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Transnational Contention

SIDNEY TARROW

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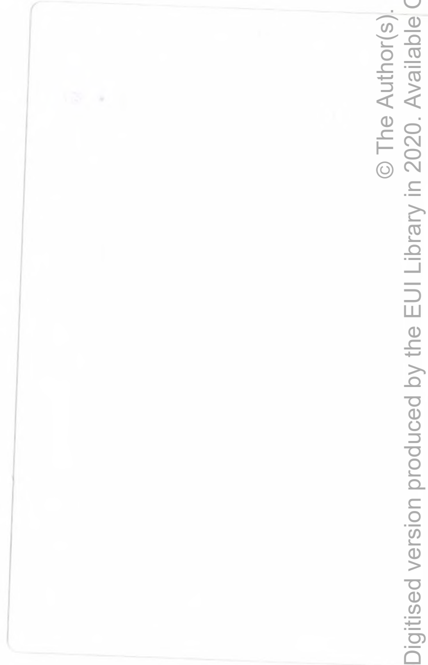

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Tarrow: ***Transnational Contention***

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ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE
FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

Transnational Contention

SIDNEY TARROW

Cornell University and EUI
Sgt2@cornell.edu

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BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO (FI)

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Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

European Forum

The European Forum was set up by the High Council of the EUI in 1992 with the mission of bringing together at the Institute for a given academic year a group of experts, under the supervision of annual scientific director(s), for researching a specific topic primarily of a comparative and interdisciplinary nature.

This Working Paper has been written in the context of the 1999-2000 European Forum programme on "Between Europe and the Nation State: the Reshaping of Interests, Identities and Political Representation" directed by Professors Stefano Bartolini (EUI, SPS Department), Thomas Risse (EUI, RSC/SPS Joint Chair) and Bo Stråth (EUI, RSC/HEC Joint Chair).

The Forum reflects on the domestic impact of European integration, studying the extent to which *Europeanisation* shapes the adaptation patterns, power redistribution, and shifting loyalties at the national level. The categories of 'interest' and 'identity' are at the core of the programme and a particular emphasis is given to the formation of new social identities, the redefinition of corporate interests, and the domestic changes in the forms of political representation.

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"For two exceptional centuries", declares Charles Tilly,

> European states and their extensions elsewhere succeeded remarkably in circumscribing and controlling the resources within their perimeters [...]. But in our era [...] at least in Europe, the era of strong states is now ending (1993:3) *.

Tilly happily admits that his declaration is informed by a "series of speculations, conjectures, and hypotheses". But let us, at least for the moment, assume that his instinct is right; that the strong, consolidated Westphalian state really *is* in decline. The question for students of contentious politics and international relations is whether the resulting gap a) is cyclical, and will be filled by states' remarkable capacity for adjustment and renewal; b) is being filled by forms of non-territorial institutional governance; or c) is providing space for social movements and other non-governmental forms of collective action to thrust forward into political space normally occupied by institutions; or d) some combination of the three.

Faced by this conundrum, some scholars have predicted increased power for new agencies of international governance (Young ed. 1997); others foresee local social movements reaching beyond state boundaries to create something resembling a "global civil society" (Wapner 1996) or a "world polity" (Boli and Thomas eds. 1999); still others "transnational activist networks" connecting new forms of governance to old ones and representing the interests of resource-poor actors within states (Keck and Sikkink 1998); while some see a combination of governmental and non-governmental, state and international actors (Risse 2000).

The point of view of this essay is that most of these predictions – while based on solid bits of evidence – are one-sided and fail to examine the interactions among social movements, non-governmental organizations, states and international institutions. In particular, few mechanisms are proposed which link domestic actors to transnational ones and to international institutions. I will argue that international institutions – created by states in their own collective interest – have an anchoring and empowering effect for non-state actors and provide resources, opportunities and incentives with which they can organize and mobilize transnationally. Rather than being seen as the antipode of transnational contention, international institutions may offer resources, opportunities and incentives for transnational activism.

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Three Cautions

Before turning to these issues, it won't hurt to remind ourselves of three lessons from history – too often forgotten by those who see a global civil society appearing in short order:

- states remain strong in most areas of policy – for example, in maintaining domestic security – even if they have become weaker in their ability to control capital flows (Krasner 1995; Risse 2000; Spruyt 1994:ch. 9).. States still control their borders and exercise legal dominion within them. Citizens can travel more easily than they did; they can form networks beyond borders (Keck and Sikkink 1998); but they still *live* in states and – in democratic ones, at least – they have available the opportunities, the networks, and the well-known repertoires of national polities (Tarrow 1998; Tilly 1995). Those are resources that the hypothetical attractions of "global civil society" cannot easily match.

- Although transnational association is frequently linked causally to economic "globalization" (Rosenau 1990) – it has been around for at least a century – even longer, if we include the "Atlantic" revolution of the 18th century or the Protestant reformation (Jacobson 1979:11; Keck and Sikkink 1998:ch. 2). These are not mere historical quibbles; since transnational organizations appeared historically well before "globalization", they suggest that we will need to specify mechanisms other than economic ones as the sources for increases in transnational organization and contention today.

- Nor are social movements, transnational networks and NGOs the only agents operating transnationally: *states* have always reached beyond their borders (Huntington 1973) and are doing so increasingly – notably by signing international agreements, interfering in the internal lives of [usually weaker] states, and building international institutions. These state-led institutions are usually aimed at state purposes (Moravcsik 1998) – often to counter transnational activities that states cannot control (Keohane and Nye 1974) or to provide "insurance" that other states do not defect from their commitments (Keohane 1989). Moreover, the dominant states in the international system have a profound effect on transnational relations, not only by controlling non-state actors but by providing models of transnational politics around their own domestic templates (Huntington 1973).

- Since the sources of transnational activism have a variety of sources, some of which are reversible, there are variations in the degree of transnationalization across sectors and there may be no unidirectional trend towards a global civil society – even though in the current phase of history it might seem so.

I will begin this review with a rapid survey of the changes in the treatment of transnational politics in the International Relations literature since the 1970s. In Part

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Two, I will outline the contributions of a new group of scholars – students of contentious politics – to this literature. In Part three, I will distinguish the three main types of transnational actors that appear in the literature – transnational social movements, international nongovernmental organizations, and transnational advocacy networks. In Part four I turn to the hypothetical relations between transnational contention and international institutions. I will close with a number of research questions about the study of transnational contention.

1. From the Old to the New Transnational Relations[1]

The last three decades have seen a paradigm shift in the way political scientists and others have looked at transnational politics. Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane – who popularized the term in the early 1970s[2] – were deliberately reacting against the "realist" paradigm in international relations (1971: 372-379). In that well-known paradigm, international organizations "are merely instruments of governments, and therefore unimportant in their own right" (1974:39). Nye and Keohane criticize the reductionism of the realist approach and its assumption that states are unitary actors, and propose an alternative one – what they called the world politics paradigm: (1971:379-395). Their work triggered a debate that has gone through many overly-polarized phases in international relations theory since then.

Realism – with its emphasis on states as the only important actors in international politics – has remained the stated or unstated target of much of the field of transnational politics. This fixation is unfortunate, since it difficult for realists to recognize the importance of transnational politics and for anti-realists – who are best represented in the study of transnational relations (Risse 2000:2) to analyze the role of states. Few since Huntington have made much of the fact that the world's remaining hegemon has a concept of international relations that is fully congruent with its dominant pluralist model of domestic politics.

The debate has taken several stages. After, first, focussing in their edited book *Transnational Relations and World Politics,* on *all* forms of transnational activity ("contacts, coalitions, and interaction across state boundaries that are not controlled by the central foreign policy organs of governments", 1971::xi), Keohane and Nye narrowed the concept of transnationalism to the international activities of nongovernmental actors (1974:41) – distinguishing these from "transgovernmental actors" – a term they now use to refer to "sub-units of governments on those occasions when they act relatively autonomously from higher authority in international politics" (p. 41) – and from "international organizations", which they define as "multilevel linkages, norms, and institutions between governments prescribing behavior in particular situations." Such international organizations are sometimes formalized into institutions (pp. 54-5) but often remain informal – as in the network of understandings between the United States and Canada.

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Though it was tighter than their original one, even Keohane and Nye's sharpened 1974 concept of "transnational relations" covered an awful lot of ground. It was useful in directing attention to "the tremendous increase in the number and significance of private international interactions in recent decades and the much larger and diverse number of private individuals and groups engaging in such interactions" (Huntington: 335). But it had three unfortunately narrowing effects:

- First, since their work coincided with the discovery, or rediscovery, of the field of international political economy, their work influenced scholars to focus mainly on transnational *economic* relations and, in particular, on the multinational corporation. Indeed, many of the contributions to *Transnational Relations and World Politics* did exactly that.[3] Even Keohane's 1996 reader with Helen Milner still focusses largely on economic factors (Keohane and Milner 1996). As a result, to the extent that students of transnational relations looked at contentious politics, it was usually in the form of resistance to transnational economic penetration (Arrighi and Silver 1984; Walton 1989); to the extent that they studied states' internal politics, it was mainly through foreign economic policy-making.

- Second, though they also paid some attention to contentious politics, (1971: xvii), Nye and Keohane recognized transnational contention only under the narrow heading of t*he diffusion of ideas and attitudes,* treating them separately from their more sustained discussion of "international pluralism" – by which they meant "the linking of national interest groups in transnational structures, usually involving transnational organizations for purposes of coordination" (1971:xviii). This disjunction of transnational contention from transnational nongovernmental organizations persisted; as a result, there was no integration between the field of transnational politics and the study of contentious politics until the 1990s.

- Third, though they do not explicitly say so, Nye and Keohane's emphasis on free-wheeling transnational interaction left the implication that transnational activity occurs at the *cost* of national states. This implication – vigorously combated by Huntington in his critique of their work (1973: 342-ff) – left several questions about the role of states in transnational politics unasked: When will states stimulate transnational activity in their interests and on behalf of which internal interest groups? When will they create international institutions that will provide a forum for nonstate actors? When they will provide models for transnational activity isomorphic with their own way of conceiving the world? And when they will advance the interests of nonstate actors against those of other states[4]? Later scholars picked up this zero-sum assumption about states and non-state actors and gave it a normative cast (Rosenau 1990; 1999).

The narrowing of attention to political economy and especially to multinational corporations, the disjunction of contentious politics from transnational organizations,

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and the zero-sum assumption about states and transnational organizations combined to exclude the study of contentious politics from the field of transnational relations through the 1970s and 1980s. This may be one reason for the stagnation of the field after Nye and Keohane opened it up in the early 1970s – for many of then new non-state actors that have come into prominence since then openly contest the power of states and international institutions.

It was the waning of the cold war and the enormous diffusion of transnational non-governmental organizations in the 1980s and 1990s that re-opened the field of transnational politics and took it in new directions. This was reflected in two streams of work in the 1980s and 1990s: work by sociological institututionalists like John Meyer and his associates at Stanford (see Boli and Thomas ed., for a full bibliography) and a less self-conscious group of political scientists united more by what they rejected (e.g., realism, rational choice) than what they supported. A novel aspect of the new literature is that much of it comes from outside the subfield of international relations – some of it from former activists in the peace movement and some from comparative politics and sociology.

The title of Thomas Risse-Kappen's edited 1995 volume, *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In* both revealed the stagnation of the field in the previous decade and attempted to open it to perspectives beyond the old realist-non-realist debate. Risse-Kappen and his colleagues revived attention to "transgovernmental politics" (see especially the chapter by Cameron); they included transnational economic relations but also went beyond it; and they related transnational politics to international institutions and domestic politics. Two changes in particular were notable, both in their book and in the new literature that followed it:

- a deliberate attempt to deal with the intersections between transnational relations and "domestic structure" and

- a more normatively charged concept of transnational relations.

A. *Domestic Structures and Transnational Relations*

Nye and Keohane – and especially the latter – had long called for more attention to the domestic sources of transnational politics (see especially Keohane's Presidential address to the ISA in Keohane 1989). But the early transnational literature provided little purchase on non-state political variables that might prove important in tracking the scope and directions of transnational politics. Risse-Kappen and his collaborators attacked this problem deliberately: "Under similar international conditions," he wrote "differences in domestic structures determine the variation in the policy impact of transnational actors" (1995:25). In order to gain impact, transnational actors must, first, gain access to the political system of their target state and, second, generate

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and/or contribute to winning policy coalitions (p. 25).

Risse-Kappen and his collaborators' approach – unlike the generic "recognition" of domestic factors in previous international relations work – generated predictions about how variations in domestic structure would affect the impact of transnational actors. For example, Risse-Kappen argued, domestic systems that are open and decentralized and societies that are more pluralistic will be open to such actors than closed and hierarchical ones. However, as Matthew Evangelista showed, the need for coalition building in such systems can pose formidable obstacles to transnational actors once they gain a purchase; conversely, the "closed" Soviet system was harder for transnational arms control advocates to access but – once contacts were established – they could have great impact (Evangelista 1995; 1999).

There were three main weaknesses in the "domestic structure" argument as Risse Kappen and his collaborators framed it:

- First, it was extremely general, including elements as general as "political culture," "open-ness" (eg., openness to *whom*?), and pluralism
- Second, it could not predict why some transnational actors operating in the same context succeed while others fail (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 202)
- Third, it made no clear distinctions between different types of transnational actors – indifferently lumping INGOs, social movements, and transnational advocacy networks together.

Those who followed Risse-Kappen and his colleagues after 1995 posed a partial answer to these problems: with a constructivist turn that focussed attention on the resonance between transnational goals and domestic norms.

B. Norms and Identities

The move towards norms in the study of transnational activism was part of a general discovery of "constructivism" by IR scholars in the 1990s (Risse 2000:2).[5] In various areas of international relations, norms were defined as "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity" (P. Katzenstein 1996: 5). This re-kindled the controvesy with realism and gave it a new twist (Checkel 1997). Strong realists posited state interests as both fixed and central to international relations. Neo-realists budged only slightly; for them, transnational actors could have an impact on the international system by influencing the policies of the strongest states. But if norms could be shown to have an autonomous role in structuring international debate irrespective of the policies of strong states, then it could be shown that interests are constituted and reconstituted around learning, norm-diffusion, and identity shift – and not around the interests of hegemonic states.

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This concern with norms overlapped with the new institutionalism in sociology, with its concern with identity construction. John Boli and George Thomas and their collaborators, growing out the Stanford school of sociology, see the creation of INGOs, the move towards standardization, and the rationalization of institutions as signs of an emerging world culture with strong normative elements (1999). These scholars' work provided a theoretical rationale and quantitative historical evidence for the growth of international institutions that could be seen as embodying new norms and new identities that reflected normative change on a global level. However, it is more accurately aimed at tracing changes in world culture than at the actors, the forms of activism and the interactions with significant others in transnational politics.

Much creative work has grown out of the concern with norms and identities in the international system:

- First, transnational normative consensus could be shown to result in international agreements that were capable of constraining state behavior (Klotz 1995; Price 1997).

- Second, international normative agreements could create political opportunities for domestic actors living under governments which would otherwise be reluctant to tolerate dissidence (Thomas forthcoming, Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999).

- Third, even where international normative consensus was lacking, strong states could endow international institutions with the authority to enforce behavior consistent with these norms – as in the U.N. and NATO interventions in Yugoslavia.

- Fourth, norms could contribute to the construction of new identities, which – in some cases – could bridge national identities, providing a normative basis for transnational coalitions or principled issue networks.

But as in the broader constructivist paradigm, the problem of where norms are *lodged* in transnational relations was not always clear. Are they based in states that convey them to other states through persuasion, force or moral authority? Are they embodied in international institutions? Or do they emerge venus-like from an international or global society in which – without apparent constraint or resources – individuals and groups from across the planet come together around normative consensus and new identities? If true, it would have to be shown that these norms and identities are more than contingent coalitions of interest or elite networks. What was missing was a well-specified model of the mechanisms for norm diffusion and transformation (but see Risse, Roppe and Sikkink, eds., 1999).

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A similar problem bedeviled writings about identities. Identities can be of at least two types: *embedded* in the processes of everyday life and networks ot trust; and *disjoined* from these and attached to political and institutional processes (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, forthcoming, ch. 6). While the growth of transnational organizations speaks directly to the creation of disjoined elite identities, this is very far from transforming the embedded identities of ordinary citizens beyond their families, neighborhoods, work groups, sports associations, political parties and nation-states.[6] A good deal more evidence on the actors, actions and interactions of transnational exchange will be needed to convincingly show the development of transnational collective identities beyond the elites who attend international conferences, read each others newspapers, and take part in transnational organizations and networks.

A final problem: most of the new work on transnational activism focussed on "principled issues" or normatively-committed groups. But what of the considerable amount of transnational activity that is driven by material interests? Do businesses, professional associations, and labor unions operating across borders have the same connection to international norms and identities as human rights groups, environmentalists or peace activists? The co-occurrence of the rediscovery of transnational politics with the constructivist turn has led many IR scholars to focus on heavily normative activist networks and to ignore networks with deeper material interests – like international labor networks (Blyton et al 2000).

Nevertheless, the new turn in international relations theory has had an unexpected benefit: it helped to provide a bridge between international relations scholars and a previously-distinct tradition – the field of contentious politics – which had been concerned until recently only with domestic social movements (McAdam 1998; Tarrow 1998: ch. 11). In the 1980s and early 1990s, this group of scholars had already absorbed and profited from constructivism (Melucci 1988, 1996; Snow et al 1986); it also had a well-grounded tradition of studying the kinds of actors who engage in activism on the border between institutional and contentious politics. Let us turn to this tradition's contributions to the new transnational politics.

2. Contentious Transnational Politics[7]

The evidence for the growth of contentious transnational politics that led to this new approach was dramatic but scattered. It had four main sources in real-world politics:

- First, grassroots insurgencies, like Chiapas, which frame their claims globally and enjoy international support from sympathetic national groups and INGOs

- Second, international protest events like the "Battle of Seattle" which bring together coalitions of transnational and national groups against highly visible targets like the World Trade Organization or the IMF

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- Third, the successes that some transnational activist coalitions gained against some national states in some situations

- Fourth, activism within and around international institutions and internatonal treaty-writing.

These are different kinds of evidence at different levels of the international system. Some is episodic while other parts are continuous. And much of the evidence was "selected on the dependent variable" – e.g., it was about highly dramatic events in which transnational activists of one kind or another either triumphed or fought hard against entrenched enemies.

The first type of evidence relates to fundamentally *domestic* contention that is framed as transnational and enjoys international support – mainly by proxy.[8] The second type depends very much on particular domestic and international opportunities and resources and – as the Seattle follow-up demonstration in Washington showed – is difficult to sustain. The third type is mainly the result of elite coalitions using the leverage of either third-party states or international institutions, often with weak domestic support in targeted states. And the fourth type involves transnational activists in cooperative relations with states and international institutions.

The sources of these varied research strands were largely experiential: as in the study of *domestic* social movements, an important source of data on transnational contention came from former activists, who brought energy, real-time information and commitment to studying contention to the field. They also brought perspectives from comparative politics, cultural anthropology, and sociology to a field that had been restricted to professional international relations specialists and hung up on the realist/anti-realist debate. From the early 1990s on, a creative cross-fertilization began to develop between IR specialists interested in transnational relations and social movement scholars interested in transnational contention.

The new work can be divided roughly into five groupings, with some overlap between them:

- Some examined the development of a wide spectrum of non-state actors who organized transnationally (della Porta, Kriesi and Rucht, eds., 1999, Keck and Sikkink 1998, Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco, eds. 1997, Boli and Thomas eds. 1999)

- Others focussed on particular movement families – like the peace movement (Rochon 1998) human rights (Risse, Roapp and Sikkink 1999), the environment (Young, ed. 1997), conflicts over dam-construction (Khagram 1999, Khagram, Riker and Sikkink, forthcoming), or indigenous peoples'

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movements (Brysk 1998).

- Some focussed on organizations, either particular (Finnemore 1996, Wapner 1996), or in the aggregate (Chatfield 1997; Boli and Thomas 1999) or on transnational networks of organizations (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

- Others studied international treaties which either legitimated and provided resources to nonstate actors (Thomas forthcoming), or in which activists played a constitutive role (Price 1997), or against which they mobilized (Ayres 1998).

- And some looked at particular binational or regional contention in the context of international agreements or institutions (Ayres 1998; Fox 2000; Imig and Tarrow 1999, 2000, and Imig and Tarrow, eds. forthcoming).

From a field that had been heavily influenced by transnational economic relations and was harnessed to a somewhat sterile debate with realism, the study of transnational politics has begun to overlap increasingly with the study of contentious politics. But as in any marriage between actors coming from different traditions, assumptions are not always the same and the casual adoption of the language or conventions of others can lead to misunderstandings.

The most general problem was the adoption of the language of "globalization" with its shifting combination of economic, political, and cultural meanings. The fusion of the various meanings of globalization is an important tool in the framing of social movements, permitting organizers to access broader movements and distant enemies in mobilizing supporters. But its adoption by scholars has had two unfortunate effects:: first, it fostered insensitivity to the *regional* scope of much transnational activity; and, second, it produced a conceptual difficulty in distinguishing between the global *framing* of an activity and the empirical scope of the activity (see the critiques in Tarrow 1998:ch. 11 and Yashar 1999).

Second, coming to the field from a commitment to the goals of particular social movement sectors – especially from the peace, the environment, feminist and indigenous rights movements – many saw the universe of non-state actors through the lens of "their" particular sector. They also tended to focus on "good" movements – like the peace or human rights movements – giving much less attention to the more dangerous sectors of transnational activism – for example, militant fundamentalism. (For an exception, see Rudolf and Piscatori eds. 1997.)

Third, for some of the same motives, the role of states was often underplayed – or seen as unremittingly hostile to transnational actors – while that of a poorly-specified concept of "civil society" was often exaggerated.

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Fourth, as for international institutions, they came to scholars' attention mainly as the *targets* of contention, and not – as will be argued below – as sources of resources, incentives and opportunities for transnational activism.

Finally, scholars shifting their research interest from domestic activism to the transnational level frequently transferred the domestically-shaped and ideologically-satisfying category "social movement" somewhat loosely to international activities that would be more recognizable as lobbying, communication, and educational and service activity if they were observed at home.[9]

3. Forms of Transnational Activism

This leads to a major theoretical and substantive problem in the study of transnational politics: the nature and variety of the actors on the transnational scene. Are they social movements? Non-governmental organizations (INGOs)? Or some looser configuration like "transnational advocacy networks (TANs)? This could make a difference in their interactions with states and international institutions. To begin with, these terms need some elementary definition.

A. Transnational Social Movements

As the new field of transnational politics emerged, a tendency developed to characterize all or most transnational actors as "social movements." (Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco 1997), whose activities could be measured through the number of transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs). Some authors focussed on individual transnational organizations – like Greenpeace (Wapner 1996) – while others drew samples of transnational social movement organizations from the broader category of INGOs (international nongovernmental organizations) from the records of the Union of International Associations. The availability of the UIA database has, in fact, helped to shape this field of study.

Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco define TSMOs as a subset of INGOs that operate in more than two states and work to "change some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of society" (pp. 12, 43). This definition is clear and operationable, but it poses the problem that its parameters are so broad that they can comprehend groups as varied as the Fourth International, the World Wildlife Federation and the International Red Cross. It also takes no account of the types of *activities* in which such groups engage.[10] As Keck and Sikkink observe, "to understand how change occurs in the world policy we have to understand the quite different logics and process among the different categories of transnational actors" (1998:210).

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The classification of transnational actors as "social movements" gives a dramatic flavor to many humdrum activities but it makes it difficult to disaggregate the variety of forms in which transnational contention takes place. Consider trade unions: in recent years there has been increased attention to international capital flows and transnational subcontracting and its effects on workers (Anner 1998; Blyton et al 2000). As a result, unionists have become involved in transnational activities of both a bilateral and a multilateral nature. Much of what they do is profoundly relevant to social change; but it does not advance understanding to consider them as "transnational social movements" in the same category as Greenpeace, militant Islamic fundamentalists, and the Third International.

There is a solution to this definitional puzzle which comes from the study of domestic contention: to define social movements – not in terms of their social change goals – which they share with many *non*-social movements – but in terms of the kinds of actions in which they routinely engage and see them as part of a broader universe of *contentious politics*, which I define as

> "Episodic, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when at least one government is a claimant, An object of claims, or a party to the claims and b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants".[11]

Social movements are a particularly congealed form of contention within this universe which I define as:

> "Socially mobilized groups engaged in sustained contentious interaction with powerholders in which at least one actor is either a target or a participant".[12]

To be *transnational,* a social movement ought to have social and political bases outside its target state or society; but to be a *social movement,* it ought to be clearly rooted within social networks in more than one state and engage in contentious politics in which at least one state is a party to the interaction. This produces a definition of *transnational social movements* as

> "Socially mobilized groups with constituents in at least two states, engaged in sustained contentious interaction with powerholders in at least one state other than their own, or against an international institution, or a multinational economic actor".

Like all definitions, this one can be faulted for one reason or another. But it has three advantages: first, it distinguishes *sustained* transnational action from other forms – like occasional political exchange or the diffusion of contention; second, it emphasizes *contentious* action – which is by no means characteristic of all non-state actors; and, third, it insists on *interaction* with actors outside the challengers' own state – which sets them off from domestic groups who may frame their claims in global terms but have no connection with actors outside their own state. The strategic advantage of this definition is that it will allow us to examine as an empirical question

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the relations among social movements and other institutional forms and trace potential transitions between these various forms. The major other forms are INGOs and transnational advocacy networks.

B. International Non-Governmental Organizations

A truism of transnational politics is that international nongovernmental organizations are growing rapidly. John Boli and George M. Thomas enumerate nearly 6,000 INGOs founded between 1875 and 1988 (1999:20). They find not only a growing founding rate of INGOs after 1945, but a declining rate of dissolution. Figure One reproduces Boli and Thomas' map of INGO foundings and dissolutions between 1875 and 1973 (permission applied for).

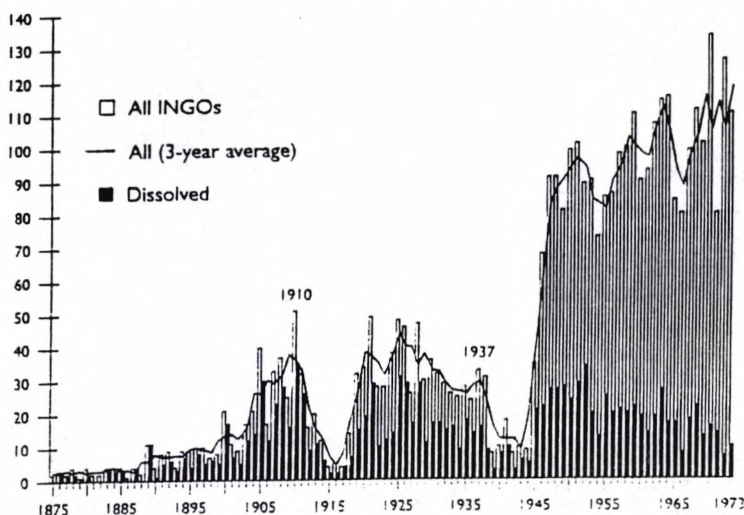

FIGURE 1. International nongovernmental organizations: Foundings of all and dissolved bodies, 1875–1973. SOURCE: Boli, John and John Thomas, eds., 1999. Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations Since 1875. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

But for a term that has gained great currency in recent debates, it is surprising how little consensus there seems to be on the definition or operationalization of INGO's. [13] Boli and Thomas offer three descriptions: they see INGOs as "the primary organizational field in which world culture takes structural form" (p. 6), as "transnational bodies exercising a special type of authority we call rational voluntarism" (p. 14), and groups whose "primary concern is enacting, codifying, modifying, and propagating world-cultural structures and principles" (p. 19).

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Their operational definition is "the entire population of INGOs classified as genuinely international bodies by the Union of International Associations" – that is, all "not-for-profit, non-state organizations" (p. 20). This is a fairly rich, variegated but not very discriminating category of organizations. For one thing, it leads to many inconsistencies and gaps.[14] I will hazard a definition that will be broad enough to include in the INGO category a wide range of organizations but also distinguish them from social movements:

> "International nongovernmental organizations are organizations independent of governments that are composed of a membership base coming from more than two countries, organized to advance their members' international goals and provide services to citizens of other states through routine transactions with states, private actors and international institutions".

Starting from this definition, the main distinction between INGOs and social movements is primarily behavioral: while both may have social change goals, transnational social movements engage in sustained contentious interaction with states, multinational actors, or international institutions, while INGOs engage in routine transactions with the same kinds of actors and provide services to citizens of other states. Making a clear analytical distinction between the two categories will make it easier to examine the relations between them, as whether transitions are occurring from one type to the other, and compare their relationship to grassroots social movements.

This last issue is particularly crucial: even the briefest examination of INGOs will show that their composition is largely elite: made up of dedicated people who can afford to travel around the world, are adept at languages, and have the technical, intellectual and professional skills to serve and represent the interests of those they support with international institutions and powerful states. Though social movements need leaders as well – and have become more professional in recent decades (Meyer and Tarrow eds. 1998) – by our definition at least, they are based on "socially mobilized groups engaged in sustained contentious interaction with powerholders."

If we accept this definition, it seems clear that an INGO cannot be a social movement; but there is no reason to think that INGOs cannot maintain close relations with social movements, domestic interest groups, and other collectivities or contribute to their formation. Indeed, one advantage of a clear definitional distinction between INGOs and transnational social movements is to allow for empirical analysis of the relations between each with states, international institutions and domestic actors.

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C. Transnational Activist Networks

One reason why INGO's have been the subject of a flourishing literature is that their births and deaths, their organizational structures and institutional ties, are matters of public record and are carefully mapped by the UIA, the United Nations and other organizations. Despite the gross nature of the data used to measure them,[15] they are a useful measure of changes in international organizations (Boli and Thomas 1998: 45-48). But recently, scholars have become aware that except for their service activities – where they are normally independent – INGOs frequently operate in temporary or long-term alliances with other actors – both state and non-state, transnational and domestic – to advance their policy goals. This has added a new and dynamic category to the study of transnational politics – *transnational activist networks*.

As Keck and Sikkink define it,

> "A transnational advocacy network includes those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services" (1998:2).

Transnational advocacy networks (TANs) are not alternatives to social movements or INGOs; on the contrary, they can *contain* them, in the loose way that networks contain anything – as well as containing governmental agents in either their official or unofficial capacities. They are the informal and shifting structures through which NGOs, social movement activists, government officials, and agents of international institutions can interact and help resource-poor domestic actors to gain leverage in their own societies. In Keck and Sikkink's model, resource-rich NGOs – working through either their own states, international institutions, or both – try to activate a transnational network to put pressure on target state. Keck and Sikkink's diagram of this "boomerang" effect illustrates the potential relationships within these networks (1998: 13; permission applied for):

Keck and Sikkink's "boomerang effect" is a nice metaphor for the triangular relations that crop up continuously among domestic groups, their governments, and transnational activist networks.[16] Such networks, continue Keck and Sikkink, "are most prevalent in issue areas characterized by high value content and informational uncertainty" (ibid: p.2). They thus draw on the "normative turn" in international relations theory described above – with special relevance to such heavily-normative areas as human rights (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999).

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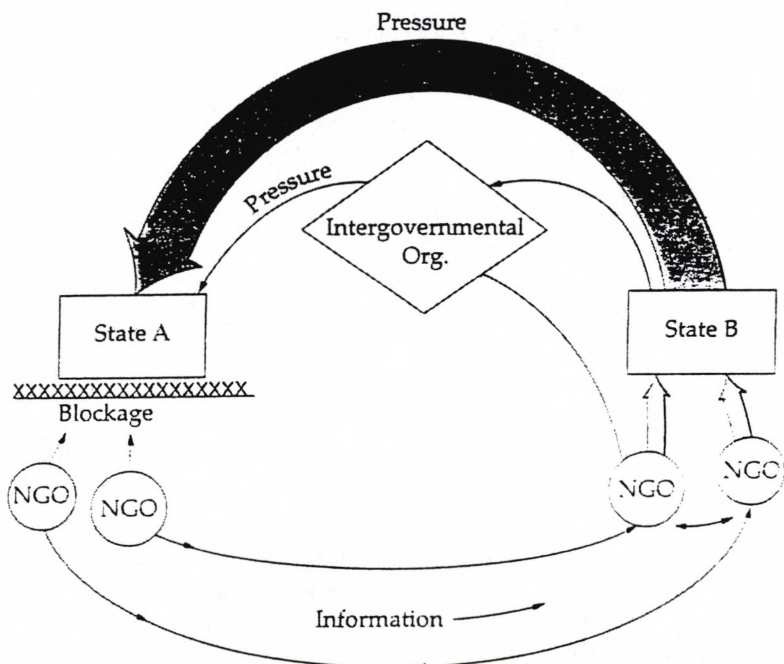

Figure 2 Boomerang pattern. State A blocks redress to organizations within it: they activate network, whose members pressure their own states and (if relevant) a third-party organization, which in turn pressure State A. SOURCE: Keck, Margaret and Kathryn Sikkink, 1998. Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in Internatioal Politics. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

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At this stage, Keck and Sikkink's justly-celebrated work suggests a number of research problems:

- It is unclear how they see TANs relating to the existing state system. Do these networks' operations depend incidentally – or fundamentally – on the power of the states they come from?[17] The majority of their member groups come from the wealthy states of the North; does the power of these states lie behind the capacity of network activists to persuade other states to accede to the claims of resource-weak allies within them?

- How network activists relate to domestic social movements – often the victims of state oppression? In the short run, when their efforts are successful, their effects are likely to be positive; but what kinds of structures and attitudinal changes to

they leave behind when they disaggregate after the campaign is over? Do local allies retreat into more or less resentful inactivity, or are they empowered to form more powerful opposition to their governments (Keck and Sikkink 1998a)?

- Most of the empirical work on TANS has been oriented to highly normatively-oriented groups; does the same logic of coalition-building and deployment of the power of third party states and/or international institutions occur when the basis of support is material interest?

- Are TANs occasional interlopers in the relations between states and their citizens or are they becoming core links in the formation of transnational social movements among citizens of different states?

- Finally, how do TANs relate to international institutions? In Keck and Sikkink's paradigm, they are intermediate links between activist networks and their allies. But if the activists depend on these institutions, how far beyond their policies can their campaigns to go? If they do not depend on them, what is the major source of their leverage on the states their local allies challenge?

IV. International Institutions and Transnational Contention

Two main approaches divide the study of transnational contention a "global civil society" thesis whose advocates tend to emphasize conflict and an inexorably increasing degree of transnational contention; and an institutionalist perspective whose advocates emphasize both conflict and cooperation and predict a varying degree of transnational activity.

Since the "global civil society" thesis is so well known, it can be rapidly summarized:

- First, in the age of global television, whirring fax machines, and electronic mail, the national political opportunity structures that used to be needed to mount collective action may be giving way to transnational ones

- Second, the national state may be losing its capacity to constrain and structure collective action. In part, this is because of the declining capacity of governments to disguise what is going on abroad from their own citizens. But in part, it is because the integration of the international economy weakens states' capacity to cope with global economic trends

- Third, as the state's capacity to control global economic forces declines, individuals and groups have gained access to new kinds of resources to mount collective action across boundaries. These include travel abroad, contacts with like-minded others across national boundaries, and growing expertise at using transnational communication.

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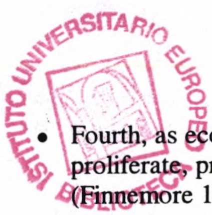
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- Fourth, as economies globalize, cultures universalize, and institutions proliferate, principled ideas are increasingly adopted as international norms (Finnemore 1996) and then become socialized into domestic understandings

This vision of an emerging global civil society producing transnational collective action cannot be faulted as wrong, so much as it is too narrowly derived from "globalization" and insufficiently specified. With respect to the first problem, I have already argued that a good deal of transnational organization preceded the current phase of economic interdependence. But there is a more serious problem: the model proposes no mechanisms for overcoming the obstacles to transnational collective action for ordinary people.

These obstacles are of three types: the weakness or absence of social networks outside people's neighborhoods, towns, cities, social groups and political allegiances; the weakness or absence of transnational collective identities; and the absence of mechanisms to overcome or counter the political opportunities of national polities (Tarrow 1998:ch. 11). For example, in Western Europe, even when the source or target of protest is the European Union, Imig and Tarrow found that over 80 percent of protests studied were directed at intra-national actors or institutions (Imig and Tarrow: 2000 and forthcoming).

While the argument from international institutions is in many ways parallel to the "global civil society thesis, it specifies an increase of transnational contention through the resources, incentives and opportunities of international interaction. As Thomas Risse argues, "the higher the degree of international institutionalization in a given issue-area, the greater the policy impact of transnational actors" (1995). He elaborates the theme in his recent review article:

> Transnational actors are expected to flourish, the more they act in an international environment which is heavily structured by international institutions and structures of governance. International organizations, for example, provide arenas enabling regular interactions between TNA's and state actors. In some cases, they actively encourage (and even finance) INGOs and other transnational coalitions (Risse 2000:27).

Institutionalization can take different forms – from conventions to loosely structured regimes to formal institutions (Keohane 1989; Martin and Simmons 1999); it will vary in degree in different sectors of activity; and it is dynamic – going through phases, in some of which the influence of transnational actors may be welcomed – for example, what Finnemore and Sikkink call a "norm-emergence" phase (1998) – and in some of which agendas are fixed and non-state actors may have little influence. In fact, to the extent that the robustness of transnational non-state actors depends on international institutions, their emergence and durability will vary from sector to sector and may even be reversed as institutions harden or lose their importance.
An institutional approach to transnational contention suggests several mechanisms

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through which domestic activists can find one another, gain legitimation, form collective identities, and go back to their countries empowered with alliances, common programs and new repertoires of collective action. We can identify at least four such mechanisms: *brokerage, certification, modeling,* and *institutional appropriation.* These terms need some elementary definition:

- By *brokerage* I mean making connections between otherwise unconnected domestic actors in a way that produces at least a temporary political identity that did not exist before

- by *certification,* I mean the recognition of the identities and legitimate public activity of either new actors or actors new to a particular cite of activity

- by *modeling*, I mean the adoption of norms, forms of collective action or organization in one venue that have been demonstrated in another

- by *institutional appropriation*, I mean the use of an institution's resources or reputation to serve the purposes of affiliated groups.

No single international institution is going to provide the mechanisms to facilitate all of these steps (indeed, most of them fall well short of that threshold). But the list provided above can perhaps help scholars to specify the ways in which non-state actors with weak resources and opportunities in their own societies can develop transnational ties that can be "boomeranged" on behalf of their own claims.

V. Conclusions

Though the bulk of resistance against external challengers takes the form of social actors protesting domestically, this does not automatically create the networks, identities or policy changes that are likely to produce a transnational civil society. Nor do domestic actors access the international system when they frame their grievances in global terms. This is why I believe an institutional model provides more analytical leverage than the more dramatic "global civil society" approach. International institutions serve as a kind of "coral reef' –helping to forge horizontal links among activists with similar claims across boundaries. action.[18]

International institutions are particularly important as targets and fulcra for contentious politics. This leads to the paradox that international institutions – created by states, and usually by powerful ones – can be the arenas in which transnational contention is most likely to form. I do not maintain that states create international institutions in order to encourage contention; states are more likely to *delegate* than to fuse sovereignty, (Moravcsik 1998). But because international institutions gain autonomy as they mediate among the interests of competing states, they can provide

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political opportunities for weak domestic social actors, encouraging their connections with others like themselves, and offering resources that can be used in intra-national and transnational conflict. We see a highly-developed version of this process in the case of the European Commission, which actively subsidizes citizen lobbies in Brussels and – on some occasions – encourages them to lobby their own governments and create legitimacy for European projects (Imig and Tarrow eds., forthcoming).

These reflections are by no means all supported by empirical evidence and are just as speculative as the quotation from Tilly with which I began this review. But they suggest some promising areas for research – some of which are already underway:

- what kind of domestic actors – and around which kinds of issues – are most likely to form long-lasting non-elite networks across borders with others like themselves? Much of the work reviewed in this article regards single-group or single-issue studies led by elite activist networks; we have little evidence that domestic social activists create or maintain transnational social movements in the absence of these networks

- what are the long-term effects of the links between INGOs and transnational activist networks and their resource-poor domestic allies? To substitute for domestic activism? Detach ambitious activists from domestic organizing and turn them into cosmopolitians? Or empower domestic movements? This requires the collection of qualititative time-series data on INGO campaigns and their longterm results

- what is the role of states – and particularly hegemonic states – in advancing or impeding transnational alliances? While it seems clear that states do not automatically lose strength as transnational networks grow, no one has yet taken up Huntington's bold challenge of three decades ago that states – and especially the United States – profit from and provide models for transnational organizations

- finally, can we systematize the dynamic relations between transnational organizations and international institutions? Boli and Thomas have shown the growth rates of these two sets of collectivities are parallel over time (Boli and Thomas 1998:28-30). But can we demonstrate that this growth over time is interactive or are these two independent results of international rationalization?

A final provocative thought: if the processes of "internationalization" described above are robust, then a global civil society will not come about as the result of domestic groups moving outward from their societies and replacing government with governance; but from the reflux of their activities around state-created international institutions back on domestic contention, institutions, and identities. And if that is the

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case, then the distinction between international relations and domestic politics will really need to be challenged!

Sidney Tarrow
Cornell University and
European University Institute

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Endnotes

[1] A parallel effort to this one will be found in Risse 2000.
[2] But they did not invent it: as they acknowledge in the preface to *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (1971), they were in debt to Raymond Aron, Philip Jessop, Karl Kaiser, Horst Menderhause, James Rosenau, and Stanley Hoffmann (p. vii). Their subsequent work was partly in debt to their debate with Samuel Huntington, who took a different – and broader – view of transnational relations (1973).
[3] They write; "By far the most important of these [transnational] organizations is the multinational business enterprise." See, in particular, the contributions to their book by [3] But they did not invent it: as they acknowledge in the preface to *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (1971), they were in debt to Raymond Aron, Philip Jessop, Karl Kaiser, Horst Menderhause, James Rosenau, and Stanley Hoffmann (p. vii). Their subsequent work was partly in debt to their debate with Samuel Huntington, who took a different – and broader – view of transnational relations (1973).
[4] This lacuna is somewhat abstractly filled in their 1973 article in which Keohane and Nye describe "potential governmental intervention in predominantly nongovernmental transactional systems" (p. 55).
[5] For a review and some stimulating hypotheses, see Finnemore and Sikkink 1998 and the soources they describe. Also see Finnemore 1996, Katzenstein 1996, Klotz 1995, Price 1997 and Thomas, forthcoming.
[6] A particular version of the problem: the construction of "European" identities. Despite reams of Eurobarometer surveys, we still have little idea of whether Europeans identify with the European Union at the cost of embedded identities or as a detached identity that is perfectly compatible with them.
[7] For a bibliography on which this section is based, see Tarrow and Acostavalle 1999.
[8] The Chiapas rebellion did gain international support within the region but only after the rebels had gained enough international visibility that the Mexican government could not afford to be seen keeping foreign activists out.
[9] For an analysis of the analogies and differences between social movements and activist networks see Keck and Sikkink 1998a and Tarrow 1998:ch. 11).
[10] Smith – writing with Sikkink – seems aware of the problem when she observes that: researchers have shown significant growth in non-governmental organizations (INGOs), but many of these organizations are not social movements or networks. See Sikkink and Smith, forthcoming, and compare to Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco 1997.
[11] This definition was developed in the course of a joint project by Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention,* forthcoming.
[12] For the development and application of this definition, see Tilly 1995, Tarrow 1998, and McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly forthcoming.
[13] Huntington (1973), Keck and Sikkink (1998), and Risse, Ropp and Sikkink (2000) use the term but fail to define it. Rucht points out that "this label is mostly used to denote all categories of non-governmental actors, irrespective of their forms, formal status or aims" (1999:206-7). For Wapner, they are "best understood as transnational pressure groups which gain political relevance to the degree that they influence state action" (1996:10). Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco are more specific; for them, INGOs "include a wide variety of organizations with members from several countries. Members are typically national associations but often also include individuals. They are generally organized to provide services and advance the interests of their members" (1997:12). Smith later (1999) added a useful addendum to this definition: "autonomy": INGOs "pursue purposes independent of national

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governments and intergovernmental agencies" (1999:591).
[14] For example, non-governmental religious organizations active in the human rights or development fields are not classified as "religious" in the UIA data, making it difficult to trace the role of these important organizations' international activities. I am grateful to Evelyn Bush for this observation.
[15] See the preceding note for one kind of example. In general, the problem with the UIA data is the absence of a systematic check on the quality and completeness of the data furnished by the international organizations themselves and the inferences about identity construction that are mainly drawn from evidence about numerical growth in organizations and activists.
[16] The "boomerang model" has been taken up and given a temporal dimension in a joint work by Sikkink and Thomas Risse in Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, eds. (1999:19-20).
[17] In the legend of the "boomerang pattern", they write: State A blocks redress to organizations within it; they activate network, whose members pressure their own states and (if relevant) a third-party organization, which in turn pressure State A. (1998: 13).
[18] I am grateful to my colleague Ron Jepperson in the European Forum for suggesting this metaphor.

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