Transnational Contention and Changing Organizational Fields in the Late-20th and Early-21st Centuries[1]

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Abstract

The 1980s and 1990s saw dramatic changes in the global political arena, including shifts in geopolitical arrangements, increases in popular mobilization and contestation over the direction of globalization, and efforts by elites to channel or curb popular opposition. We explore how these factors impact changes in global politics. Organizational populations are shaped by ongoing interactions among civil society, corporate, and governmental actors operating at multiple levels. During the 1990s and 2000s, corporate and government actors promoted the "neoliberalization of civil society" and the appropriation of movement concepts and practices to support elite interests. Movement actors have not all been passive witnesses to this process: they have engaged in intense internal debates, and they have adapted their organizational strategies to advance social transformation. This paper draws from quantitative research on the population of transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs) and on qualitative research on contemporary transnational activism to describe changes in transnational organizing at a time of growing contention in world politics. We show how interactions among global actors have shaped new, hybrid organizational forms and spaces that include actors other than states in influential roles.

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Since the 1970s, and alongside the increased globalization of politics, we have seen growing engagement of popular groups in global political arenas and increased formal organization of global civil society. Transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs)—that is, non-state organizations working in multiple countries to advance explicit social change goals—have expanded dramatically in number, from 103 in 1953 to 1,798 in 2013.[2] They have also, as we show below, become more inclusive of activists in the global South, and have increasingly shaped global debates and decision-making processes (Anheier et al. 2004; Willetts 1996; 2011; Smith and Wiest 2012). Over time, they have become more skilled at influencing global political processes, and increasingly they have adopted a more adversarial position vis-à-vis inter-state institutions (Sikkink 2005; Bennett 2005; Hadden 2015). This growth in the organizing capacities of transnational social movements has not developed without resistance. States, corporations, and other elites have taken steps to neutralize, co-opt, or otherwise influence movements and support elite projects. Movements have responded to these efforts in various ways, with some groups engaging with states and corporations and others actively resisting their influence. We suggest that this cycle of movement action and reaction has influenced the forms that social movement organizations have taken over the past decade as well as activist organizing strategies.

In this paper, we consider how transnational social movement organizing and the larger global polity has changed over time. Our insights are informed by our experience collecting longitudinal data on transnational social movement organizations between 1953 and 2013.[3] This analysis also draws from our previous research on transnational social movements and international nongovernmental organizations (for example, Hughes et al. 2009; Hughes, Krook, and Paxton 2015; Hughes et al. 2014; Smith and Wiest 2012; Smith 2008; Smith et al. 2011), as well as on ours and others' qualitative accounts of social movements in relation to globalizing processes.

We begin with a discussion of some of the key ways elites have responded to pressures from a growing constellation of social movements and popular mobilizations in global spaces that had, prior to the 1980s, seen minimal engagement from non-state actors.[4] The principal emphasis of states and other elites has been to attempt to neutralize the effects of social movements and limit the appeal of their messages to wider audiences. We follow this with a discussion of how the changing political landscape has affected social movements as well as how movements have responded to elite attempts to coopt or otherwise undermine their impacts. We argue that understanding changing organizational populations requires attention to the larger global political context in which these organizations operate. Complex

social conflicts and interactions among diverse actors shape organizational strategies and network relations over time. We hope to offer insights that can enhance theorizing about social movement outcomes and organizational change, especially how interactions between social movements, states, and other global actors affect organizations, strategic discourses, and the larger global political arena itself.

[A-Level] Elite Responses to Social Movement Challenges

Over the last few decades, the flourishing population of transnational progressive organizations seeking to change international institutions and norms met with greater levels and forms of resistance. States and the inter-state institutions they control increasingly limited access of non-state actors to official policy arenas where important international negotiations take place. Whereas the United Nations has been relatively more open to civil society groups when compared with the World Bank and other inter-state financial institutions, it has in recent years become more closed to participation from civil society actors and social movements (see Charnovitz 1997; 2002; Willetts 2000; 2006). In particular, groups that challenge market ideologies and neoliberal ideas of governance have less access to inter-state arenas and organizations that are increasingly governed by what Da Costa and McMichael (2007) call "market epistemologies."

Transnational social movement organizations have also been facing resistance from corporate, right-wing, and government opposition. The expansion of TSMOs and their activities has triggered counter-mobilization by growing numbers of corporate-sponsored "NGOs" and a much-expanded corporate presence at international negotiations and other transnational policy spaces (Bruno and Carliner 2002; Sklair 2001). Formal transnational organizing by right-wing activists has also been on the rise (Buss and Herman 2003; Bob 2012). In addition, the expansion of government counter-terrorist measures, especially following the September 2001 attacks in the United States, has been used to justify repression against nonviolent, progressive groups (see, e.g., Wiest 2007; Howell et al. 2008).

Businesses and other elite groups have assimilated and coopted movement organizations, discourses, and agendas, obscuring the boundaries between social movements and actors that perpetuate the status quo. Processes of assimilation, cooptation, and other forms of resistance also drive changes in the overall population of organizations and their networks. In Table 1, we summarize some of the discourses and practices elites have used to respond to pressure from movement challengers. Elite strategies not only demobilize active opposition but diminish the appeal of movement frames to a broader audience of potential supporters. At the same time, *they leave intact existing power relations.*

<Table 1 about here>

One principal way elites have sought to neutralize movements' impacts is by appropriating the language activists use in order to appear as if they are responding to legitimate and reasonable demands made by protesters. In this way they can engage their critics in dialogues and organizational processes that divert energy away from more confrontational actions. A prominent example of this is the term "sustainable development," coopted by corporate interests such that many environmental groups now qualify or eschew the term (see, e.g., Sklair 2001). Corporations may also appropriate the discourses of movements in order to take advantage of market opportunities emerging from a movement's success, such as in the case of renewable energy. Elite appropriation of movement language can be a first step towards the realization of some of the changes movements seek, such as more ecologically sensible practices or the expansion of markets for fair trade goods. Elite adoption of movement language often contributes, however, to the "discursive demobilization" of movement activists and potential supporters who believe that critical social problems have been addressed (Lynch 1998). In reality, the appropriation of movement discourses in many cases replicates practices consistent with market-based and growth ideologies and does little to address activist concerns, even as it absorbs movement resources and energies (Cooper 2013; Lucier and Gareau 2015; Lynch 1998; 2013). As critical forces demobilize, elite agents can have freer rein to make their actions appear consistent with movement preferences without making significant changes to their practices.

Co-optation of movement energies and organizations can also occur through the resourcing of elite projects. Since the end of the Cold War, governments, corporations, and foundations have been channeling more financial aid to NGOs, in part as an alternative to providing such aid to national governments, which neoliberal ideology holds as inefficient and obstructive to the operation of markets (Keshavjee 2014; Ferguson 1990; Bebbington et al. 2008). This strategy is a central part of what Ferguson (2002) calls "neoliberal governmentality." By providing restricted funding for civil society groups, elites—including governments, corporations, and foundations—can demand accountability to donors and thereby shape the agendas and activities of civil society groups, diverting groups from addressing basic needs or advancing more transformative projects (see Lang 2013). Another way elites work to undermine threats from their opponents is to create new structures or relationships that create an illusion of access while not affording them any real power to effect transformational social change. The examples in Table 1 illustrate various ways these three strategies contribute to movement assimilation and cooptation. In addition to the more subtle ways elites undermine movement impact, we can see more

active resistance to challenges in the form of delegitimation/ stigmatization, counter-terrorism, and elite counter-mobilization.

Sklair develops the argument that a "sustainable development historical bloc" (2001:207) emerged in the 1990s, using many of the discourses and practices outlined in Table 1 to fend off the challenges to corporate globalization posed by the environmental movement. Promoting what at the time were new ideas like *corporate social responsibility*, a growing network of elites that form what Sklair calls the "transnational capitalist class" developed and consolidated their ideological efforts during the 1980s and 1990s, in an effort to defend corporate interests in a project of capitalist globalization against expanding transnational social movements. He shows that connections between global capitalist institutions and environmentalists grew dramatically in the 1980s and 90s, and these connections included direct and indirect corporate sponsorship of environmental groups and corporate alliances and collaborations. According to Sklair, "[t]he main ideological and practical tasks of the members of this bloc are to deflect attention from the idea of a singular ecological crisis and to build up the credibility of the idea that what we face is a series of manageable environmental problems" (2001:207). In contrast to the systemic critiques offered by radical environmentalists, such a perspective is more appealing to a general popular audience, since it does not require fundamental changes in behaviors or in the distribution of power and privilege. Moreover, this perspective allows for technocratic, top-down solutions that reinforce existing structures of governance.

Observing how state actions helped neutralize movement efficacy, some feminist theorists, like Nancy Fraser (2013) and Angela McRobbie (2009), argue that elements of the feminist movement have entered into what Eisenstein (2009) calls a "dangerous liaison" with (neoliberal) capitalism. Eisenstein contends that liberal 'mainstream' feminism has unwittingly served as a handmaiden to corporate capitalism by campaigning for the integration of women into the capitalist economy on the same terms as men, thereby legitimating neoliberal policies of internal devaluation and welfare rescission. Furthermore, she demonstrates how a professional class of 'gender experts' working for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) facilitated the spread of neoliberalism in the Global South and undermined welfare state capacity (see also Alvarez 2009). Both nationally and internationally, the moves of mainstream feminists have weakened radical political struggles, in part by channeling grassroots organizations and energies toward liberal reforms. Fraser's (2013) analysis is in line with Eisenstein's, to which she adds an indictment of identitarian movements for abandoning a politics of redistribution in favor of a politics of recognition. In the era of global capitalism, she argues, the once emancipatory critiques of "economism, androcentrism, etatism, and Westphalianism" disseminated by

transnational feminist organizers "now appear fraught with ambiguity, susceptible to serving the legitimation needs of a new form of capitalism. After all, *this capitalism would much prefer to confront claims for recognition over claims for redistribution*, as it builds a new regime of accumulation on the cornerstone of women's waged labor and seeks to disembed markets from democratic political regulation in order to operate all the more freely on a global scale" (2013, p. 223, emphasis added).[5]

In the area of poverty reduction, movements introduced micro-credit projects, which are small-scale loans designed to provide access to credit for women and other borrowers excluded from the formal financial sectors. Often such micro-credit projects were accompanied by substantial support in the form of training, market access, and other resources. TSMOs like the Trickle Up Program, Women's World Banking, and the Grameen Bank used microcredit projects in strategic ways to advance women's emancipation and sustainable local development. However, the financial crises in the world economic system and growing threats from movement critics have led financial elites to seek new strategies for promoting economic growth. As a result, micro-credit became a new magic bullet to address slowing growth and the global financial crisis. The United Nations named 2005 the "International Year of Microcredit," and in 2006 the Grameen Bank and its founder, Mohammad Yunus, were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (Bateman 2008; Aitkin 2013; Roy 2010). Subsequently the World Bank initiated its own micro-lending program, based on market-oriented principles rather than the community-based development principles that characterized movement initiatives.

In more recent years, we are witnessing the emergence of novel forms of organization such as "public-private partnerships," which involve nongovernmental, private sector (business, private foundations), and governmental (local, national, and international) agencies in collaborative networks. In response to public pressure and to ostensibly involve multiple "stakeholders" in global decision-making, intergovernmental organizations have also formed new agencies like the United Nations Global Compact, the NGO-World Bank Committee, and the World Bank Civil Society Joint Facilitation Committee, which seek to incorporate elements of civil society into governance processes (Willetts 2000). The limitation of these bodies, however, is that they do not address the fundamental inequities of power between civil society and global elites, and they effectively reduce democratic accountability by involving more private actors in governance questions. These entities tend to be highly selective, excluding groups seen as more "radical," i.e., groups that are critical of market ideology and managerialism. Their processes and structures also tend to privilege better-resourced groups with formal organizations, staff, and an organizational presence in the cities where IGOs are headquartered (see, e.g., Gleckman 2016; Martens and Seitz 2015). Since social movements tend to be less formal and to have

fewer resources, those most marginalized by prevailing institutions and harmed by their effects are effectively excluded or silenced by public private partnership arrangements. At the same time, activist energies that might otherwise be devoted to addressing needs that emerge from people's experiences are channeled into projects defined or controlled by corporate and other elite interests.

As an example, the World Bank Civil Society Joint Facilitation Committee, which came out of a 2001 meeting between the World Bank and the NGO Working Group, claims as members transnational social movement organizations like CIVICUS, the Freedom from Debt Coalition, and the Latin American Association of Development Organizations. The stated purpose of these committees is to establish transparent and democratic engagement between the World Bank and civil society organizations, but critics argue that these types of committees create only the appearance of participation, given their failure to address power differentials. In our dataset of TSMOs, we find a piece of evidence suggesting the critics' suspicion of World Bank Civil Society Joint Facilitation Committee is justified: Although the Committee itself reported having ties to more than a dozen of the TSMOs we have studied, just one of those TSMOs reported having a tie to this Committee.

As a result of material pressures, strategic calculations, and the ideological efforts of corporations and their elite allies, some movement organizations that had formed to promote critical approaches to economic globalization have come to engage in projects that effectively advance the interests of global capital. Ferguson (2002) documents how NGOs became "agents of neoliberal governmentality," enabling Northern governments to divert resources to Southern governments and engage more dependent and malleable non-state actors in tasks traditionally taken on by the state. Similarly, Keshavjee describes health-related NGOs as "transplanting mechanisms" for global policy agendas (2014). Researchers might interpret such co-optation as movement failure. However, the fact that elites see a need to respond to challenges with co-optation efforts is a sign that movements have some influence over much better-resourced, more "powerful" actors. Nevertheless, elite efforts to channel movement efforts in less threatening directions pose an ongoing challenge for activists—a challenge which many have come to expect and to which they actively respond.

Table 1 identifies repressive responses of elites to social movement challenges. In part this response involved the mobilization of counter-movements and the use of corporate resources to create the image of popular support for corporate agendas, a strategy known as generating "astroturf" or "hijacking the public interest" (Lang:208). One prominent example is the Global Climate Coalition, an oil industry lobby that worked to discredit scientific evidence of global warming, which disbanded after its origins and intents became known (Bruno and Karliner 2002; Smith 2008:chapter 4). In addition to

mobilizing corporate advocacy groups, elite efforts to suppress or undermine movements included more overt forms of soft and hard repression. Ferree (2005), for instance, shows how the stigmatization and ridicule of feminist agendas and activism operated as a form of "soft repression" against the movement. Such tactics are frequently used against not only feminist but also environmental and anti-free market activists, as mainstream media commentators echo elite perspectives to delegitimize and undermine the credibility of challengers' claims. More overt repression has occurred in global spaces such as mass actions at the meetings of the World Trade Organization or G-8 meetings. Arrests and physical abuses of protesters have served to criminalize dissent, dissuading broader public participation in protests and discouraging support for their messages. The wide-scale mobilization internationally of the rhetoric of counter-terrorism after September of 2001 has reinforced public fears and has been used to limit public demonstrations and to justify repression of groups opposing official policies.

[B-Level] Limits of Elite Control

Beyond the question of whether, for instance, Greenpeace's collaboration in a BP solar energy project represents a movement failure or evidence of movements' influence, it is critical for researchers and observers to keep in mind that the activists making decisions about their engagements with government and corporate entities are themselves engaged in thoughtful strategic calculations and in webs of social relations that impact their choices. These relationships are multi-dimensional—that is, they are not only about movement-elite relations but also about relationships among movement actors and between movements and various third parties. These relationships also change over time. Thus, it is problematic to characterize an actor as 'co-opted' based upon a single act. Many organizations enter relations with more powerful groups with the intention of re-evaluating that relationship at a later date. For instance, Goldman (2005) found that many groups that subjected themselves to the World Bank's "disciplining" of civil society did so not because they believed in the projects, but simply to try to prevent even worse outcomes. And as more groups have reflected on that experience, they are opting out of or avoiding altogether such relationships. For instance, the UN Global Compact initiative has been largely rejected by activist groups that are critical of neoliberal economic policies (Smith 2010). And within the larger field the discourse and analysis of many movement groups reflects a pervasive and internalized critique of "philanthrocapitalism" (Edwards 2008) and the "nonprofit industrial complex" (INCITE 2007).

At the same time as movements resist elite efforts to mitigate their influence, contestation among elite groups is also at work, and important divisions exist between and within states and among

corporate actors. Such elite divisions can be sources of leverage for social movements. For instance, in this particular era we are seeing evidence of declining U.S. power in the global political order as states and regional groupings assert their own interests in global politics and otherwise challenge U.S. hegemony. Within states, we also see expanding contention over government authority and agendas, as we discuss in more detail below. In addition, as Sklair (2001) notes, the transnational capitalist class operates in ways that counter the interests of national capitalists. And the issue of climate change pits corporate actors that profit handsomely from the continued exploitation of fossil fuels against those who see their economic and personal livelihoods as threatened by climate change.

With regard to changes in the internal coherence of state authority, globalization has meant that national governments' monopoly on state authority is under increased challenge from growing numbers of municipal and regional authorities organizing in response to the governance challenges they face (Barber 2013; Slaughter 2004). Global institutions like the World Bank and World Trade Organization typically limit participation to national governments, excluding the municipal leaders who are charged with implementing international trade and other policies and who face direct repercussions as they are forced to cut public services and compete for external investment. The exclusion of local authorities has denied international negotiators the practical knowledge and accountability that local leaders bring, and it has led to policy outcomes that have created unanticipated difficulties for regions and municipalities as well as local communities. In response, municipal leaders have become increasingly engaged in their own efforts to organize outside official channels in order to better address the conditions they face in their communities (see, e.g., Barber 2013; Borja and Castells 1997). Thus, we see a rise of hybrid transnational organizations like Local Governments for Sustainability, the World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty, the International Network of Cities on Drug Policy, and the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism.

[A-Level] Social Movements in a Changing World

Although social movement contention in global political arenas has generated responses from states and other elites to try to co-opt or otherwise channel social movements in ways that support elite projects, movements have responded in various ways. Many have been very outspoken in their critiques of elite co-optation and appropriation of movement discourses, and such critiques have led to re-thinking and innovation of movement strategies and discourses. We argue that changes in the organizational population and its network of relations are one outcome of social movements' work, and that these organizational changes shape the opportunities for subsequent social movement challenges.

One important development we point out is the emergence of new, hybrid organizational forms and spaces. New types of organizations—such as transnational associations of local authorities—and new global spaces—that include actors other than states in influential roles—are emerging. These changes reflect a global polity that is becoming less centered on the inter-state system and less subject to the hegemony of states. Increasingly, for instance, we see that movements and other global actors are generating autonomous spaces and claims that may engage with formal institutions but are not initiated or promoted via inter-state agendas. Such changes in the nature of transnational organization and politics, we argue, results both from larger shifts in the global geopolitical context and contentious interactions among states, social movements, and other global actors that are often less visible in mainstream media and scholarly accounts. While acknowledging that some civil society actors do become engaged in the kinds of elite projects described above, our quantitative and qualitative data on transnational social movement activity reveals a growing range of organization and activity outside the formal, inter-state political arena. Table 2 summarizes some of the social movement strategies that help define a changing global political arena.

<Table 2 about here>

The rapid growth of the population of TSMOs in the 1980s and 1990s affected organizing practices, and previous analyses of data on transnational movement organizing reveal important cohort differences between groups formed prior to the end of the Cold War and those formed after the early 1990s (Smith and Wiest 2012). The Cold War significantly shaped the geopolitical arena and its agenda. With its end, new possibilities opened for advancing new frames and analyses and for expanding ties among civil society actors. The breakdown of the bipolar global order of the Cold War also opened up opportunities for states to challenge U.S. and Western hegemony in the world-system, and leading contenders include China, the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). At times, the efforts of counter-hegemonic states and both anti-systemic and counter-hegemonic movements[6] come together, as they did during the World Trade Organization protests in 1999, around access to essential medicines, and in the more recent global climate negotiations. The key point here is that the current world-historical moment of declining U.S. hegemony and expanded contestation over the nature of global economic and political integration provides new opportunities and constraints for social movements, states, and business actors. Volatility in global political alignments has opened opportunities for movements to mobilize new publics and to reach constituencies not previously

engaged in critical global political policy debates. Such efforts shape the character of transnational organizing. Therefore, to understand and appreciate organizational dynamics, researchers must situate their analyses in this complex world-historical context.

In addition to changing geopolitics, this period also saw the proliferation of new information and communications technologies that significantly reduced the costs of transnational organizing, enabling people and groups with very few resources to participate in a political space from which they were previously marginalized, if not excluded. By working and struggling together, activists in different places and working on different issues developed new ways of framing issues, techniques for communicating, and strategies for collective action and conflict resolution that helped break down, though not to fully overcome, the divisions of nation, gender, race, class, etc. that are structured into the capitalist world-system (See, e.g., Sperling et al. 2001; Hewitt and Karides 2011; Conway 2012; Hertel 2006; Moghadam 2012; Vargas 2005). The series of United Nations global conferences that took place during this time of relative openness in the geopolitical order provided a focal point, a mobilizing framework, and resources that encouraged transnational organizing work and that helped develop more connections between global and local political spheres.[7] Greater participation by local activist groups in global conversations, moreover, has complicated elite governance projects that have relied on abstract theoretical justifications for policies that often have detrimental consequences for marginalized local populations.

By the mid-1990s a substantial network of transnational activists and organizations had considerable experience working to influence the inter-state system, especially the negotiations and treaty bodies associated with the United Nations. The process of organizing in the UN helped develop and expand connections between local and global activists and between groups in the global North and South. For instance, the number of TSMOs with headquarters in the global South grew from just two dozen in the early 1970s to over 400 in 2013, and more groups reported having members in the global South.[8] But the numbers alone do not tell us what these changed relationships mean for political activism. Reitan and Gibson's observations reflect how a stronger Southern voice has transformed and radicalized activism around the climate negotiations:

> Southern-based movements and organizations like Via Campesina, Third World Network, and Focus on the Global South and their grassroots Northern allies …now compete with professionalized NGO advocates to demand that the communities most affected speak for themselves in global environmental negotiations, and mobilize to effect or even halt the

> negotiations and implementation of what they denounce as false solutions…. The lack of progress in over 15 years of talks and in actual emission reductions has spurred many veteran movement actors to radicalize their critiques and tactics. (2012:399)

The more radical critiques introduced by Southern voices in transnational movements have been echoed in many ways by the growing chorus of local activist groups, whose participation in transnational alliances and networks has been facilitated by communications technology and new opportunities to engage in global debates like the transnational anti-trade protests and World Social Forum process. Indeed, in the most recent global mobilizations around climate change, people of color, who make up the "frontline communities" of those most impacted by climate change and economic globalization, have claimed a greater leadership role as "new protagonists" in global environmental justice struggles (Smith and Patterson forthcoming). Similar processes of radicalization resulting from such North-South encounters have been recorded by other scholars working on environmental movements (Rothman and Oliver 1999) and on the women's movement (Moghadam 2012; Hertel 2006).

Experiences with transnational relationships across the North and South have thus allowed activists to deepen their analyses of the relationships between the global capitalist system and its effects in different parts of the world. It also led to more critical and nuanced understandings of global political processes and institutions among activists, who increasingly critiqued the UN conference process and global "summit hopping" strategies, challenged what they saw as growing corporate influence in the UN, rejected or outwitted the "nonprofit industrial complex," and worked to develop alternative and autonomous bases of power with which to challenge the forces of economic globalization. Some of this learning is reflected in a more confrontational approach to the inter-state political arena, and the 1999 "Battle in Seattle" against the World Trade Organization marked a significant turning point in this regard.

The late 1990s brought growing challenges to the prevailing international order from both states and from a growing popular movement for "global justice." The global justice movement helped a wider range of actors become engaged in global political and economic debates and, significantly, showed how global policies impacted people's local experiences. Movement actors' shared experience of the global conference process highlighted the UN's inability to address the most pressing global problems and showed the limitations to achieving movement goals within the inter-state framework.[9] It also gave them opportunities to develop capacities for transnational communication and learning and helped them appreciate what was needed to enable and facilitate transnational movement building for systemic

change. Mobilizations to protest global financial and trade negotiations, informed by past experiences of engaging the UN system and global financial institutions, led to the development of new networks and organizing frames as well as new kinds of movement strategies and spaces. What these efforts have in common is that they integrate a critical analysis of power and attempt to raise consciousness and alter the unequal distribution of power. For instance, the introduction of language like "climate justice" and "gender justice" explicitly addresses institutionalized inequities that systematically marginalize particular groups from decision making (Smith and Patterson forthcoming; Moghadam 2013). Such innovations help open spaces (however imperfect) for the articulation and dissemination of new ideas and models of action from various peripheries into global arenas (Alvarez et al. 2003; Smith 2014).

Oppositional mobilizations around the WTO and other International Financial Institutions like the Group of 8, World Bank/IMF, and regional trade meetings showed activists the limitations of such protests for building movement unity and goals. Critics of the movements easily dismissed protesters saying, 'we know what you're against, but what are you *for*?' And activists were divided over the challenge of mobilizing large numbers of people in spaces that could easily turn violent, regardless of their work to insist on nonviolent forms of protest. In this context, the World Social Forum emerged as a space for convening groups opposed to neoliberal globalization to develop strategic thinking and networks that could strengthen a global movement for a different kind of globalization. Many tens of thousands of activists were and continue to be inspired by the idea expressed in the WSF slogan that "another world is possible." By suggesting the possibility of alternatives to the neoliberal model of economic globalization, and by creating spaces for people to discuss and organize around those alternatives, the WSF became an extremely significant development for transnational social movements. Its role in helping bring diverse groups together where they can forge networks and share ideas, experiences, and strategies has helped consolidate new global discourses, projects, and networks.[10] Along with other movement-led initiatives,[11] the WSF helps re-center transnational movement politics away from the inter-state arena and towards non-state-centered spaces and agendas.[12] The levels of participation in the WSFs –typically in the tens of thousands and as high as 150,000 for meetings in the WSF birthplace of Porto Alegre—along with its persistence for more than a decade and the diffusion of local, national and regional forums around the world demonstrate its political resonance.

A critical element of the discourses of activists in the WSF process has been the need for fundamental changes in the global system of capitalism and patriarchy and the necessity of strong global movement networks and deeper global political and economic analyses to achieve this (see World Social Form Charter of Principles).[13] This realization, moreover, is accompanied by a recognition that

organizing strategies targeting only states and/or the inter-state system are not *and cannot be* effective for achieving many movement aims. Instead, the larger system of globalized capitalism and its (often localized) cultural and institutional manifestations have become a focal point for much of the discourse and organizing in WSF and related spaces. It would seem that the experience and observations of the history of civil society engagement with the United Nations and the inter-state system helped generate more radical analyses and critiques of that system. The World Social Forum charter, for instance, explicitly links economic globalization/neoliberalism with the militarized, patriarchal inter-state system. Whether or not groups attending the WSF come to the space with such a radical critique, they are exposed to those analyses and presented with accounts and experiences from activists and groups around the world.

In addition to a radical critique of the global structural causes of the grievances that motivate many activists, another radical notion in the WSF is the idea that it is possible to build a global movement to transform this system and, indeed, that elements of this movement are in place in countries all around the world. The idea that popular initiatives can offer solutions to the concrete needs of people and communities is further reinforced by the persistent failures of states to be able to address, or even prioritize, increasingly urgent problems such as poverty and inequality and climate change. For instance, the 2007 U.S. Social Forum provided a prominent space for displaced residents of New Orleans and the surrounding region to share their experiences of systemic racial discrimination/exclusion and state incapacity for addressing the growing threats from climate change. This theme of states' inherent inability to address problems related to neoliberal globalization has been echoed in other social forums, in language regarding growing "precarity" and systemic "social exclusion" (see, e.g., Smith et al. 2011). Activist strategies and discourses in these spaces suggest that many activists believe the appropriate response to the challenges of globalization and the existing concentrations of power is to build power through trans-local networking, communication, and collaboration (see, e.g., Desai 2015; Escobar 2008; Goodman and Salleh 2013).

The decline of U.S. hegemony in the global political and economic arenas is accompanied by the rise of new challengers to global authority. Regional groupings like the European Union or the BRICs have become more assertive players on the global stage, resisting U.S. policies that contradict their interests. But in addition to states that are contending for influence within the existing capitalist world-system, other elite actors are working to advance alternatives to the prevailing world order, and to do so they are seeking to create new kinds of spaces that challenge state primacy in world politics. They are joined, moreover, by some business actors who see a need for greater transparency and responsiveness

to social needs (Peña and Davis 2014). In other words, interactions among diverse actors in the global arena are leading to the emergence of hybrid actor networks and forms of activity that operate at different or multiple scales and seek to address critical weaknesses in the inter-state order (see Alonso 2010). As Peña and Davis conclude "social roles, interests and ideologies do not reflect the competitive social relations presumed by liberal pluralism" (2014: 31). Thus, we need to understand boundaries among global actors and spaces as fluid and evolving through both contentious and cooperative interactions (cf. von Bülow, 2010).

The most prominent example of this is the work of Bolivia to press for progress in the global climate negotiations. Following the failure of the UN climate negotiations in Copenhagen in December of 2009, Morales' government invited governments and civil society groups to be part of a World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth.[14] The meeting drew over 35,000 participants and generated a powerful final declaration that named the consumerist, growth-oriented practices of capitalism as the principal cause of climate change. The document identified a number of proposals for substantially reducing greenhouse gas emissions and altering the power inequities that have allowed the leading polluters to ignore demands for change. Morales brought the "People's Declaration" to the United Nations General Assembly, which, unsurprisingly, failed to support it. In 2015 Morales again convened a "World Peoples Conference on Climate Change and the Defense of Life" in Tiquipaya Bolivia. Although this meeting was smaller than its predecessor, it drew thousands of participants and generated a similarly radical final document that Morales used to shape his government's position at the Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations in Paris later that year.[15] Despite the relative lack of attention to the meeting in official circles, many in the activist and climate policy community recognize the World Peoples Conference as a pivotal event, or at least they see the recommendations it generated (most of which have emerged from movements) as critical to advancing a more realistic and productive global dialogue in response to the climate crisis than is taking place in the UN framework. Movement activists engaged in global spaces like the WSF and Peoples Climate Coalition have used these meetings and their final declarations to advance transformative political projects (see Smith 2014).

National governments are not the only actors beginning to articulate alternative ideas to how the world should be governed. Growing numbers of municipal and regional authorities have been organizing in response to the governance challenges they are facing because of neoliberal globalization. Global institutions like the World Bank and World Trade Organization typically limit participation to national governments, excluding the municipal leaders who are charged with implementing international trade

and other policies. In addition to undermining democratic institutions, this has denied international negotiators the practical knowledge and pragmatic interests in solving critical social problems that local political leaders can bring.

The exclusion of local officials from global governance debates has led to policy outcomes that have created unanticipated difficulties for regions and municipalities as well as local communities (Peck 2015; Harvey 2012; Frug and Barron 2006). In response, municipal leaders have become engaged in their own efforts to organize outside official channels in order to better address the conditions they face in their communities. Thus, at the first World Social Forum municipal leaders launched the Forum of Local Authorities for Social Inclusion and Participatory Democracy, which convenes local authorities, particularly those in the global South, to search for solutions to common problems. The group has "sought to strengthen the role of cities as political subjects in the new world stage, promoting greater relevance to the experiences of peripheral cities."[16] In the population of TSMOs we see a growing number of groups organizing local and regional government officials—groups such as Mayors for Peace or the Association of Cities and Regions for Recycling. While just two such organizations existed in 1970, by 2011 there were 24 organizations bringing together municipal officials, and two-thirds of these were formed in or after 1990. These developments reflect growing connections between local and global, and an expanding participation in global politics of actors that had previously been marginalized or excluded from debates about how the world should be organized.

[A-Level] Conclusion

The global arena has changed dramatically over recent decades, and factors such as the rise of neoliberalism, the end of the Cold War, expanding civil society participation in the UN and other global settings, and changes in communications technology all impact how people have organized to advocate for change. In response to growing challenges, elite actors whose interests are threatened take steps to channel movement energies in less threatening directions. The interactions among movement and elite networks influence the overall character of the organizational field in which movements operate.

Drawing from our research on the population of transnational social movement organizations over multiple decades, we have offered some reflections on how the changing institutional context and elite responses to movement challenges have shaped contemporary global politics. We argue that elite efforts to co-opt social movements take the form of appropriating movement discourses and using civil society groups to resource elite projects to create illusions of access to power. In these ways powerful actors have been able to obfuscate activist messages and create tensions within movements over

strategies and resources. Nevertheless, social movements have responded with their own efforts, generating novel forms of organizing and opening hybrid global spaces for promoting critical dialogues, countering elite co-optation, and amplifying popular influence in global politics.

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Table 1: Neutralizing Resistance: Elite Responses to Movement Challenges

Strategies	**Discourses**	**Practices**
Assimilation	Democratization (nominal/from above) Multi-stakeholder governance 'Depoliticized' expert knowledge	UN Global Conferences & "summit hopping" Global Compact & similar IGO-Civil Society joint agencies Techno-managerialism— & NGO professionalization
Co-optation/ appropriation of activist ideas and energy	Hegemonic market epistemologies Corporate social responsibility Sustainable development	Elite-funded projects and "upward accountability" (Lang 2013); A.k.a. "Non-profit industrial complex" (INCITE 2007) Public-private partnerships
Resistance	Stigmatization/Delegitimization Counter-terrorism	Business "INGOs" Conservative movement mobilization (i.e., vs. inclusive, participatory democracy)

Table 2: Global Shifts & Transgressive Movement Discourses and Practices

Strategies	Discourses	Practices
Responding to hegemonic decline and changing political contexts	Transnational dialogue and deepened understanding of global North-South divide Greater understanding & targeting of corporate power and global financial and trade system Critique of UN system and its limits	Confrontational stance vis-à-vis IGOs (especially IFIs) Expanded transnational communication, networking, collaboration, and alliance-building
Extending counter-hegemonic alliances	Climate justice Gender justice Food sovereignty Rights of Mother Earth	Declining ties to inter-state organizations World Social Forum process (global, regional and local scales) World Peoples Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth Corporate targets and investor actions—e.g., Fossil fuel divestment campaigns
Building movement counter-power	Another world is possible/ alternatives to neoliberal globalized capitalism Human Rights Global Citizenship	TSMO population growth and networking Strengthened local-global links World Social Forum, World March of Women, and other transnational movement spaces outside inter-state system Trans-local networks (Desai 2015)

Endnotes

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[2] These counts include organizations that: 1) have members in at least three countries; 2) are non-governmental (although representatives from governments, such as members of Parliament or municipal officials, may be members); and 3) have a primary purpose to advance some form of social or political change (for more details, see Smith and Wiest 2012).

[3]The Transnational Social Movement Organizations dataset is based on organizational records from the *Yearbook of International Organizations*, collected by the Union of International Associations in Brussels. Our new research extended the dataset to include alternate years between 2003 and 2013.

[4] 'Non-state actors' includes all actors that are not national governments or inter-governmental organizations (IGOs). This category includes all "non-governmental organizations," which typically implies non-profit entities and excludes corporations. TSMOs are a subset of internationally organized NGOs (INGOs) working for social change.

[5] Feminist activists have engaged in extensive debates over these questions, and a significant segment of feminist activists and organizations retains a more critical stance to states and the inter-state system (see, e.g., Alvarez 2009; Alvarez et al. 2003; Mendoza 2002). The World March of Women has helped bring these critical elements together (Vargas 2005; Eschle 2005; Dufour and Giraud 2007).

[6] Counter-hegemony refers to actors and actions that challenge prevailing power arrangements in the global system, such as China's or the EU's attempts to challenge U.S. dominance in global political and economic arenas. Anti-systemic refers to actors and actions aimed at challenging, transforming, and/or replacing capitalism (Arrighi et al. 1989).

[7] The conferences provided a predictable organizing model that activists used to structure their internal organizing routines and their international mobilizing strategies. It also helped frame discussions about issues and political strategies in ways that certainly constrained debate, but that probably facilitated the formation of new networks and a fairly coherent transnational movement arena. In addition, governments and international agencies provided resources to enhance participation, particularly from low-income countries. This brought new voices and actors into the global political process and enabled new transnational networks to form among activists and their organizations.

[8] Growth in the number of groups headquartered in the Global South consistently outpaced the growth of those located in the North, although in absolute terms groups headquartered in the North still greatly outnumber those in the South.

[9] For very explicit statements about the need to work outside the UN system, see Lohmann (2012) and Mooney (2012).

[10] The WSF has, of course, been criticized for being influenced by some of the same governmental and corporate forces that its constituent movements oppose (see, e.g., Peña and Davis 2014). The diverse interests and actors involved in the WSF process reveals the complexity of organizational fields and reiterates a key point in our study, that conventional binary modes of thinking are inadequate for understanding complex and fluid organizational environments.

[11] Such movement initiatives include, a growing number of movement-initiated transnational meetings and workshops. Pianta and Silva (2003) have documented a decisive increase in these types of initiatives in recent years, and far more have taken place within the framework of the World Social Forum process. In addition to the expanded opportunities these settings provide for activists to meet across national borders and develop global perspectives and strategic networks, we also see new kinds of 'hybrid' spaces like the World Peoples Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, which brought together leaders from counter-hegemonic states (led by Bolivia) and movement actors to address an issue that the dominant inter-state arena had failed to address.

[12]As Peña and Davis (2014) show, the WSF is not strictly a movement space, and it has been shaped by both the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) and business leaders hoping to advance a more humane form of capitalism. Given the resource demands of transnational organizational gatherings and the concentration of wealth in today's global economy, it is likely that the organizational fields in which movements operate will likely contain a mix of groups with varying views on whether capitalism can or should be abolished or reformed.

[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Social_Forum#Charter_of_Principles

[14] https://pwccc.wordpress.com/

[15] http://www.jallalla.bo/en/

[16] http://www.redefalp.com/en/sobre