoral competition for representation is a core theme of the global civil society approach. Representation is seen as a mechanism of domination over civil society whereby political identities and interests are imposed from above. Ricardo Blaug, for example, argues that engaging with the formal political framework of states only increases the legitimacy of political hierarchies by channelling 'the utopian energies of the lifeworld' into legalistic arguments about rights on terms set by the state.³¹ For Gideon Baker, 'a discursive-institutional division between representatives and represented actually constitutes subjects as citizens'.³² Instead, Baker argues for the freedom of 'self-legislation' and 'doing politics for ourselves rather than on behalf of others', allowing identities to remain fluid and avoiding the 'game of power'.³³ He argues that, given their 'permanent domination of the political', states 'cannot be legitimate' and that new social movements can be, 'but only for as long as they resist incorporation' into the statist framework of law and rights.³⁴ The radical 'bottom-up' approach of global civil society rejects any attempt to reconstitute traditional understandings of the political, based on formal representational rights, even the 'post-national' frameworks of cosmopolitan democracy.³⁵

Radical 'Autonomy'

The disillusionment with mass politics, highlighted in the 1980s in Central Europe and in the 1990s and beyond in the West, can be

30. *Ibid.*, 134.

31. R. Blaug, *Democracy, Real and Ideal: Discourse Ethics and Radical Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 121.

32. G. Baker, 'Unstable Subjects and Unknowable Others: Is Political Representation Possible?', paper presented to the 'Political Representation' workshop, ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Edinburgh, 28 March – 2 April 2003, 10.

33. Baker, 'Unstable Subjects and Unknowable Others'.

34. G. Baker, 'Problems in the Theorisation of Global Civil Society', 942.

35. Baker, 'Problems in the Theorisation of Global Civil Society'; K. Hutchings, 'Modelling Democracy', in *Democracy and International Relations: Critical Theories/ Problematic Practices*, ed. H. Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2000); and V. Jabri, 'Discourse Ethics, Democratic Practice and the Possibility of Intercultural Understanding', in *Democracy and International Relations*.

understood better in relation to the first movements to put the 'bottom-up' ethics of autonomy before power: the 'new social movements', generally considered to be the offspring of the 1968 student protests.³⁶ The new social movements were defined in opposition to the 'old' social movements of trade unions and Communist Party politics. Rather than engaging in formal politics, monopolised by the 'old' left, these groups stressed their radical opposition to traditional political engagement. As James Heartfield notes: 'The new generation of radicals did not, as a rule, challenge the official leadership of the trade unions, but side-stepped the organised working class altogether, to find new constituencies and fields of activism. Taking the path of least resistance, these radicals took their struggle elsewhere'.³⁷

The radical struggle was shaped by a rejection of the conservative politics of the organised left; particularly in France, where the left (including the Communist Party) supported the war in Algeria, discrediting its claim of representing universal interests.³⁸ However, rather than dispute the claims of the old left to represent a collective political subject, the new left rejected the existence of collective political interests per se. This resulted, by default, in either a reduction of emancipatory claims to the 'self-realisation' of the individual (expressed, for example, in the women's movement, and the *mouvement autogestionnaire* in France and the *Alternativbewegung* in Germany) or in the search for subaltern subjects on the margins of society.³⁹ Instead of the construction of new collectivities, radical consciousness was dominated by a critical approach to organisation, a 'hermeneutics of suspicion', which derided mass politics and inevitably reduced political aspirations.⁴⁰

The critique of, and political distancing from, organised labour on the grounds of the rejection of any collective political subject, went hand-in-hand with a critique of mass politics and liberal democracy, which similarly implied a collective political subject; i.e., the electorate. Leading theorists of the 'new left', Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, argued that democratic struggles were not necessarily popular struggles, to be legitimated through the formal equality of the ballot-box.⁴¹ They denied the central importance of state-based politics of

36. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 84.

37. J. Heartfield, *The 'Death of the Subject' Explained* (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University Press, 2002), 142.

38. *Ibid.*, 120.

39. P. Wagner, 'The Project of Emancipation and the Possibility of Politics, or, What's Wrong with Post-1968 Individualism?', *Thesis Eleven* 68 (2002): 31-45.

40. *Ibid.*

41. E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2001).

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democratic representation, arguing that there was no one ontologically privileged political space.⁴² For these theorists of 'radical democracy', democratic struggles (for example, the feminist or anti-racist struggles) took place in a 'plurality of political spaces' shaped by their own, relatively autonomous, 'ensemble of practices and discourses'.⁴³ There was no longer one 'political space'; the key demands were therefore not for equal political rights of participation but for the recognition of difference and 'autonomy'.⁴⁴

The centrality of autonomy to the definition and nature of new social movements makes them implicitly anti-state, not so much because of their subjective political views but because of their organisational practices. The radical approach sees the bearers of a new globalised democracy as social organisations which reject formal political processes and work at the sub-political level. For Alberto Melucci, new social movements exist outside the traditional civil society / state nexus; submerged in everyday life, they 'have created meanings and definitions of identity' which contrast with traditional political boundaries.⁴⁵ He argues that traditional electoral measures of political success miss the point 'because conflict takes place principally on symbolic ground. . . . The mere existence of a symbolic challenge is in itself a method of unmasking the dominant codes, a different way of perceiving and naming the world'.⁴⁶

Melucci highlights the choices thrown up by new social movements and their ambiguous relationship to the political: 'A new political space is designed beyond the traditional distinction between state and "civil society": an intermediate *public space*, whose function is not to institutionalise the movements or to transform them into parties, but to make society hear their messages . . . while the movements maintain their autonomy'.⁴⁷ This ambiguity is the key to the 'bottom-up' ethics of global civil society, understood as a space whereby political movements can make their claims but also maintain their difference and specificity. They become 'visible' but are not institutionalised; that is

42. Ibid.; see also B. Jessop, *State Theory: Putting Capitalist States in their Place* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

43. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 132.

44. Ibid., 184.

45. A. Melucci, 'Social Movements and the Democratization of Everyday Life', in *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, ed. J. Keane (London: Verso, 1988), 247.

46. Ibid., 248.

47. Melucci, 'The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements', *Social Research* 52, no.4 (1985): 815.

they do not have to make claims to legitimacy based on public electoral or financial support.⁴⁸ This, in Melucci's words, is the 'democracy of everyday life', where legitimacy and recognition stem from 'mere existence' rather than the power of argument or representation.⁴⁹

In effect, the claim for recognition on the basis of existence—rather than the ideas forwarded or numbers of people involved—inverses the traditional 'benchmarks' for judging political legitimacy. The focus on the everyday and the marginal has led to a growing appreciation of non-state networks least linked into political institutions and a celebration of the 'everyday' survival strategies of the Southern poor, which are held to 'reposition the locus of power' and 'transform the nature of power'. From this perspective, isolation and the reliance on contacts within disparate 'local communities result in a decentralized strength, rooted in the autonomy of the national and local process'.⁵⁰ Unlike the formal political struggle for representation, the 'struggle' of global civil society from below is for autonomy, held to be a self-constituting goal or end-point.

The radical self-constitution of the political subject avoids the mediating link of the political process. Political legitimacy is no longer derived from the political process of building support in society but rather from recognition of the movement's social isolation. This is a logical consequence of the new left's rejection of any legitimate collective political subject. As Laclau and Mouffe assert in their summation of the essence of 'radical democracy':

Pluralism is *radical* only to the extent that each term of this plurality of identities finds within itself the principle of its own validity. . . . And this radical pluralism is *democratic* to the extent that the autoconstitutivity of each one of its terms is the result of displacements of the egalitarian imaginary. Hence, the project for a radical and plural democracy, *in a primary sense*, is nothing other than the struggle for a maximum autonomization of spheres on the basis of the generalization of the equivalential-egalitarian logic.⁵¹

48. See G. Martin, 'New Social Movements and Democracy', in *Democracy and Protest*, eds. G. Taylor and M. Todds (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University Press, 2003).

49. Melucci, 'Social Movements and the Democratization of Everyday Life', 259.

50. S. Patel, J. Bolnick and M. Mitlin, 'Squatting on the Global Highway: Community Exchanges for Urban Transformation', in *Global Citizen Action*, eds. M. Edwards and J. Gaventa (London: Earthscan, 2001), 244.

51. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 167.

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In plain language, the claim is not for equality but for autonomy; for recognition on the basis of self-constituted difference rather than collective or shared support.

New Global Agency?

Hardt and Negri pose the problem sharply: 'The proletariat is not what it used to be'. The task, therefore, is to discover new forms of global agency.⁵² Fortunately, it appears that the solution is at hand: radical proponents of global civil society 'from below' claim to have discovered new sources of political agency capable of transforming global politics. According to the radical guide books advertised in the *Guardian* and the *New Statesman* every week, a new world-wide revolution is in progress—a global movement against globalisation and capitalism and for justice, autonomy and civil society—a movement so large and so diverse that it is often simply termed a new 'movement of movements'.

The world is allegedly in revolt. Everywhere—from the Zapatistas in Chiapas, often alleged to have founded the new global politics when they started their 'post-modern' 12 day rebellion on 1 January 1994; to the radical farmers protesting against GM crops in Latin America, India, Malaysia, the Philippines and South Africa; to the anti-privatisation struggles in South African shanty towns, to the Narmada Dam protests in India; to the struggles of the landless peasantry in Latin America—a new global revolutionary movement has been widely heralded. For many commentators, this global revolution is different: its membership is found largely outside the West⁵³ and much of its politics and its techniques were first developed in the global South.⁵⁴ Paul Kingsnorth in his best selling *One No, Many Yeses*—promoted as a 'journey to the heart of the global resistance movement'—asks: 'Has a movement this big ever existed before? Has such a diversity of forces, uncontrolled, decentralised, egalitarian, ever existed on a global scale? Has a movement led by the poor, the disenfranchised, the South, ever existed at all?'⁵⁵

This sense of radical global agency is reflected in leading academic treatments. Sussex professor Martin Shaw argues that the progressive movement of global politics is one of 'conscious human agency'; that while 'there is no single guiding force, such as a revolutionary party . . .

52. Hardt, and Negri, *Empire*, 53.

53. G. Monbiot, *The Age of Consent: A Manifesto for a New World Order* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 10.

54. Graeber, 'The New Anarchists', 207

55. Kingsnorth, *One No, Many Yeses*, 329.

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there are many actors whose conscious interactions shape the new era'.⁵⁶ This is a 'global revolution' with a difference; there is no collective conscious agency but rather a new pluralist 'agency' which 'involves a radical redefinition of the idea of revolution'.⁵⁷

For Hardt and Negri, the plural source of global agency is to be found in disparate forms of resistance 'from below', from the 1992 Los Angeles riots, to the Palestinian Intifada and the uprising in Chiapas. These are local struggles with little in common and little that could be generalisable. This local character and isolation from any broader political movement is described by Hardt and Negri as 'incommunicability', and they maintain that '[t]his paradox of incommunicability makes it extremely difficult to grasp and express the new power posed by the struggles that have emerged'.⁵⁸ Because these struggles are isolated and marginal, and express no broader political aspirations, they do not at first sight appear to be particularly powerful. However, for Hardt and Negri, a focus on their purely local and immediate character, for this reason, would be a mistake. They are also seen to have a universal character, in that they challenge facets of global capitalist domination. For example, the Los Angeles rioters are held to challenge racial and hierarchical forms of 'post-Fordist' social control, the Chiapas rebels to challenge the regional construction of world markets, etc. The key point is that '[p]erhaps precisely because all these struggles are incommunicable and thus blocked from travelling horizontally in the form of a cycle, they are forced instead to leap vertically and touch immediately on the global level'.⁵⁹

It would appear that the decline of traditional international social movements capable of generating mass support has led radical theorists to see a new importance in increasingly disparate and isolated struggles. As Hardt and Negri illustrate:

We ought to be able to recognize that this is not the appearance of a new cycle of internationalist struggles, but rather the emergence of a new quality of social movements. We ought to be able to recognize, in other words, the fundamentally new characteristics these struggles all present, despite their radical diversity. First, each struggle, though firmly rooted in local conditions, leaps immediately to the global level and attacks the imperial constitution in its generality. Second, all the struggles destroy the traditional distinction

56. M. Shaw, *Theory of the Global State: Globality as Unfinished Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 18.

57. *Ibid.*

58. Hardt, and Negri, *Empire*, 54.

59. *Ibid.*, 56.

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between economic and political struggles. The struggles are at once economic, political, and cultural—and hence they are biopolitical struggles, struggles over the form of life. They are constituent struggles, creating new public spaces and new forms of community.⁶⁰

Until the Seattle protests, the most noted example of global civil society globalisation 'from below' was the Zapatistas, whose use of the internet to promote their struggle over land rights was picked up by Western academics, who turned the limited success of the Chiapas rising into a revolutionary 'postmodern social movement'.⁶¹ The Zapatistas' message was held to transcend the local. Charismatic leader, and former university lecturer, Subcomandante Marcos has promoted the movement as embodying the essence of global civil society. In response to the question 'who is he?' the reply was given:

Marcos is gay in San Francisco, a black person in South Africa, Asian in Europe, a Jew in Germany . . . a feminist in a political party. In other words, Marcos is a human being in this world. Marcos is every untolerated, oppressed, exploited minority that is beginning to speak and every majority must shut up and listen.⁶²

Rather than political leadership, the Zapatistas argue they offer a mirror reflecting the struggles of others.⁶³ Instead of a political or ideological struggle for a political programme, the Zapatista movement claims to seek support within the diverse heterogeneous movements of global civil society.⁶⁴ The message is that subaltern subjects should celebrate difference rather than seek integration on the terms of power. Baker, for example, cites Marcos on the need to operate not on the state's terms but on those of global civil society, 'underground' and 'subterranean', rather than taking up formal avenues where they would be 'admitted only as losers'.⁶⁵

60. Ibid.

61. R. Debray, 'A Guerrilla with a Difference', *New Left Review* 218 (1996): 128-137; G. Esteva, 'The Zapatistas and People's Power', *Capital and Class* 68 (1999): 153-182; G. Esteva and M. Prakash, *Grassroots Post-modernism: Re-making the Soil of Cultures* (London: Zed Books, 1998).

62. Cited in M. Giles and K. Stokke, 'Participatory Development and Empowerment: The Dangers of Localism', *Third World Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (2000): 247-258.

63. Klein, *Fences and Windows*, 210-12.

64. J. Holloway, 'Dignity's Revolt', in *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*, eds. J. Holloway and E. Peláez (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 180.

65. Baker, 'Problems in the Theorisation of Global Civil Society', 941.

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The EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) at its founding congress decreed it would not take part in elections or even allow its members to join political parties and the rejection of all ambition to hold political office became a condition of membership.⁶⁶ Despite the geographic distance, the Zapatistas have a very similar approach to that of the East European 'anti-politics' intellectuals of the 1980s. They accept their weakness vis-à-vis the state and, instead of challenging governing power, follow the less ambitious project of creating 'autonomous counter-publics' and thereby demonstrate the exclusionary practices of the Mexican state.⁶⁷ As Naomi Klein notes: 'Marcos is convinced that these free spaces, born of reclaimed land, communal agriculture, resistance to privatisation, will eventually create counter-powers to the state simply by existing as alternatives'.⁶⁸ Baker highlights that what really makes the Zapatista struggle part of global civil society is not just the rejection of engagement with state-level politics, but the declaration that their struggle is a global one against transnational capitalism and neo-liberalism or just 'Power'—a conceptual shorthand for capitalism and its enforcers at a global and national level.⁶⁹

This rhetoric of global resistance coexists with a remarkable failure of the struggle to achieve any relief from abject poverty for the indigenous villagers of the area. Ten years after the Zapatistas' started their rebellion, their demands are still ignored by the government. The EZLN, however, argue that their failure to deliver resources is a secondary question since they 'know their "dignity" is worth more than any government development project'.⁷⁰

This contrast between the claims made for global civic actors and the reality of their marginal influence was clear in the alternative anti-globalisation conference held at the same time as the World Trade Organisation talks at Cancun in September 2003. Meeting in a badminton court in central Cancun, overhung with pictures of Che Guevara and Emiliano Zapata, WTO protestors could allege they represented 100 million peasant farmers—who would have been there but couldn't afford to come—while radical Western publishers launched

66. P. Cunninghame and B. C. Corona, 'A Rainbow at Midnight: Zapatistas and Autonomy', *Capital and Class* 66 (1998): 16.

67. Baker, *Civil Society and Democratic Theory*, 140.

68. Klein, *Fences and Windows*, 220.

69. Baker, *Civil Society and Democratic Theory*, 142-3; see also J. Vidal, 'Peasant Farmers Show Strength in Cauldron of Grassroots Politics', *The Guardian*, 10 September 2003.

70. J. Tuckman, 'Zapatistas Go Back to the Grassroots', *The Guardian*, 27 December 2003.

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their new books to an audience of Western spokesmen and women who talked-up the event. For example, Peter Rossett, from US think tank Food First, argued that the Cancun meeting demonstrated the strength of new social movements: 'These movements are growing fast, everywhere. For the first time you have global alliances forming'.⁷¹ Barry Coates, of the World Development Movement, concurred: 'What we are seeing is the emergence of mass movements from across the spectrum of the developing world'.⁷² Even at this event, the highlight was a message of international support from Zapatista leaders—their first international message for four years.⁷³

Whether we would need the self-appointed spokespeople of Food First, the World Development Movement, or the countless other think tanks and NGOs which advocate for the 'millions of dispossessed', if there really was the emergence of any type of mass movement is a mute point. It seems that, from anarchist squatters in Italy to the Landless Peasant's Movement in Brazil, the smaller or more marginal the struggle, the more pregnant with possibility it is and the more it transgresses traditional political boundaries, whether conceptual or spatial. One might wonder whether there is an inverse relationship between the amount of progressive 'new characteristics' these struggles have and their strength and influence. A sceptical observer would no doubt suggest that the more marginal an opposition movement is, the more able are academic commentators to invest it with their own ideas and aspirations. These normative claims can then be used by any institution or individual to promote their own importance and moral legitimacy.

If this is the case, it seems possible that if global civil society did not exist it would have had to have been invented. As Rob Walker notes, liberal and radical commentators have drawn 'heavily on the notion of a global civil society, not least so as to avoid falling back on some pre-political or even anti-political claim about an existing ethics of world politics'.⁷⁴

The Narrowing Sphere of Political Community

While the 'new left' emphasises the moral distinctiveness of new social movements engaged in 'globalization from below' they are also keen to

71. Cited in Vidal, 'Peasant Farmers Show Strength'.

72. Cited in *ibid.*

73. S. Marcos, 'The Slaves of Money—and Our Rebellion', *The Guardian*, 11 September 2003; Vidal, 'Peasant Farmers Show Strength'.

74. R. B. J. Walker, 'Social Movements/World Politics', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 23, no. 3 (1994): 674.

stress the 'global' nature of these 'movements'. The claims put forward for global civil society as a new way of doing politics attempt to overcome the isolation of radical activists in their own societies—or, put another way, their inability to engage with people now seen to be only arbitrarily connected to them by the territorial (rather than political) ties of the nation. John Keane argues that this view of new social movements as the 'world proletariat in civvies', while comforting for the left, is highly misleading.⁷⁵ In contrast, Richard Falk describes this process in glowing terms as 'transnational solidarities, whether between women, lawyers, environmentalists, human rights activists, or other varieties of "citizen pilgrim" associated with globalisation from below . . . [who have] already transferred their loyalties to the invisible political community of their hopes and dreams, one which could exist in future time but is nowhere currently embodied in the life-world of the planet'.⁷⁶ The global interconnectedness which is celebrated is, in fact, the flip-side of a lack of connection domestically: 'Air travel and the Internet create new horizontal communities of people, who perhaps have more in common, than with those who live close by'.⁷⁷ What these 'citizen pilgrims' have in common is their isolation from and rejection of their own political communities. The transfer of loyalties to an 'invisible political community' is merely a radical re-representation of their rejection of a real and all too visible political community—the electorate.

In fact, the global movement for emancipation 'from below' could be read as a product of the end of any genuine transnational struggle. When radical theorists celebrate 'the early 1990s' as 'the time when civic transnationalism really came of age',⁷⁸ they betray a certain lack of historical imagination. Alejandro Colás in *International Civil Society* makes the point that the idea that transnational politics has only recently emerged demonstrates a lack of historical awareness on the part of the advocates of 'globalization from below'.⁷⁹

In the 19th and 20th centuries the main political currents, whether they were conservatives, communists, anarchists, socialists, pacifists, feminists or even nationalists were in fact internationally—as much as nationally—orientated. For example, the People's International League, a cross-European association of nationalists, was established by Mazzini

75. Keane, *Global Civil Society?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 65.

76. Falk, *On Humane Governance*, 212.

77. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 111-112.

78. R. Falk and A. Strauss, 'The Deeper Challenges of Global Terrorism: A Democratizing Response', 211.

79. A. Colás, *International Civil Society: Social Movements in World Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).

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in 1847, the International Working Men's Association or First International was formed in 1864, and the International Congress of Women was established in 1888.⁸⁰ Rather than being new or on the rise, transnational political activism is in a parlous state today. The transnational social movements of modernity had the independence of aim and capacity to effect meaningful political change at both domestic and international levels without either relying on states to act on their behalf or, at the other extreme, avoiding any engagement with formal politics for fear of losing their 'autonomy'.

The fiction of global civil society as an ethical alternative approach to the problems of the political, has its roots in the politics of the left, whose lack of support within their own societies was historically softened by the illusion of being part of an international movement. While their own groups may have been marginal to domestic politics adherents took heart in messages of 'solidarity' or success from other parts of the world. These international props were initially the mainstay of the 'old left', dependent on the Communist International or international trade union federations. However, the post-'68 'new left' soon followed the trend as peace, environmental and women's groups sought legitimacy more in their international connections than their capacity to engage in a political struggle of ideas with a domestic audience.

The transformations in Eastern Europe in 1989 leant new life to this narcissistic form of internationalism. Isolated dissident groups in Eastern Europe, whose oppositional politics was influenced by the new left's rejection of mass politics and claims for 'recognition', found themselves to be the short-term beneficiaries of the collapsing Soviet systems and the bureaucracy's search for a negotiated regime change. A new 'East-West' dialogue between Central and East European dissidents and the West European peace movement gave an international legitimacy to both sets of participants which were marginal in their own states.

Kaldor's own experience of active involvement in the waning European peace movements in the 1980s was an instructive one. Perceiving themselves as isolated due to being 'unpatriotic' and 'pro-Soviet', the European Nuclear Disarmament (END) group took their critics' rejection literally when they said 'Why not demonstrate in Moscow?'.⁸¹

80. Ibid., 55-57.

81. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 48.

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Hundreds of activists travelled to Eastern Europe and identified local groups, individuals, town councils and churches, with whom they could talk and exchange ideas. I have before me as I write a leaflet published by END called "Go East": "Forget smoke-filled rooms, this political organisation is asking you to take a holiday—in Eastern Europe."⁸²

The new strategy of 'Going East' was hardly a sign of political dynamism, but rather a sign of giving up on winning the arguments at home. In the same way, today's liberal and radical commentators are drawn to the international realm not because it is a sphere of political struggle, but precisely because it appears to be an easier option—one with less accountability and little pressure for representational legitimacy.

It would seem that the dynamic towards the creation of global civil society is one driven by domestic marginalization and the attempt to avoid the pressures and accountability of domestic politics rather than the attraction of the international sphere per se. As Kaldor states: 'almost all social movements and NGOs . . . have some kind of transnational relations. Precisely because these groups inhabit a political space outside formal national politics (parties and elections)'.⁸³ Claire Fox, writing about the burgeoning international activities of British local authorities, ranging from multiple twinning, to capacity-building partnerships as far a field as Indonesia, Vietnam and Kosovo, notes that it seems that easy-sounding solutions to problems elsewhere are more attractive than engaging with a domestic audience. For her, it appears that 'New Internationalism is in danger of becoming a con-trick, a worthy sounding escape-route from the angst and insecurity of running and representing local areas'.⁸⁴

Rather than be exposed through a formal struggle to win the argument with people in a genuine debate, isolated activists are instead drawn to the forums of international financial and inter-state institutions where there is no democratic discussion and they have no formal rights or responsibilities. Protesting outside meetings of the WTO or the G8 does not involve winning any arguments. At best it is a matter of courtier politics and elite lobbying, shortcutting any attempt to win popular representative support. At worst it is a radical justification for the refusal to engage politically and for a retreat into personal solipsism.

82. Ibid., 64.

83. Ibid., 82.

84. C. Fox, 'Thinking Global, Not Local', *Municipal Journal*, 10 July 2003.

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Courtier politics

The attempt to give elite lobbying a moral legitimacy leads to the exploitation of marginal struggles in the non-Western world, where people are least likely to complain about Western advocates claiming to represent them and guide their struggle.⁸⁵ Mary Kaldor, for example, echoes network theorists Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink in their use of the 'boomerang effect' to describe the way civil society groups could 'bypass the state' through appealing to transnational networks, international institutions and foreign governments.⁸⁶ Kaldor describes the relationship:

[A] kind of two-way street [links Southern] groups and individuals who directly represent victims, whether it be the victims of human rights violations, poverty or environmental degradation, with the so-called Northern solidarity 'outsiders'. The former provide testimony, stories and information about their situation and they confer legitimacy on those who campaign on their behalf. The latter provide access to global institutions, funders or global media as well as 'interpretations' more suited to the global context.⁸⁷

The popularity of building global civil society from the bottom up for Western radicals would seem to be a reflection of similar problems to those faced by East European oppositionist figures in the 1980s—the weakness of their own domestic position. In the search for new political avenues which do not rely on representational legitimacy, Western radicals have talked-up the importance of international institutional gatherings which previously attracted little interest. Pianta argues, for example, that 'the new power of summits of states and inter-

85. Of course, this does not mean that there is no local opposition, or resentment, over some 'social movements' which 'consist of nothing more than an office and a big grant from somewhere or other' and 'call a workshop, pay people to attend, give them a nice meal and then write up a good report' but 'build nothing on the ground', as Trevor Ngwane states. 'Sparks in the Township', in *A Movement of Movements*. For a similar analysis in the case of Bosnia, see S. Sali-Terzic, 'Civil Society', in *International Support Policies to South-East European Countries—Lessons (Not) Learned in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, ed. Z. Papić (Muller: Sarajevo, 2001), 175 – 193.

86. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 5; M. E. Keck and K. Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

87. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 95.

governmental organisations' needs to be confronted through the invention of parallel summits.⁸⁸ In the face of an inability to make an impact at home, the transnational activists have sought to latch on to the ready-made agenda of international institutions. It is increasingly apparent that these radical movements are shaped and cohered more by external agendas—e.g., the timetable of meetings of the G7, WTO or the UN—than by any collective drive of their own.

Significantly, rather than this global civil society bringing pressure to bear on institutions, it is these institutions, particularly the UN, which have been largely responsible for creating a global activist network providing an agenda of forums which could act as a cohering focus for the establishment of a 'loose coalition of groups and individuals worldwide'.⁸⁹ Rather than being seen as a threat to the powers that be, the 'new' social movements are more often than not seen by the international establishment as making a positive contribution. For example, following the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001 global institutions responded by welcoming the dialogue. The IMF and the World Bank invited lobby groups including Global Exchange, Jobs with Justice, 50 Years is Enough and Essential Action to engage in public debate. Guy Verhofstadt, Prime Minister of Belgium and President of the European Union at the time, wrote an open letter to the anti-globalization movement, published in major national newspapers around the world, and collected the responses. The French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, welcomed 'the emergence of a citizen's movement at the planetary level'.⁹⁰

As highlighted by George W. Bush's relationship with U2 rock star Bono, governments and international institutions can only gain from their association with radical advocates.⁹¹ The reason for this positive reception from the establishment lies in the fact that the relationship of advocacy implies a mutual interest rather than any radical opposition.⁹² The power of the advocate rests on an entirely different basis to that of an elected representative: lacking the representative's independent basis of legitimacy, the advocate's position necessarily depends upon the

88. Pianta, 'Democracy vs Globalization', 238.

89. C. Bunch, 'International Networking for Women's Human Rights', in *Global Citizen Action*, 217-21.

90. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 103.

91. J. Vidal, 'Odd Couple's African Tour Highlights Battle over Debt', *The Guardian*, 22 May 2002; R. Carroll, 'Pop Star's Relations with Bush Turn Sour', *The Guardian*, 18 September 2003.

92. J. Heartfield, 'Contextualising the "Anti-Capitalism" Movement in Global Civil Society', in *Global Civil Society: Contested Futures*, eds. G. Baker and D. Chandler (London: Routledge, 2004), 85-99.

good favour of governing elites. This lack of representational accountability leaves control in the hands of the powerful, while offering the appearance of 'openness', 'transparency' and 'accountability'.⁹³ Under these circumstances, the more 'radical' global civic actors become, the more the doors of inter-state forums have been opened to them.⁹⁴ Despite the claims of many critical theorists, there are few indications that operating outside the formal political sphere of electoral representation facilitates a radical challenge to political power and existing hierarchies of control. Compared to 'political' social movements of the past, new social movements based on advocacy pose much less of a threat to the status quo.⁹⁵ However, for Kaldor, the advocacy movement 'represents, in some respects, a revival of the great anti-capitalist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries'. She points out that '[a]t the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2002, the activists defined themselves as a "global movement for social justice and solidarity"'.⁹⁶

The activists may have declared themselves to constitute a 'global movement', but it could be argued that what is distinctive about global civic activism is precisely the individual character of global civic activism rather than the collective mass character of the 'great anti-capitalist movements' of the last two centuries. According to Grugel:

Recent anti-globalisation movements include: the Jubilee 2000 campaign against third world debt; mass protest against the policies and strictures imposed by the IMF, the symbol of global regulation; street protests at European Union summits; and local protests against the onward march of globalising capitalism, such as that encapsulated within the Chiapas rebellion in Mexico. . . . *These organisations privilege lobbying at the global level over national strategies*

93. As Steve Charnovitz notes, the power to appoint non-state actors and lobby groups to advisory committees ensures that states control the policy process through determining which groups should be 'recognised'. 'NGOs and International Governance', *Michigan Journal of International Law* 18 (1997): 283.

94. V. Heins, 'Global Civil Society as the Politics of Faith', in *Global Civil Society*, 186-201.

95. There is a growing number of critical studies considering the limits of NGO and non-state actor engagement in evolving mechanisms of global governance. See, for example, A. C. Hudock, *NGOs and Civil Society: Democracy by Proxy?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); J. Hearn, 'Aiding Democracy? Donors and Civil Society in South Africa', *Third World Quarterly* 21, no. 5 (2000): 815-830; R. Wilkinson and S. Hughes, eds., *Global Governance: Critical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2002); and G. Laxer and S. Halperin, eds., *Global Civil Society and its Limits* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003).

96. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 101.

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of mobilisation. As a result, even the voices of communities geographically isolated from, and economically unimportant to, the core of the global economy and decision-making can now be heard in the decision-making centres of the global political economy.⁹⁷

The anti-globalisation movement brings together disparate groups and organisations which choose to prioritise global lobbying and advocacy politics over the struggle for democratic legitimacy at the national level. The rejection of the mass politics of liberal democracy is radically re-represented as the claim to be operating on a higher ethical level, that of making common cause with the most marginalized social groups least influential to the workings of the global economy. Ethical advocates who take up the (selective) demands of (selective) marginal groups, and provide "'interpretations" more suited to the global context', can then lobby for their political ends without the trouble of democratic legitimacy.

The advantage of the politics of ethical advocacy is that individuals can engage in politics without having to struggle to win electoral accountability. As Slavoj Žižek notes, this limited interactivity is based on 'interpassivity', the virtuous activity of a minority being presupposed by the passivity of others, who are spoken for.⁹⁸ Rather than expand the horizon of democratic politics, this is a form of politics which is neither 'democratic' nor 'inclusive'.⁹⁹ It is focused around the 'freedoms' of the individual advocate who engages in courtly politics and elite lobbying.

This highly individualised approach is reflected in the work of Mary Kaldor, who argues: 'I develop my own definition of civil society as the medium through which social contracts or bargains between the *individual* and centres of political and economic power are negotiated, discussed and mediated'.¹⁰⁰ Whereas in the past the 'social contract' was made through collective and egalitarian political engagement, for Kaldor, civil society takes the place of collective politics and facilitates an

97. J. Grugel, 'Democratisation Studies Globalisation: the Coming of Age of a Paradigm', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 5, no. 2 (2003): 276, emphasis added.

98. S. Žižek, 'The Interpassive Subject', 20 May 2003 [<http://www.lacan.com/interpass.htm>] (visited 1 Feb 2004); see also J. Mendel, 'Reading the "War on Terror": Psychoanalysis and Beyond', paper presented at the British International Studies Association 28th annual conference, University of Birmingham, 15-17 December 2003.

99. R. Lipschutz, 'Global Civil Society and Global Governmentality: Resistance, Reform and Resignation?', in *Global Civil Society*, 171-85.

100. Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 12.

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individual 'negotiation' with centres of power. The radical 'bottom-up' project of global civil society ends up rejecting democratic accountability for the courtier politics of elite advocacy.¹⁰¹

Living in truth

In a similar way to that in which the courtier politics of elite advocacy makes the personal act a political one through bypassing the mediation of a collective political process, there has also been a startling emergence of a new type of individuated civic activism, one which engages in politics through personal ethical acts. Ann Mische highlights that this is a 'type of civic participation in which human subjectivity is not sacrificed to politics'.¹⁰²

This is a form of politics which privileges the individual subject above the collective one. The 'anti-politics' or 'living in truth' of East European intellectual oppositionists, such as Havel, is the model of today's political activism which seeks to blur the distinction between the private and the public life of an individual: '[T]he aim is not to maintain two mutually opposed realms, but rather to understand the one as a "holding area" of the self, from which the self must necessarily emerge to act publicly within the other. In Havel's view, it is the recovery of the "hidden sphere" of subjectivity that provides the basis for the "independent life of society"'.¹⁰³ Gideon Baker also suggests that personal ethics should be the basis of the public resistance to power. This blurring of the private and the public is central to the liberatory promise of post-political activism, as it 'holds out the hope of both personal and political autonomy, in short, of self-rule'.¹⁰⁴

Twenty-three-year-old Caoimhe Butterly is a leading example of the new breed of transnational political activists. Brought up in a culture of liberation theology and with her father working around the world as an economic advisor to the UN, she worked in soup kitchens in New York, in Guatemala and with the Zapatista communities in Mexico before working in pre-war Iraq with an activist group opposing sanctions and then moving to Palestine working in Jenin camp. Interviewed in the *Guardian*, after being shot by Israeli troops, she was asked if she planned to leave. Her reply was 'I'm going nowhere. I am

101. See further, D. Chandler, 'Universal Ethics and Elite Politics: the Limits of Normative Human Rights Theory', *International Journal of Human Rights* 5, no.4 (2001): 72-89.

102. A. Mische, 'Post-Communism's "Lost Treasure": Subjectivity and Gender in a Shifting Public Place', *Praxis International* 13, no. 3 (1993): 245.

103. *Ibid.*

104. Baker, *Civil Society and Democratic Theory*, 149.

staying until this occupation ends. I have the right to be here, a responsibility to be here. So does anyone who knows what is going on here'.¹⁰⁵

This is a very different form of political activism from the solidarity work of trade unionist and political activists in the past. Rather than engaging in political debate and discussion with colleagues and workmates or raising concerns in election campaigns, the new breed of postmodern activist is more concerned to act as a moral individual than to engage in collective political action. The rights which are claimed are those of individual engagement with other people's struggles rather than any specific political claims of the Palestinians or of others. Caiomhe argues she has a duty to be in Palestine, to bear witness and to negotiate with Israeli forces on behalf of Palestinian victims, and, implicitly, that any morally-aware person has a similar duty. The self-centredness of this type of ethical politics is highlighted in the title of leftist British comedian Jeremy Hardy's film of his experience in the region: *Jeremy Hardy versus the Israeli Army*.¹⁰⁶

Ken Nichols O'Keefe, leading the volunteer mission of peace activists acting as human shields during the 2003 Iraq war, spells out the transnational ethos. According to O'Keefe 'we the "citizens" are responsible for the actions of "our" governments. . . . [W]e are collectively guilty for what we allow to be done in our name'.¹⁰⁷ For this reason O'Keefe has renounced his US citizenship and would 'invite everybody to join me in declaring themselves not citizens of nations but world citizens prepared to act in solidarity with the most wretched on our planet and to join us'.¹⁰⁸ Along with Caiomhe, O'Keefe is implicitly critical of those who do not take up the invitation to put morality first. O'Keefe would 'rather die in defense of justice and peace than "prosper" in complicity with mass murder and war'.¹⁰⁹

It would appear that the motivation of the global civic activists acting as human shields and witnesses in Iraq and the West Bank has less to do with the politics of the conflicts and more to do with their own personal need to make a moral statement. Ronald Forthofer, from the Episcopal Church in Longmont, Colorado, a human shield in Beit

105. K. Barlow, 'Courage under Fire', *The Guardian*, 27 November 2002.

106. See also J. Hardy, 'Four Days in Hell', *The Guardian*, 15 April 2003.

107. O'Keefe, K. N. 'Back to Iraq as a Human Shield', *Observer Comment Extra*, 29 December 2002

[<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,6903,866254,00.html>]
(Visited 15 Jan 2003).

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid.*

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Jalla on the West Bank, stated: 'We believe that we who are protected in America should experience and live in the same way that Palestinians are living in the suffering'.¹¹⁰ Kate Edwards, a community worker from Manchester, explained why she joined the International Solidarity Movement in the occupied territories: 'I wanted to challenge myself to see if I could cope working in a place like this. I have good friends and a comfortable life. I wanted to do something for those who were not as fortunate as me'.¹¹¹ But rather than donate to the International Red Cross or another professionally trained organisation, Kate felt the need to put her own life at risk, suffering severe internal injuries from bullet wounds in Bethlehem, after refusing to follow Israeli troop orders to halt. A similar individual mission has driven young British Muslims to volunteer as suicide bombers in conflicts abroad. As Josie Appleton notes:

This is less a case of militants finding common cause in Palestinians' fight for their land and livelihood, than of finding themselves—of finding their own individual identity and mission. . . . In this context, the nihilistic tactic of suicide bombing seems to allow these young Western militants to fight their own war. Unlike fighting in an army over a sustained period of time, suicide bombing is an individual act that requires no engagement with the conflict itself. It is *my* act, the sacrifice of *my* life—it allows suicide bombers to construct in their heads the mission that they are making the sacrifice for.¹¹²

In the not so recent past it was religious leaders and moral authority figures who 'intervened' in other people's struggles in the hope of bringing a peaceful resolution by bearing witness to the suffering and attempting to help. Today, the collapse of a broader political or moral framework has led to individuals claiming their own moral right of 'intervention' without any legitimacy derived from a collective authority.

Conclusion

The celebration of global civil society 'from the bottom up' would appear to be based less on any emergence of new political forces at the

110. I. Hazboun, 'Volunteers Act as Human Shields', *Associated Press*, 2 August 2001.

111. P. Beaumont and M. Wainwright, 'I Never Thought They Would Fire Live Rounds', *The Guardian*, 3 April 2002.

112. J. Appleton, 'Suicidal Tendencies', *Spiked Online*, 7 May 2003 [<http://www.spiked-online.com/Articles/00000006DD8B.htm>] (Visited 1 June 2003).

global level than the desire of Western activists and commentators to justify their avoidance of accountability to any collective source of political community or elected authority. The focus on the shared interests with those 'excluded', or the 'imagined' global community of radical activists, is a way of legitimising the avoidance of any accountability to those still 'trapped inside'—the electorate.¹¹³

The struggle for individual ethical and political autonomy, the claim for the recognition of separate 'political spaces' and for the 'incommunicability' of political causes, demonstrates the limits of the radical claims for the normative project of global civil society 'from below'. The rejection of the formal political sphere, as a way of mediating between the individual and the social, leaves political struggles isolated from any shared framework of meaning or from any formal processes of democratic accountability.

This article should not be read as a defence of some nostalgic vision of the past, neither does it assert that the key problem with radical global civil society approaches is their rejection of formal engagement in existing political institutions and practices. The point being made here is that the rejection of state-based processes, which force the individual to engage with and account for the views of other members of society, is a reflection of a broader problem—an unwillingness to engage in political contestation.

Advocates of global civil society 'from below' would rather hide behind the views of someone else, legitimising their views as the prior moral claims of others—the courtly advocates—or putting themselves in harm's way and leading by inarticulate example, rather than engaging in a public debate. The unwillingness of radical activists to engage with their own society reflects the attenuation of political community rather than its expansion. Regardless of the effectiveness of radical lobbying and calls for recognition, this rejection of social engagement can only further legitimise the narrowing of the political sphere to a small circle of unaccountable elites. If the only alternative to the political 'game' is to threaten to 'take our ball home'—the anti-politics of rejectionism—the powers that be can sleep peacefully in their beds.

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113. See, for example, Connolly, 'Democracy and Territoriality', 479.

