Rise of Global Civil Society: Understanding the Impacts and Implications

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Abstract

Civil society is a thought-provoking and controversial expression, predominantly when prefixed by "global". Formerly local and national NGOs and community organizations nowadayshabitually operate transnationally: swapping information, networking, coordinating campaigns, framing claims, and locating shared targets. This is aalteration, not only in the regularity of interactions across borders, but also in the networks' compactness, adaptability, complexity, and influence. In eachcontext, the configuration of associational existence has a vital influence over products, although evidently there is no mechanical "transmission belt" that brackets together and synchronizes the structure, type, and accomplishment of civil society mutually. Civil society mobilization, in respect of global governance institutions activities, has indeed become very significant. Arguably, civil society activities, demonstrations, and protests about global regulatory economic and political architectures, methods, and procedures havehitherto realized only a segment of their over-all potential.

However, some scholars sense thatnotwithstanding the merits being expressed about the power of civil society organizations, there are numerous paradoxes unfolding. So, this paper attempts to unfold variousdialectical processes being indulged into by scholars. The paper is theoretical and conceptual in its scope.Thus, looking to the future, global governance requires more civil society engagement at the heart of policy processes, in respect of the full range of regulatory institutions, and involving all quarters of society. However, there are no final words on civil society, because civil society is constantly being reinterpreted and recreated.

The Concept

'Civil society' is a synthetic term that describes the status of individuals and social groups in a contemporary state; its ontological ambiguity renders it complex and therefore a subject of interest in many areas of science: political and legal doctrines, social sciences and historical sciences. The literature stresses that the notion of civil society may be regarded as descriptive. Civil society looms large in the public debate. The concept of a burgeoning global civil society (GCS), an exclusive public sphere of voluntary alliances separate from the architecture of sovereign states and markets, has become a buzzword in the practice of global governance. A sovereign state is getting increasingly questioned in juridical and realistic terms by the transnationalising and deterritorialised nature of contemporary social relations. This restructuring has led to reformulation a range of concepts. A number of buzzwords accompanies this resurrection of the civil society discourse - social responsibility, citizenship, big society, activation, participation, horizontalisation - to name only a few. A firm belief in civil society as a solution, as a more effective alternative to welfare state and market arrangements,is feeding the current debate on how to solve pressing social problems.

"Porto Alegre and Davos in an annoying dialogue of the deaf" was the caption of an editorial published in the Bolivian newspaper El Diario on January 29, 2001 on the occasion of the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum. The two congregations, Davos with its neoliberal argot, and Porto Alegre with its anti-capitalist Esperanto, denoted two opposingdiscourse on global governance.Davos and Porto Alegre were contraryboth geographically and ideologically yet they were expressing disgruntlement with globalization. These meetingsare now seen as an emblem for the launch of a new social movement.Numerouspunditsnoted the growth of new global social movement as the harbinger of a globalcivil society.The major disruption of the eventsby protesterat Settle was depicted as the 'Battle of Seattle' where the activists took to global podiumin big numbers, interrupted the congregationand openly held global institutions accountable for the predicaments of globalization. Since then,it is identified with the public sphere of influence of international NGOs or the global civil society.

The current terminology of politics is dotted with expressionslike 'advocacy networks', 'globalcivil society', 'transnational socialmovements', 'International non-governmental organizations', 'segmented polycentric networks' 'non-profit associations', 'voluntary organizations and many more. According to Amitai Etzioni (2004), this reveals the surfacing of a "transnational community" or "new global society."Jeffrey C. Alexander calls it the vision of 'solidarity sphere'.

It must be mentioned here that 'Civil society' is not a new concept. It dates back to English political thought of the sixteenth century.Alexis de Tocqueville was amongstthe first to underscorethe worth of associationalism and self-organization for substantive democracy (Kaldor 2003). Civil society is a vanguard against the capricious state power and a counterbalance to it. Civil Society is,in fact,a turf that challenges the hegemony of state and market uniformly. It is like an intermediary associational realm. Anheier et al., believes GCS is 'about the radicalization of democracy and the redistribution of political power'.All social movements invariably beginwith small, quixotic, tentativedesire but can galvanize support to modify the paradigm.

Habermas' visualized the 'communicative public sphere' as a public space where community could openly talkabout the shared concern and learn about the veracity and truth about public policies (Habermas 1989). The public sphere thus assumes freedoms of speech and assembly, a free press, and the right to freelyengage in political debates and decision makings. Chandhoke believes "The concept, never too clear at the best of times, has turned into the proverbial will-o'-the wisp that eludes understanding. It has come to mean many things to many people: as the space of solidarity, as a project of projects, as the area of associational life, as a site of contestation, and as a third sector" (Chandhoke, 2002).

The concept of civil society is measuredas an enduring one. It offers a malleable framework through which to examine the 'geometry of human relations' by offering frameworks and spaces in which the agency and imagination of individuals can be pooled to deal with the key issues of

those times. Arjun Appadurai (2001) notes that terms like international civil society cannot completely capture the 'mobility and malleability' of creative forms of social life that are localized transit points for mobile global forms of civic and civil life'. Civil society persists to be afascinating space for camaraderie, a specter of associational way of life and also a hot spot of contestations. It is the associational diversity of civil society that provides the basis for communicative democracy and an option to the monolithic citizen-state relationship of institutionalized representative democracy.

Global Civil Society

Civil society or *societascivilis* is contentious term, particularly when prefixed with the word 'global'. Any glance at the burgeoning literature on globalization indicates little consensus exists on the precise character of globality. The adjective 'global' was prefixed many a noun in the early1990s. Likewise many enthusiasts of civil society have suggestedit is the way forward for global camaraderie and participative democracy.The notion of global civil society is inseparable from the idea of globalness (Scholte 1999). Global Civil Society (GCS) can also be seen as "bounded space, as voluntary associations; and as representative of empowerment/resistance" (Amoore and Langley, 2005). This blurriness is the core of the 'bottom-up' code of global civil society. It is believed to be a space through which political engagements can articulate their claim and uphold their peculiarity and individuality. We continue to witness the growth of global civilsociety as it has come to playacriticalrole inrecasting politics. Anheier (2007)believes that "global civil society is the sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organizations, networks, and individuals that are based upon civility; are located between the family, the state, and the market; and operate beyond the confines of national societies, polities, and economies".

Studying global civil society is a way of understanding globalization. Globalization is not just an economic concept; it embodies concerns about global consciousness, global governance, individual autonomy, responsibility, participation and emerging sphere of shared values and ideas. 'Think globally, act locally' is a catchphrase intended to dissolve borders and inspire democratic connectedness in global community. However, we are observing the rise of another

slogan i.e., 'global is indeed local'. The rising challenge from bottom of pyramid is shifting the sands in conventional playing field necessitating reimaging, reconfiguration and reconstruction of 'dialogic politics' within democratic institutions and processes.

Global civil society sustains on and responds to globalization. Globalization provides the bedrock for global civil society, the supply side of the phenomenon that pushes it on (Glasius, 2003). There is constructive correlation between 'clusters of globalization' or 'thick globalization' and 'clusters of global civil society' (Held et al. 1999). As the enormity of global concerns widens, many micro level mobilizations and civil society interventions start emerging as expression of disquiet. This upward surge and grouping of disparate factions have been termed as "globalization from below" which attempts to centre stage the need for fair globalization.

Global civil society cannot be put in nutshell. In its structural forms itranges from the ordered NGOs for community benefit like Amnesty International,Red Cross, Oxfam, CARE and Greenpeace, and in associations for member it benefitsprofessional associations trade unions, consumers' groups, andsports clubs to faith-based associations, internet-basedpressure organizations ordot-causes. They can be global insofar as voluntary associations are motivated by opinions of transworldcommonality. Global civil groups may utilize a sense of shared identity and destiny that transcends territoriality like on lines of faith, religion, gender, class, race, age, profession or sexual orientation. Additionally, some global civic activity like respect of human rights, humanitarian assistance and development havedevelopedmainly out of a cosmopolitan motivation to provide protection, fairness and equality for all in spite of their geographiclocation on the planet.A vibrant civil societyis packedwith organizations with competingcauses; it is therefore ignorant to oversimplify the inherent homogeneity in global civil society movements.

Over the last three decades,International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and activist networks have ever more gone global. Formerly local and national NGOs and community organizations now regularly operate transnationally: swapping information, networking,

coordinating campaigns, framing claims, and locating shared targets. There is analteration not only in the level of interactions but also rise in the networks' density, adaptability, complexity, and reach. It gives rise to regularattempt to do politics in horizontal network-based approach that is more open and egalitarian than conventional structures of politics (Glasius, 2005). In theglobalarena and with focus on comprehensive these activists supportconcurs that arefundamental to public opinion formation.For example, as well as addressing climate change, various civic associations have also campaigned for ecological problems like the loss of biological diversity and thedepletion of stratospheric ozone that has a supraterritorial quality.Many other civic organizations have raised questions about the contemporary economy in relation to outsourcing, sweatshop, child labor supply chains etc.Coalitions between trade union organizations and GCS are seen as the emergence of a 'global social movement unionism' that goes beyond the constricted concerns of organized labor.

Considerable civic activism has been directed at global governance agencies like theUnited Nations (UN), the Bretton Woods institutions, the Organization for EconomicCooperation and Development (OECD), and the World Trade Organization (WTO).Human rights groups have promoted standards that are meant to apply to peopleeverywhere on earth, regardless of the distances and borders that might lie betweenthem.Some civil society bodies have also treated armament questions like bans onchemical weapons and land mines as global issues.

The Economist (1999) refers to a diverse and diffuse range of actors, campaigns, and events as falling within the ambit of global civil society. Furthermore, new communications technology allows novel ways of functioning and for innovative organizational structures to emerge, particularly, the internet-based campaigns or 'dot causes' led by social networking platforms like Twitter, Face book etc. The 'network age' is transforming and creating imperatives in global civil society to connect in innovative ways and with non-traditional partners.

Underpinning accountability

The accountability syndrome facing global civil society actors is a by-product of the governance problems of a globalizing world. Accountability regimes are tied to a world of nation states but economy and society, and increasingly civil society and philanthropic institutions, no longer fit into this framework.Anti-terrorist legislations in the USA and Europe, laws like the Sarbanes–Oxley Act and the multiplication of watchdog groups add to the accountability complexity of transnational civil society. Indeed, as Kaldor (2003) suggests, the balance among different accountability approaches used will differ across types of NGOs and fields of activity, in particular in the relative emphasis given to procedural and moral accountability.

NGOs are not alone in seeking solutions to the accountability syndrome of organizations working transnationally. Different actors, including international organizations like the World Bank and transnational corporations, are seeking new ways and means of accountability, trying to create what Selznick (1994) called 'regularized forms of openness' that could make transnational organizations more sensitive and porous to information needs about their performance, and at the same time also generating a feeling of ownership and control for stakeholders.

At global levels, this amount to new forms of accountability for multilateral institutions – instruments through which organizations like the World Bank, the IMF, and the United Nations have to engage with and take local opinions seriously. At national levels, it means fostering interactions between governments, municipalities and civil society, helping to overcome hindrances by bringing diverse groups together, stimulating a notion of public interest, and empowering those organizations that are engaged in public policy.

However,some scholars feel despite the merits listed above, there areparadoxes unfolding.Even thoughthe *substance* of politics has been globalized like economics, trade, climate change issues, terrorism etc.The *process* ofpoliticshave remained largely local. The institutions of governance, legislative bodies, elections, political partiescontinue to remainembedded at the national level. Global civil society organizations, in contrast, demonstratetheir agility and ability to work with globaladvocacy networks. Uncertainties remain about GCS as a symbol of a 'good' agent for

global struggles. Cox acknowledges that lack of agreement about GCS as 'good 'agent'can open doors for the 'dark forces' of the extreme right movements, organized crime, terrorists and the intelligence breaches to benefit theclandestineoperators. Manyalso questions the real impact of civil society on policy making, but indisputably civil society actors have been somewhat successful at centre staging issues on global political platforms and influenced public debates and to name and shame actors who do not deliver on their promises. Indeed, there has been occurring 'global associational revolution'.

While the growth and presence of NGOs is undeniable, increased activism does not necessarily result in deepening of democracy. Global civil society activism comes from global North and far fewer Southern organizations are engaged in lobbying and advocacy at the global level. For instance, only 251 of the 1,550 NGOs associated with the UN Department of Public Information come from the global South; the rest are NGOs from the global North (Wild 2006). Another reason to be cautious is that although the numbers of NGOs have dramatically increased in developing and transition countries, the reality is that the vast majority of these NGOs are almost entirely dependent on foreign support. This dependence not only raises concerns about their long-term sustainability and impact but also raises questions about their legitimacy, probity and accountability. In other words, are these NGOs considered legitimate actors locally? Within the global civil society there is apprehension about 'who' is getting empowered, or 'what' and 'who' is being opposed."Discursively entrenched power relations cannot simply be toppled by mass demonstrations or other transversal practices of dissent" (Bleiker, 2004:34).It is difficult to measure the impact of democracy-building efforts on people's behavior and attitudes, often what is considered and presented as signs of success are the formal or procedural democratic mechanisms and institutions.

Beyond this movement toward a global normative synthesis, Etzioni observes an advance making possible for the citizens from different countries of the world to understand mutual moral perceptive on global issues. These issues range from ethical to economical to environmental that pushes civil society organizations to ban land mines, big dams, control climate changes,

denunciate child pornography, and oppose to human rights violation. A critical intend in this framework is to make possible the 'moral dialogue' and globally acceptable normative framework.

So, in recent years a consciousness of a global civil society has reached "critical mass," as it draws attention and wields more influence. It is a critical mass as it is more plugged-in to express candidly the liabilities of globalization. People are articulating and forging ties with global social movements, International NGOs, and protests to hold both State and Corporates accountable for the predicaments facing humanity.

Global civil society now operates trans-nationally, swapping information, networking, coordinating campaigns, framing claims, and locating shared targets. There is a change, not only in the frequency of interactions across borders, but also in the density, speed, adaptability, complexity, and reach. Communications industries contribute to the "semiotic construction" of the world—that is, the ways images of the world, nations, institutions, people, and activities are designed, packaged, and disseminated.

Virtual Public Sphere and Global Civil Society Organizations

The connection between communication and power, and voice and citizenship are ancient, the extent to which citizens have made their voices heard has depended on their ability to apply communicative power - to wieldinfluence over policies that concern them by communicating, either individually in ways that resonate in the public sphere, or collectively in ways that will pressure those in authority to mull over their opinion.

Since 1990s the Internet has served civil society as a mode to circumvent state authority by presenting a platform for networking, advocacy and mobilization. Notable cases, such as the 1999 anti globalization protest in Seattle, Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, etc drew media interest to what many civil society actors were conscious of i.e., the latent power of global networking for global and local causes. Ifcivil society is the public space in which people meet,

discuss and engage with politics and public policy, then the media is an indispensable determinant of the success of civil society as a creator of public spaces, and of how successfully people's voices can be addressed. Social media platforms have become the social space where issues are getting debated and decided.So, the Internet has created a boundless matrix through which citizens can usetheir communicative power;create shared spaces for dialogue and discourse, and conventional and twenty-first century communication networks are frequentlyinterwoven.It provides an extraordinaryfreedom for democratic dissent for civil society.

But beneath the euphoria and democratic openness of the Internet, a 'dark side' lurks. The open networked communications milieu also enables deep and often disruptiveconfrontation to political and economic power. Some of these confrontations took the form of organized street manifestation against capitalist globalization. The Occupy Movement post 2008 financial crisis is one such example. More serious was the facilitation of networked forms of militancy and extremism, most blatantly exemplified in the Al-Qaeda terrorist networks. Open cyber space also allowed the illicit trade in copyrighted substance and the spread of what many see to be pornography, cultural decadence, and hate speech. The hands-off approach to the Internet adopted by political elites brings about unintentional and increasingly unconstructiverepercussions. Civil society's liaison with the social media is double edged sword in terms of its impact on the public sphere. Today social media is a significant sphere where influence is determined, civil society organizations have an understandable concern in understanding and engaging in processes that shape this power.

As anoutcome, the variegated landscape of cyberspace is ever more contested as states endeavor to imposenationwide defined policy on conduct in cyberspace, so as tomake it less 'unregulated'. The very nature of cyberspace iscontingent on collaboration for its very continuation, this makes the issue of establishedstate sovereignty built on the basis of defensive bordersdifficult to conceptualizeand much less enforceable.

Conclusion

Global civil society certainly offers muchpotential for enhancing security, equity and democracy in the contemporary world;however, a long haul of committed endeavor is still required in order to fully realize those benefits.If global civil society isto genuinely provide global solutions, one criticalprerequisite is the engagementof the South in the course which is just beginning to happen.Indeed, an awareness of what other CSOs are doing, in different culturaland political environments, mobilized for different goals, and following differentorganizational models, is in itself a major step forward in the questfornew structures of global governance. Such awarenessneeds to include "bestpractices"as revealed in successful campaigns, as well as lessons learnedfromcampaigns still in progress, and it will be informed and sophisticated byasense of humankind's historical quest for a just world order.

To sum up we can say that global civil society networks are learning to create their own widely used, noncommercialmedia channels, to network globally and, equally important, to form novel alliances across sectors: with trade unions, environmental pressure groups, NGOs, human rights activists, social movements, intellectuals, and pop stars all coming together on common platforms. While not presenting a total alternative, this is helping to introduce a set of global political values and norms and a new sense of accountability of those holding public office to a global public. This is opening the door to the possibility that perhaps politics *can* be globalized.

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