


**Introduction: the empire of global civil society**

Around a decade ago I used the notion of 'international civil society' during a national seminar within an international institute of development studies…um…somewhere in Europe. A colleague, known for his post-modern fireworks, as well as for his pre-modern arrogance, broke into my presentation, stating, 'There is no such thing as international civil society. Civil society assumes the state and there is no international state'. Caught on the back foot, fumbling for words, I came up with the answer that I usually find in the bath the following day. There were, I suggested, two possible grounds for the use of such a concept: 1) the development of increasingly state-like institutions and powers internationally; 2) by analogy, a common social science procedure in the face of new and un-conceptualised phenomena. We can be confident that my colleague, now a full professor, somewhere in the USA, drops this concept in his writings as smoothly and frequently as 'deconstruction', 'postmodern', 'hybridisation', and 'cultural turn'.

Along with the academic, then political, generalization of global civil society (GCS) has gone the inevitable debate about its meaning and its status. This means: status in relationship to civil society *tout court*, to the nation state, capital, and their increasingly internationalized forms, to social movements (national and international); status in relation to academic disciplines, and then in relation to grand social theory; status in relation to the continued reproduction of capitalism and alienation, and to the surpassing
of such. (Compare Eschle 2001a, Munck 2002a, for touching but not-quite-parallel takes to mine on these matters).\(^1\)

When I first used the notion of international civil society, I certainly thought this was a new arena of positive, progressive and potentially emancipatory politics and values. I considered that NSMs meant Nice Social Movements and that a GCS was the international terrain they were uniquely creating. Later I recognised that this agora was equally open to Nasty Social Movements, and that emancipatory struggle was not simply between GCS on the one hand, capital, state and patriarchy, on the other, but within GCS, as well as between and within the radical-democratic forces within GCS.

Surrounded by a rising tide – no, drowning in a flood - of writing on or around global civil society (for some earlier rivulets, see Waterman 2001), I feel the need of a rock to stand on, a sieve to sort out the smiley-face babble from the unavoidable (I hope) cross-cultural babel. I propose, for safety, to take four rocks. Or sieves. These seem to me to provide some kind of contemporary reality check - including Castell's 'real virtuality' (1996:329-30) - for a concept more often related to other concepts, theories or disciplines. I take:

- **The women's movement and feminism** because there are a lot of women out there and a lot of feminists involved in here; and a gender-free concept is an obviously gender-blind and only partially-humanised one (Cynthia Cockburn and Deborah Stienstra in Cohen and Rai 2001, Eschle 2001b, Marchand and Runyan 2001, Vargas 2002);
- **Workers and the labour/socialist movement**, because of the continuing and even increasing centrality of 'labour-for-capital' in the reproduction of alienation, fetishisation and reification on a world scale (Aguiton 2001, Cleaver 2002, Holloway 2002, Munck 2002b);
- The **World Social Forum**, because it also has a W, and it can stand here for what now is beginning to call itself the 'global justice and solidarity movement'. The GJ&SM provides a) a major pole of attraction to radical-democratic and internationalist movements, b) a space within which it is possible to dialogue about global civil society with spokespeople for the sectores populares – these having largely disappeared from the discourse of even left academics for a decade or two (Aguiton 2001, Ventner and Swart 2002);
- The **World Wide Web**, not only because it has three Ws, but also because of the widely-recognised and intimate articulation of the Web with both capitalist

\(^1\) Too late for this review came Hamel et. al. (2001). I here note its quantitative relation to the test categories below. Women: an impressive four out of ten chapters! Workers: no chapter despite passing references throughout; World Social Forum: one chapter on a significant forerunner; World Wide Web: two index references to 'e-mail', occasional reference elsewhere. Despite the 'Global Solidarity' symbol on the cover, the first three editorial chapters seem neither motivated by, nor, indeed, focused on this notion. The whole seems less than the sum of the parts. Compare with a similar title, Cohen and Rai (2000).
Global Civil Society 2001

Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor (henceforth GCS2001) is a good place to start, being the most substantial of these books (it is double-columned), casting the widest net, and being directly addressed to global civil society. GCS2001 comes out of a major project, based at the London School of Economics, and is intended to be an annual. It is divided into the following rubrics: Concepts, Issues, Infrastructure, Records (indicators). It is beautifully designed, full of tables, boxes and figures. And if anyone who reads English and can afford it fails to use this as a textbook when teaching on the matter, there might be a case for taking them to one of those new international courts of justice that are coming out of pressure from a GCS in the making. It gets pride of place, finally, because it has its own website, from which it is not only possible to get any information I leave out here, but to also download the Full Monty, chapter by chapter (a considerable help when I was in Lima, just before the WSF2 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, late 2001). See http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Yearbook/default.htm.

GCS2001 is a little coy about defining what it means by GCS (3, 17), claiming that an understanding will develop out of the project. Only at the point of its own gun (the need to operationalise) are the editors prepared to come down off the razor-wire and specify it thus:

Global civil society is the sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organisations, networks, and individuals located between the family, the state and the market and operating beyond the confines of national societies, polities and economies. (17)

We must then, however, note that the major theory chapter, by John Keane, will have nothing to do with civil society as outside, far worse against, capital. And I would also register a reservation at a definition that still defines GCS primarily in relation to the national. But how does the book as a whole stand up to the W Test?

Women: The merely illustrative references to women’s groups and conferences are only under-passed by those to feminism, which is not in the index, even though it appears on one page. Gender does get an index reference, but not to the extent that might undermine the impression that Global Civil Society is inhabited solely by men. The dramatic presence alone of women and feminists at the parallel events of UN Conferences surely deserves better than this.

2 It was only after deciding on this strategy and, indeed, completing this piece, that I discovered a damaging critique of International Relations (both practice and discourse) that stands on the rock, or with the sieve, of the international indigenous movement and studies! See Karena Shaw (2002).
Workers: There are occasional references to international unions by name. But, even bearing in mind the low empirical union profile within GCS, the international unions have been increasingly seeking a place in this sun (Waterman 2002).

World Social Forum/Global Justice and Solidarity Movement: Two substantial chapters are devoted directly to this area: one on the ‘new anti-capitalist movement’, the other on ‘parallel summits of global civil society’. The first, despite its liberalism, pays respectable homage to the critique of a world dominated by the cash nexus, placing this in long historical context and attempting to identify different tendencies within the contemporary movement. The second, by Mario Pianta, recognises one major origin of the GJ&SM, this being precisely in the NGO fora attached to the wave of UN global conferences in the 1990s. But he goes further, making reference also to the first World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, January-February 2001 – the same year in which the book appeared! Both chapters lean heavily in the direction of dialogue between the hegemons and the movements. Pianta, however, not only provides us with an impressive set of analytical tables concerning his parallel conferences but also broadens out the editors' typology of movements from Rejectionists, Reformists, Supportive and Alternative, to Radicals (though even this does not sound much like anti- or post-capitalist).

Web. John Naughton overviews the virtual terrain, considers different applications and examines cases. He recognizes the compatibility between GCS and this terrain/technology. But he also points to two major threats, from capital and state, which must themselves be campaigned against if the new agora is to be defended or expanded.

International Civil Society: Social Movements in World Politics

If the previous work remains a largely socially-reformist one, that of Alejandro Colás proudly unfurls the banners of Marxist theory and class-struggle politics. This is an original theoretical-historical work. Yet its relationship to any kind of Marxism known to me is problematic. His central battle is hardly a traditional Marxist(-Leninist) one (such as workers v. capitalists; people v. state; colonies v. empires, international proletariat v. international bourgeoisie, socialism v. capitalism); nor is his battleground a traditional one (such as the factory, the state, the street, the colony); nor is his discipline a traditionally Marxist one (such as political-economy, history, politics, culture/ideas). His battle – interestingly - is expressed in terms of the 'transnational solidarity among social movements' (1) within as well as against the 'global reproduction of capitalism' (22). His battleground is that of 'international civil society' (ICS), understood as 'the domain of IR generated by the global reproduction of capitalism' (22). His discipline is that of IR, within which he wishes to insist upon the 'relevance of voluntary, non-state, collective social and political agency' (1). In the brief initial definition of his book title, he says

International civil society refers to a domain of IR generated by the global reproduction of capitalism where modern social movements pursue their political goals. Modern social movements are characterised by a historically specific form of agency with four basic components: a universalist ideology; an open membership; a secular or 'disenchanted'
vision of social and political action; and a reliance on printed media and novel forms of mobilization such as strikes, demonstrations or electoral rallies. (22-3).

We will later note again Colás' preference for the media and novel forms of (early) modern movements over late-modern (contemporary) ones. It has to do with the 17th-19th century development of capitalism, of the modern and the international. It is, further, not too difficult to understand why Colás refers to international rather than global civil society. He calls IR 'our discipline', implying, I suppose, that it is with his colleagues within this discipline that he wishes to speak (since he surely cannot mean that it is a Marxist discipline?).

In so far as IR is somewhat allergic to the concept of globalisation (which threatens to take the toys away from the boys), Colás' erudite historical and theoretical discussion is, it seems to me, shackled by his discipline, and by its necessity to re-assert the primacy of inter-state relations at a time in which such are being relativised by the dynamism of capitalist globalisation, by major social theorists, and by a horde of global justice and solidarity movements themselves! This limitation leads, it seems to me, to curious disjunctures. Colás is clearly identified with his international social movements but merely assumes or asserts their relationship to class theory. And, then, reference to these movements is illustrative rather than analytical (he does conceptualise periods, but not types). Sometimes his references are problematic. Thus, he takes a sclerotic institution, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, to exemplify the concept of international social movement (78), thus also conflating 'organization' and 'movement' – a distinction central to critical social movement theory and practice. He asserts that the Third International continued to be, in part, an 'international expression of self-organized communist movements across the world' (79) even after it had been reduced to an organ of the Soviet state (Drachkovitch and Lazitch 1966). He considers that the African National Congress continues to play a 'solidary' role within ICS (189, fn 20) - an assertion problematic even before, in South Africa, 'civil society won state power' (an appropriate Post-89 Czech notion): the ANC supported the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan, and its puppet 'Marxist' regime there. So far, so problematic. How does he measure up on the W Scale?

Women: There is no index reference to women, just a couple to feminist internationalism. Whilst Colás actually gives more attention to women and feminism than this might suggest, allowing for feminism as an historical internationalism, the movement is presented as merely one of a series, and there is no engagement with feminist writing on globalisation or even IR (which goes back to at least Enloe 1989 (2001)). When he does deal with feminist internationalism, moreover, Colás sets up an opposition between its historical and its contemporary forms (which Freedman 2002 would suggest is his rather than theirs). He also 'bluntly' dismisses the feminists' contemporary websites, conferences, networking and international NGOs in favour of their earlier forms (149-50) - another indication of his preference for the early-capitalist world to the late-capitalist one.
Workers: His treatment is problematic – particularly for a work which claims to rest on the theory and history of working-class internationalism. This concept only gets five entries, one to the historical Internationals (57), one to the Russian Revolution (84), one to socialist contributions to national unity and state-building! (119), one injunction to socialists to continue their internationalist tradition in the face of competition within international civil society (167), and one that mentions socialism but not the working class (178). The underlying problem here is that 'working class', 'marxism' and 'socialism' have little theoretical weight in this work, compared with a myriad of other concepts more central to IR as a discipline. (For historical-theoretical IR work that gives considerably more weight to Marxism and internationalism, see Kubálková and Cruikshank 1989 (1985) and Gilbert 1999).

World Social Forum/Global Justice and Solidarity Movement: Whilst the lacuna here can be in part explained by the book's origin in a Ph.D. from the pre-Seattle era, the practice and theory of, for example, a 'new labour internationalism' goes back a decade or two (Waterman 2001:77, fn 3). It may be the manner in which that new internationalism, and reflection on it, was cast in terms of defence-against/opposition-to globalisation, to multinationals or neo-liberalism (no index entry on either of the latter) which causes its failure to register on the Colás radar screen. He does make reference to a 'third generation' of international social movements, but then endorses a liberal academic classification of these as 'rejectionist' (82)!

Web. There is no index entry on 'computers', 'informatisation', 'networking' or even 'culture' in this work, which remains steadfastly attached to the institutional and statist bias of IR theory. Curiously, Colás does not e the relationship between the web and his third generation. But note again his – paradoxical? - attitude towards this, and his distancing quotes:

Somewhat paradoxically, a major distinguishing feature of these new global activist 'networks' is said to be their use of the Internet and electronic mail as a means of communication, thereby claiming the status of spontaneist, non-hierarchical and non-bureaucratic movements. (82)

This is all regrettable, given the energy and intelligence Colás reveals in his theoretical discussion, as well as his evident sympathy for – indeed commitment to – social movements as potential bearers of transformative power within ICS. In so far as IR is a discipline, it surely needs approaching as did Marx in his Critique of Political Economy – a critique of and alternative to both liberal theory and capitalist practice. Or in the spirit of Foucault, where 'discipline' is, of course, intimately articulated with surveillance and control.

Global Citizen Action

Edwards and Gaventa is simultaneously less theoretical and more engaged with the matter of international/global civil society, being also mostly authored by those long engaged with/in the international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that the other
books hover over. Whether this engagement-with is matched with the necessary autonomy-from is, however, another matter. Particularly when the author of the chapter on ethics is employed by a World Bank that has been one of the three or four major (ethical) targets of the anti-globalisation movement. But the book as a whole is so clearly bent on dialogue, partnership, participation within, and reform of, the new global hegemons, that this particular ambiguity hardly reaches the visibility of a sore thumb. John Clark, who has made the journey between these conflicting/overlapping spheres, knows what he is talking about, but he believes that both State and Capital - here 'governments' and 'the private sector' - also have 'core values' (So did Karl Marx: 'Accumulate, accumulate, that is Moses and the Prophets'). If John Clark also campaigns for ethical behaviour in the international financial institutions, his impact has not yet been registered on the websites, nor on the TV screens, nor in Argentina. The babble in this work surely overwhelms the babel. And the collection seems over-concerned with making international NGOs interlocuteurs valables (a late-colonial French term) for the global hegemons. Much of what is said here has been said earlier, more succinctly, and with more concern for the popular constituencies concerned, by others (Jordan and v. Tuijl 1997, Sabatini 2002). All this should not imply a dismissal of individual contributions, but this is a book suffering from a disease recognised by Latin-American feminists, in relation to their own movement, already some years ago: ongización (NGOisation). The book also suffers, I would argue, from its preference for the concept of 'transnational' civil society (TCS), since both the etymological and the political reference is - as with 'international' - to the state-defined nation (Waterman 1999). But how does the book confront the Big W?

Women: One chapter out of 16 has to be seen as an achievement when measured against earlier competitors. Especially when co-authored by prominent international feminist thinkers/activists such as Charlotte Bunch and Peggy Antrobus. The chapter argues the value of using the liberal-universalistic discourse of human rights to establish a feminist understanding and struggle around specific women's wrongs and rights. Their understanding of universal women's rights, moreover, has been increasingly inflected by recognition of 'difference' as something that can empower rather than divide (much as the Zapatistas call for 'a world that allows for many others'). The development of their campaign has been largely a matter of networking, with this increasingly important practice being exemplified, if not conceptualized. Whilst the usual qualifications have to be made when writers champion their own activities, this contribution is inspired by understandings that still need to be established within, for example, the international labour and socialist movement.

Workers: Apart from occasional references to inter/national unions or organizations, 'Labour groups' makes five or six references to different international labour campaigns. One is to labour issues raised within a more general internationalist document, 'Alternatives for the Americas' (16). Others are on child-labour campaigns, trade-labour disputes, and contacts with the International Monetary Fund. This is, however, a mixed bag, in so far as it does not discriminate between the national/traditional 'social partnership' project of the equally-traditional inter/national unions, such as the earlier-mentioned International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (now suffering severe
national/global schizophrenia), and the pioneering efforts to articulate labour demands with those of other social sectors and movements internationally (Waterman 2002).

**World Social Forum/Global Justice and Solidarity Movement:** Little awareness, again probably because of the publication deadline. But, in any case, this work would not be capable of coming to terms with significant tensions, as well as overlaps, between those international NGOs, social movements or commentators who see GCS as a space for liberal-pluralistic 'countervailing power' and those who see it as one within which an alternative to global capital might be formulated and fought for.

**Web:** Not one chapter out of 16, simply passing references to email, the internet and networking. This may be the price to be paid for a fixation on NGOs (where index entries have to be measured by length rather than number - 17 cm).

**Conclusion:** So what is the meaning of GCS? And the role of the Big Ws?

Having dealt somewhat cavalierly with other people's understandings of a GCS (not to speak about an ICS or a TCS), I am under some obligation to specify an alternative: this is how I have defined it, for better or worse:

Global civil society, understood as one created out of conflict with the capitalist and (inter-)state spheres, is a privileged terrain (not the sole one) for the construction of liberty, equality, solidarity, ecological care and cultural tolerance/creation. This is, however, not a paradise to be announced, discovered or inhabited, it is a habitat to be jointly constructed by autonomous, democratic and pluralist forces. This requires engagement with/in existing inter-state and capitalist instances and processes. It also requires engagement with/in churches, religions, and within and between NGOs/social movements that often reproduce the structures and behaviours they claim to surpass…The development of a global civil society both depends on and stimulates the democratization, de-concentration and de-centralization of inter-state organisations, transnational capitalist companies and religious institutions. A new concept of world citizenship is required to simultaneously synthesise and surpass those of the past. This would have as its utopian imaginary a citizenship without borders, classes or genders. (Waterman 2000).

If I had to reformulate this in the light of the reviewed books (and, for example, Scholte 2000, Tarrow 2002) it would certainly be sharpened, deepened and extended, whilst preserving GCS as an increasingly central agora and discourse for emancipatory struggle. This (cyber-)space has yet to be defined by the hegemons, it cannot be occupied and controlled by them, and therefore holds out possibilities that traditional places (the workplace, the battlefield, the state-defined-nation) have so far denied.

Looking back on the present text, it occurs to me that readers might get the mistaken impression that I have some kind of a problem with both 'global reform' and 'global
dialogue'. My problem is, rather, with reformism and dialogism (global or not). I have no problem with either reform or dialogue, provided that both are seen – politically and academically – in relation to human emancipation on a world scale (to put this matter as cautiously and modestly as the notion requires). I consider reform and radicality as conditions for each other's existence – successful radicalism making reform necessary to the hegemons, successful reformism obliging serious radicals to get real. As for dialogue with hegemonic forces, this – if carried out under conditions of public discussion, delegation, scrutiny and approval – can force the former to abandon their traditional secrecy and elitism, bringing them out into arenas in which emancipatory social movements, and those they claim to represent, must anyway operate.

Readers may further feel I have been inexplicably indulgent with the reformist GCS2001 and unjustifiably aggressive with the radical Colás. The indulgence, if it be such, is for the scope, clarity and professionalism of the former. The book inhabits the real and virtual world of actually-existing globalisation. The aggression, if it be such, is due to the red flag Colás waves in front of this red bull. Apologies all round.

As for my Big W's, I have briefly – a wee facetiously perhaps – argued for them above. But I have to say more about the black - or red - sheep here. This is, of course, labour.

What's labour got to do with it?

My insistence comes not out of a sentimental attachment to the Communist Manifesto (to which I freely confess), nor its concentration of all emancipatory and internationalist agency in a proletariat of its own imagination. It is out of recognition of a dramatically growing tension, under globalisation, between civilization (in any meaningful sense) and capitalism. (How much more global capitalism can women, workers, peoples, the wheat and the weather afford?). In so far as capitalist globalisation is generalizing 'labour for capital', it is barbarising and proletarianising the world (though without producing a Marxist proletariat). What needs to be fed into the equation, in civilising global society is, therefore, a Labour Question that has an equal, if different, import to the Ecological Question, the Indigenous Question and the Woman Question. (An old friend and myself both credit the other for the notion that a 'question' for Marxists is something for which they don't have an answer).

It is precisely in the articulation (joining, expression) of these – and other major global issues that already exist or have yet to be identified – that we could move toward the civilizing of a globalized capitalism. This is not just a nice utopian idea (though it is this also). Both the form and content (or form-content) of such a programme and process have been shaping up, over the past few years, within the global justice and solidarity movement (see the documents in Waterman 2002: Appendices 1-3). Even within the World Social Forum, which denies it is any more than a part of a more general movement and process, one can see, and contribute, to the creation of a radical-democratic civil society globally. It is a good place (one definition of 'utopia') in which to discuss the meaning of global civil society. Some of the women/feminists and labour/socialists are already there. Everyone's invited.
References


