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**Article (Accepted version)  
(Refereed)**

**Original citation:**

Josselin, Daphné (2007) From transnational protest to domestic political opportunities: insights from the debt cancellation campaign. *Social movement studies*, 6 (1). pp. 21-38.

DOI: [10.1080/14742830701251252](https://doi.org/10.1080/14742830701251252)

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Available in LSE Research Online: December 2008

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# FROM TRANSNATIONAL PROTEST TO DOMESTIC POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES: INSIGHTS FROM THE DEBT CANCELLATION CAMPAIGN<sup>i</sup>

Daphne Josselin

*[Social Movement Studies, forthcoming]*

Of the transnational advocacy campaigns so far leveled at international financial institutions and practices, that to reduce the debt owed to creditor country governments and multilateral financial institutions has often been presented as the most successful. Building on the work of Eurodad and others, from 1997 onwards activists led by Jubilee 2000 UK rallied around the goal of a one-time cancellation of the 'unpayable' debts of the world's poorest countries by the end of the year 2000. The campaign soon became global, with the creation of some 57 national Jubilee 2000 networks. By the time it folded, at the end of 2000, over 24 million signatures had been gathered in support of debt cancellation. While the goal of complete debt cancellation remained elusive, the anti-debt network could be credited with raising public awareness around the issue and placing it on the agenda of creditor governments and international financial institutions (Donnelly 2002; Fogarty 2003).<sup>ii</sup>

Yet the overall success of the debt cancellation campaign masked significant national differences, even between neighboring countries: while 2,960,262 persons signed the Jubilee 2000 petition in the UK, only 1,200,381 did so in Germany, and 521,319 in France (respectively 4.97, 1.45 and 0.87 percent of the national population). The organization and timing of the campaigns also differed: two years after its London creation in October 1997, the Jubilee 2000 Coalition had sprouted similar organizations in five of the G7 members; Germany was an early joiner, France among the two exceptions.<sup>iii</sup> Why did debt cancellation achieve such

prominence in the UK and, albeit to a lesser extent, Germany, while remaining a marginal issue in French associational and political circles? This is what this paper investigates, in the process drawing a picture of transnational activism in which the national is given pride of place.

## **FROM TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM TO DOMESTIC POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES**

In recent years, a rapidly expanding literature has focused on the emergence of cross-border activism, seen as a direct or indirect response to globalization (e.g. Keck and Sikkink 1998; O'Brien, Goetz, Scholte and Williams 2000; Fiorini 2000; Khagram 2002; Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor 2005; della Porta and Tarrow 2005). However it is only recently that attention has turned to the mechanisms whereby macro structures and changes might translate into actual mobilization (see notably Ancelovici 2002; Giugni 2002; Tarrow 2002; Johnson and McCarthy 2005; Kolb 2005). These mechanisms matter: while growing transnational linkages may create the objective reasons for and conditions of a rise in transnational activism, they cannot on their own explain why cross-border mobilization actually takes place. As social movement theorists remind us, three obstacles must be contended with: '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 compete with the political opportunities of national polities' (Tarrow 2001, 14). Focusing on global civil society or transnational advocacy networks can further obscure the fact that oftentimes the message and tactics being

spread across borders developed within a particular domestic setting, and might not thrive on foreign soil. To better grasp the extent and dynamics of cross-national activism, one must therefore take a closer look at the micro sociological mechanisms affecting the behavior of societal and political actors at the domestic level. A comparative approach can yield valuable insights.

Following a triptych well established among students of societal mobilization, work on the cross-national diffusion of protest has typically underlined three types of conditions: the existence of mobilizing structures; cultural proximity or similarity; and favorable political opportunities (Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak and Giugni 1995, 188-91; Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco 1997; Tarrow 1998). It is the latter that is privileged here. The notion of 'political opportunity structure' (POS) can be defined as those 'dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success and failure' (Tarrow 1998: 85). In their more static form, political opportunity structures generally refer to different levels of institutional access to policy makers, which alter the likelihood of protest (e.g. Kitschelt 1986). However political opportunity structures can also be determined by changing political environments, in which elected officials and political oppositions can both mediate the impact of transnational activism. In some cases, new political opportunities can even be seized upon by challengers and used to pry open institutional barriers. Unstable political alignments, divided elites, influential allies and support groups all become critical aspects of political opportunity (Tarrow 1998: 78-80). Last, political opportunity structures possess a cultural dimension since political opportunity may depend less on objective facts than on actors' perceptions that chances of success are opening up (Gamson and Meyer

1996; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001).

While acknowledging that institutional access and shifting political environments may exert a significant impact on domestic mobilizations, it is this latter dimension that we wish to explore here from two different angles, both comparatively understudied in the context of global activism. The first concerns the effects of emulation and competition between different groups of domestic activists, as these can both expand and limit perceived political opportunities. On the one hand, past or concomitant social movement activity may exert a 'structural' impact on existing political opportunity structures by encouraging mobilization through a demonstration effect (Kitschelt 1986: 62). In the case of past movements, there may even be organizational remnants in the domestic political environment, 'holdovers' that will provide the necessary social underpinning for future action (Almeida 2003: 350). On the other hand, scholars working at the border between POS and cultural approaches to mobilization have argued that the success of a particular movement will depend on the congruence of its mobilizing message with that of the 'master frame' shaping the whole cycle of protest within a given polity (Snow and Benford 1992; Diani 1996). By helping to define which issues and repertoires have the greatest mobilization potential in the national context, past or concomitant movements may thus enhance or reduce activists' ability to take advantage of perceived changes in the political opportunity structure, such as greater institutional access, divided elites or international openness. Not only can 'objective' opportunities be missed; the scope for constructing, by rhetorical means, new political opportunities may also be reduced.

In the case of transnational protests, perceived political opportunities are also

bound to be affected by multilevel decision-making and activism. In one of few attempts to factor in the interactions between international and domestic governance, Kathryn Sikkink looks at international opportunity structures, i.e. 'the degree of openness of international institutions to the participation of transnational NGOs, networks and coalitions' (Sikkink 2005: 156). Combining international openness with national openness helps account for differentiated patterns of activism around transnational issues. For instance, closure in both political arenas is likely to discourage mobilization; however a combination of international closure and domestic openness should result in 'defensive transnationalization'. This time, activists will engage in a broad repertoire of political activities at the domestic level, and try through their impact on domestic governments to gain more access to international institutions. By the same token, David Meyer suggests looking at how domestic political opportunity structures are 'nested' within their larger international environment, and how changes in the international context, or perceptions thereof, can alter the opportunities for activists within domestic settings (Meyer 2003).

International institutions and regimes provide not only targets but, most significantly, arenas for social movement activity. Heads of state may successfully take advantage of international gatherings to press a new agenda, giving a previously remote policy area increased visibility and opening up new opportunities (or perceptions thereof) at the domestic level. Cross-border protests may provide focal points for activists, officials and the media, fostering new interorganizational ties and giving added publicity, even legitimacy to national actors (Kolb 2005). The way domestic political opportunities interact with international access and transnational events cannot be overlooked.

In the end, four aspects of domestic political opportunity structures are therefore explored here: domestic institutional access; changing political environment; impact of past or concomitant movement activity; interactions with international opportunities. By establishing how well these account for differences in the scope, timing and dynamics of the 1990s campaign for the cancellation of poor country debt in our three countries, we hope to better assess their relative contribution to our understanding of cross-border protests. The next section takes a closer look at the three domestic campaigns. In a fourth section, explanations relating to the specific political settings in which the campaigns took place are suggested. A fifth section concludes.

## **THE DEBT CANCELLATION CAMPAIGN: NATIONAL INSIGHTS**

Before presenting the three domestic campaigns, a few words on the transnational dimension of the anti-debt protest are in order. As mentioned in the introduction, the Jubilee 2000 campaign rapidly established itself as the epitome of successful cross-border campaigns in the area of international finance. The coalitions that were fostered in well over fifty countries encompassed churches, anti-poverty groups, trade unions and a myriad of other organizations, many of which had not worked on debt issues before. Campaigners targeted a network of creditor countries and international financial institutions previously thought to be largely impervious to external influence, yet managed to extract commitments and actual (if sometimes limited) policy changes. In accounting for this overall success, ‘global’ elements have often been emphasized: the role of the internet in enabling collaboration within and across

countries; that of the news media in spreading awareness and achieving maximum leverage from celebrity involvement; the focus on G7 Summits and IMF/World Bank annual meetings. Yet another, equally striking ingredient of the campaign was the autonomy left to national coalitions, each of which created its own decision-making structure, and to member organizations within. Tensions were rife: between South and North, reformists and radicals, even at times between the UK coalition and others (notably the US) over perceived efforts to assert global leadership around the campaign (see in particular Donnelly 2000). But crucially (perhaps inevitably) the transnational network underpinning the protest remained highly decentralized, functioning as a coalition of autonomous campaigns. It is this national dimension that we want to capture here, by looking at patterns of mobilization in three creditor countries: Britain, Germany and France.

### **Britain: the irrepressible Jubilee 2000 Coalition**

The Jubilee 2000 Coalition grew out of an alliance of aid agencies, the Debt Crisis Network (DCN), led by the New Economics Foundation, Christian Aid and the World Development Movement, which had been working on the debt issue since the Mexican debt crisis of 1982 (Pettifor 1998; Dent 1999). While many secular organizations eventually joined the movement, including trade unions, much of the initial impetus and financial backing behind the initiative came from Christian agencies: Christian Aid, CAFOD and Tearfund, all members of Eurodad.<sup>iv</sup> The very name of the campaign linked the Biblical concept of Jubilee with the approaching Millennium. A small office was set up in 1996, and in October 1997, the Jubilee 2000



Coalition, counting around 70 members, was launched in the Grand Committee room of the House of Commons.

The coalition soon proved its reach, with the organization of a 70,000 strong 'human chain' during the May 1998 Birmingham Summit, following which Prime Minister Tony Blair paid 'tribute to the Jubilee 2000 Campaign and its dignified breaking-the-chain demonstration' in a speech to the House of Commons. In February 1999, the intervention of U2 singer Bono and boxing champion Muhammad Ali at the Brit Awards gave the campaign a new publicity boost: not only did all major British papers give the event extensive coverage, the Express officially endorsed the campaign. In June, as the Cologne Summit was being convened, more initiatives followed with the screening on prime time television of Comic Relief's anti-debt show and the organization of a new human chain of over 30,000 people along the banks of the Thames, which once again received significant media coverage.

Throughout, Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown's ringing endorsements of the anti-debt campaign provided further visibility. In February 1999, an article co-written with International Development Secretary Clare Short pressed for urgent action and announced Britain had proposed to the G7 finance ministers 'new and more challenging targets for wiping out more debt' (*The Guardian*, 22 February 1999). On 7 March 1999, addressing a Jubilee 2000 public meeting in St Paul's Cathedral, the Chancellor described poor country debt as 'the greatest single cause of poverty and injustice across the earth and potentially one of the greatest threats to peace', as well as 'the great moral issue of this day and this decade', adding 'we must cut the debt and do so now', and 'I say to the churches and to all who support Jubilee 2000 - as I do - we thank you'. In December, the Chancellor announced that Britain

would cancel 100 percent of debts owed to it by 26 countries by the end of 2000. By then, a thriving Jubilee 2000 Group had also developed among MPs of all political persuasions (Dent 1999: 35).

With member organizations now numbering over 160, campaigners' efforts continued throughout the year 2000, with events such as 'Red letter day on Third World Debt', which saw 8000 letters being delivered to 10 Downing Street and G7 embassies on 3 June; the launch of a widespread e-mail action by stars and campaigners at the end of June; and demonstrations by Christian Aid activists wearing Tony Blair masks at the end of July. The extensive media coverage paid off: in June 2000, a CAFOD survey by MORI showed that 50 percent of respondents recognized the name 'Jubilee 2000'. By the end of the year, the British public had contributed 2,960,262 signatures to the Jubilee 2000 Petition.

All the while the British government reaffirmed its commitment: in July, Gordon Brown proposed a 'debt relief for peace' initiative. In September a meeting was organized between campaigners, IMF Managing Director Horst Köhler and the British government. On 2 December, the Chancellor announced that Britain would stop taking debt repayments from the 41 poorest countries.

As the Jubilee 2000 UK coalition reached its Millennium deadline, on 2 December 2000, new initiatives were announced. Director Ann Pettifor would head Jubilee+, a support unit for campaigns on international debt and finance based at the New Economics Foundation. Deputy Director Adrian Lovett would lead the Drop the Debt campaign to target the 2001 Genoa Summit. UK-based organizations including CAFOD, Christian Aid and Tearfund would continue to coordinate policy and activity on debt cancellation as part of a Debt Network. In March 2001, Jubilee Debt

Campaign (JDC) became the successor to Jubilee 2000 UK and Drop the Debt.

Comprising a similarly broad range of around 130 partner organizations, it has focused strongly on the UK government and parliament.

Yet to some extent Jubilee 2000 UK was victim of its own success. By 2003, the organization of a World Debt Day to commemorate the 1998 Birmingham Summit only attracted some 2000 campaigners, with media coverage only by the Guardian; and while Sir Bob Geldof was happy to attend, Gordon Brown addressed the gathering by pre-recorded video. The political impetus was not altogether lost however, as showed by the Chancellor's announcement in September 2004 that Britain would pay off 10 per cent of the money owed by 32 of the world's poorest countries to the World Bank and the African Development Bank (*The Guardian*, 24 September 2004).

### **Germany: up and down**

The German arm of the Jubilee 2000 campaign, Erlassjahr 2000, was set up in September 1997. During the year 1998, membership increased very sharply, from the original 47 organizations to over 700. These were mostly church-related grassroots bodies, though a growing number of nationwide organizations, both religious and secular, joined the campaign. Especially significant was the backing of Misereor, the German Catholic bishops' organization for development cooperation and main financial support of the campaign, and of WEED (World economy, Ecology and Development), whose annual debt report (published since 1994) proved a central instrument for raising awareness among the German public. February 1998 saw the

first of several postcard campaigns, with thousands of postcards sent to Bonn on the 45th anniversary of the cancellation of Germany's wartime debts. In May, German activists took part in the British human chain (Pettifor 1998: 116).

Soon after his election in October 1998, SPD Chancellor Gerhard Schröder declared in the Bundestag that the German government would present an initiative on debt at the Cologne Summit, thus breaking with a longstanding German opposition to debt cancellation. New Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Heidemarie Wiecezoreck-Zeul (also known as 'Rote Heidi' for her left wing positions within the SPD) further emphasized that debt cancellation had become a high priority issue for the German government (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, 4 December 1998). On 27 January 1999, in a personal article written in the Financial Times, Chancellor Schröder declared that 'it is clear that without a radical debt reduction in many of the poorest countries there is no hope of bringing about a fresh start', and proposed new initiatives in that direction, including the complete cancellation of debts from ODA for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC's). The initiative was hailed by Jubilee 2000 supporters as 'a fantastic success [...] Germany are no longer the bad guys – and no other country can use them as an excuse for inaction' (Adrian Lovett of Jubilee 2000, *The Guardian*, 22 January 1999). Erlassjahr 2000 announced it would organize its own human chain on the occasion of the forthcoming Cologne Summit

By May 1999, Erlassjahr 2000's membership had climbed to 1600 organizations. On 12 June 1999, an information vigil was organized in Frankfurt, and on 19 June, the promised human chain was formed in Cologne, with 35,000 participants. That same day, also the occasion of the protestant church day, a 15,000 strong demonstration took place in Stuttgart. The Jubilee 2000 petition was handed

over to Chancellor Schröder, in the presence of the Honduran Bishop Oscar Rodriguez (patron of Erlassjahr 2000) and the ubiquitous Bono. In June, Ms Wiczoreck-Zeul expressed the federal government's gratefulness for Erlassjahr 2000's support around the debt initiative (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 June 1999). A few months later, Uschi Eid, parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), insisted once again that the campaign had been instrumental to the launch of the Chancellor's debt initiative (*Die Tageszeitung*, 27 November 1999).

In December 1999, Erlassjahr 2000's membership peaked at almost 2000 organizations. Yet disappointment with the federal government was becoming manifest, Jürgen Kaiser, the political coordinator of the campaign (and a member of Eurodad's executive board) deploring the lack of commitment demonstrated by the government after the promising January start (press release, 31 December 1999). Still intent on keeping the issue alive, in the run-up to the Okinawa Summit Erlassjahr 2000 began an information campaign on the debt issue. In May 2000, on the occasion of the visit of the Japanese Prime Minister, another information vigil was organized in front of the Bunzelkanzleramt; a couple of months later the initiative was repeated, this time in front of the Kaiser-Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche in Berlin. Yet at Okinawa it became clear that Chancellor Schröder was reluctant to support more debt cancellation, declaring 'It does not make sense to support those who do not know what to do with our help' (*Handelsblatt*, 24 July 2000). This hardening of the German official position was confirmed in later years.<sup>v</sup> This the activists soon criticized vigorously, as they did Germany's slow compliance with the Cologne resolutions (Actionaid, Eurodad and Oxfam 2005). Still, the campaign continued: during the

October 2000 IMF-World Bank meeting in Prague, Erlassjahr 2000 co-organized the demonstration and representatives handed several thousand postcards to Mr Diller, State Secretary of the German Finance Ministry.

In July 2001, Erlassjahr 2000 became Erlassjahr.de. Tellingly, only 400 of Erlassjahr 2000' organizations initially extended their membership to the new alliance. By March 2002 the figure had risen to 700, still a far cry from the Erlassjahr 2000's peak membership of December 1999. As for media coverage, a survey of the number of articles published on different German social movement organizations in the Tageszeitung between January 2000 and December 2002 concluded that reporting on Erlassjahr 2000 had been so infrequent it had to be grouped with that on radical activists in the category 'others' (Kolb 2005: 113). Efforts continued however, with a new postcard campaign targeted at Finance Minister Hans Eichel and Chair of the Bundestag's Finance Committee Christine Scheel in June 2002. Over 20,000 signatures were also collected on a petition in favor of a new, more transparent debt relief process. In May 2003, on the occasion of the ecumenical church day in Berlin, Erlassjahr.de joined forces with the Aktionbündnis gegen AIDS (action alliance against aid) to organize a 5,000 strong demonstration on the debt issue. By September, membership had risen again to 1000. The petition for a fairer debt process continued to circulate into 2004, notably through a two weeks 'Fairness Tour' across Germany, collecting 150,000 signatures, and was finally handed to Heidemarie Wieczoreck-Zeul in May 2004.

### **France: a belated and limited mobilization**

Having failed to show up at Birmingham in May 1998, one observer pointing to their conspicuous under-representation (Pettifor 1998: 116), French activists began circulating the Jubilee 2000 Petition in November 1998, via the campaign '*Pour l'an 2000: annulons la dette*' organised by the Comité d'action catholique contre la faim et pour le développement (CCFD). Between February and June 1999, Agir Ici, AITEC and the CRID further made the campaign the first one of their newly created network, '*Pour une réforme des institutions financières*' (IFI). By mid-1999, around 60 NGOs had been mobilized, many of them religious, leading a British observer to conclude 'Even in Camdessus's France, the new Jubilee 2000 organization appears to be getting off the ground' (Peters 1999: 188). Falling in line with fellow British and German leaders, Socialist Finance Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn declared the time had come 'to abandon the politics of small steps' in the creditor response to the debt crisis and suggested countries eligible under the HIPC initiative should pay no interest on their aid debts for a generation. When on 14 June 1999, a few days before the Cologne Summit, Dominique Strauss-Kahn and Cooperation Minister Charles Josselin received representatives from the associations involved, around 520,000 signatures had been collected. Campaign organizers further claimed to be engaged in a dialogue with the French government over the issue, and notably over the use of the funds to be freed by debt alleviation (*Les Nouvelles de la Dette*, 7 September 1999).

However the aftermath of the Cologne Summit marked a low point for anti-debt campaigners. The rise of a new campaign on reforming international financial institutions on the agenda of the IFI network meant the issue became less prominent. Few signatures were added to the still circulating Jubilee 2000 petition - the final count in 2000 would show 521,319 French signatures. Significantly, French officials

refused to set up follow up meetings despite written solicitations (*Les Nouvelles de la Dette*, 19 December 1999).

The coalition then found a new impetus. Having first declared its interest in the Jubilee 2000 campaign during its June 1999 *Journées Mondiales*, high-profile movement ATTAC began mentioning debt cancellation among its rapidly multiplying objectives. From January 2000 trade unions CFDT, CFTC and CGT also became involved in the campaign. New events followed. On 12 April 2000, the organization of the first anti-debt demonstration took place in Paris, targeting the Finance Ministry-hosted Paris Club.<sup>vi</sup> Coordinated by the CCFD, but with the active involvement of ATTAC, it reportedly gathered ‘hundreds’ of protesters, admittedly a meager result compared with the scale of similar initiatives across the Channel but for some observers a ‘symbolic first’, and one that saw a delegation of campaigners being received by Paris Club Vice-President Philippe de Fontaine-Vive. That same month, France agreed to cancel 100 percent of the public debt owed by the 12 countries of the zone franc eligible under the HIPC initiative. In June, to celebrate the first anniversary of the Cologne Summit, prefectures throughout France were targeted by campaigners (the initiative was repeated in 2001 and 2002).

Emulating similar developments abroad, a new 'platform', Dette & Développement, was set up in March 2001. Still coordinated by the CCFD, it counted among its 26 members religious organizations and trade unions, alongside NGOs and activist movements. Also involved in the platform was the emerging CADTM-France, signaling that twelve years after the creation of the radical, Brussels-based anti-debt network, France was finally ‘ripe’ for action.<sup>vii</sup>

In July and August 2001, in a series of open letters, President of ATTAC



Bernard Cassen challenged presidential candidates Lionel Jospin and Jacques Chirac to take position on the Tobin tax and debt cancellation. In October, a BVA poll commissioned by the CCFD suggested that 59 percent of the French public believed developed countries did not make enough efforts in the area of debt relief, with support for additional measures especially strong among the Left, the Greens and the center-right UDF. By January 2002, party leaders expressing support for the cancellation of third world debt ranged from Front National Jean-Marie Le Pen to Lutte Ouvrière's Arlette Laguiller through to UDF François Bayrou and PS François Hollande.

Efforts to promote debt relief continued beyond the 2002 elections and the arrival of a right-wing majority. In June 2002, ATTAC joined others within Dette & Développement to ask the government once again to support debt cancellation within the G8; on 19 June, another protest was organized in Paris. In the run up to the June 2003 Evian-Les-Bains Summit, ATTAC launched a new campaign around the sale of rap CD '*ATTAC ta dette*', in a clear effort to mobilize young publics. So did Dette & Développement with the release, in late January 2003, of world music CD 'Drop the Debt'. As the Summit itself was taking place, a European march against debt was organized. Debt cancellation thus continued to 'surf' the *altermondialiste* wave, never the key issue but a significant background leitmotiv nonetheless.

## **EXPLAINING THE DIFFERENCES**

When comparing the British, German and French campaigns in favor of debt

cancellation, several things stand out. First, the relatively modest scope of French efforts compared to British and German ones in terms of both public and media endorsement. The Jubilee 2000 Petition attracted slightly over half a million signatures in France, versus nearly one and half million in Germany and three millions in the UK; the few demonstrations organized by Dette & Développement involved a few hundreds of protesters at best, and generated limited media interest, as did the rest of the campaign. In stark contrast, the British campaign was actively endorsed by rock stars and sporting legends, broadcast on prime time TV and well covered in the press. And while the German campaign lacked the scope and glamour of the British one, it got extensive media coverage both before and after the Cologne Summit.

A second difference lies in the timing of the mobilization of both societal and political actors around the issue. Whereas the Jubilee UK coalition was already in full swing by 1998, most visibly around the Birmingham Summit, with *Erlassjahr 2000* following closely behind, the French campaign remained relatively low key until 1999; the first protest only took place in April 2000, a few months from the announced Millennium deadline. By the same token, the Jubilee 2000 campaign was widely endorsed by the British political establishment almost from its inception. German politicians also signaled an early U-turn in the run-up to Cologne, when the SPD leadership came up in favor of the campaign. By contrast, few French political figures mentioned the debt issue before 2001.

Finally, the dynamics of the three campaigns differ: in Britain, mobilization appeared sustained from the Birmingham Summit of May 1998 right on to the Millennium deadline. It is only after 2001 that interest in the issue began to wane, and

even then the successor movement to Jubilee 2000 UK retained a broad membership. In Germany, decline set in earlier, in 2000; by the time Erlassjahr 2000 became Erlassjahr.de in July 2001, membership had already dropped, along with public interest. In France, mobilization is best described as intermittent, with feeble 'peaks' in the run up to Cologne, the Spring of 2000, the Autumn of 2001 and the run-up to the 2003 Evian-Les-Bains Summit. In trying to account for these features of the three anti-debt campaigns, one can return to the four dimensions of domestic political opportunity structures already underlined.

### **Institutional access**

Among the differences often pointed out in the comparative politics literature on the three countries, those relating to institutional access, and especially the way authorities have traditionally dealt with challengers, figure quite prominently. In Britain, inclusive strategies have generally prevailed, albeit of an informal nature. In Germany, despite an overall exclusive strategy challengers could count on some formal access, an important element behind the success of the new social movements. In France however, 'selective exclusion' has been the rule, the state only settling for substantive concessions if the social movement's demands happened to correspond to the political goals of the governing coalition. This, according to social movement theorists, generally discouraged broad mobilization (Kriesi et al. 1995: 36).

Responses to anti-debt coalitions seemed to fit these general patterns. Contacts between British debt campaigners and institutional/political actors were sustained from an early stage. As the campaign unfolded, co-founder of Jubilee 2000 Martin

Dent wrote that 'A great deal of dialogue is taking place with MPs and MEPs, with the Treasury, with the Department for International Development (DFID)', adding: 'It is impressive to see how MPs of different parties who disagree on many other issues combine in this great cause' (Dent 1999: 35). Christian Aid and CAFOD concurred, later claiming regular contact with DFID on the issue. Contacts were further formalized when, following the White Paper on International Development of November 1997, the 1998 Development Policy Forum was set up to promote more effective consultation on development issues. As could be expected, the biggest single group of participants came from development NGOs and debt relief was one of the main issues debated.

Contacts also existed between the federal government and the members of *Erlassjahr 2000*, thanks in no small part to the major and long-standing role played by civil society groups in development assistance. In the late 1990s, German development NGOs received 6 percent of Official Development Assistance (ODA), compared with 3 percent in Britain and under one percent in France. Christian organizations *Kindernothilfe*, *World Vision Germany* and *Misereor* were key beneficiaries.<sup>viii</sup> Informal ties were also established: in February 1998, Dr Erhard Eppler, former Minister for Economic Cooperation, became a patron of the campaign; and in the run up to the 1998 Birmingham Summit, *Erlassjahr* representatives met with Dr Jürgen Stark, a senior official in the Ministry of Finance.

By contrast, until the early 2000s, institutional access for French debt campaigners remained limited. The two lead actors on debt relief were the *Elysée* (for general impetus) and the *Direction du Trésor* of the Finance Ministry, host to the Paris Club and responsible for the bulk of debt treatment operations through the special

Treasury accounts. Neither seemed particularly keen to consult with civil society representatives on the issue, despite a few encouraging signs in the run up to the Cologne Summit. Things then appeared to change. In April 2000, even as the first protest was being organized in the streets of Paris, a working group on debt relief and development involving debt relief campaigners alongside the Trésor was established within the Commission Coopération Développement of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. In January 2002, an *Observatoire de la participation de la France au processus d'allègement de la dette des pays pauvres* was set up by the Haut Conseil de la Coopération Internationale (HCCI) and Dette & Développement to monitor the implementation of bilateral and multilateral debt relief initiatives. The initiative was short-lived however, the *Observatoire* disappearing a mere few months after its creation under the new Raffarin government.

### **Changing political environment**

Asked to comment on the (comparatively) poor success of the campaign on French soil, Jubilee ambassador extraordinaire Bono simply concluded that 'in France the debt issue receives limited media coverage because France has much to lose.' (*Libération*, 9 October 2000). By 1999, the 41 HIPC candidates owed France \$11.5bn at face value, versus \$4.9bn for Germany and \$2.4bn for Britain.<sup>ix</sup> Even more significantly – after all, France had nonetheless championed debt alleviation in the recent past (Roberge 1988), French policy-makers faced the necessity to meet the stringent budget criterion set up in the Maastricht Treaty and restated in the Growth and Stability Pact. One could therefore expect French officials to show greater

reluctance to endorse the campaign's goals than either their British or German counterparts.

However the pressure was also strong on Germany: upon coming to power, the new government had pledged to balance the Federal Budget by 2006. With economic slowdown and East-West discrepancies weighting heavily on domestic budgetary items, the relative cost of deeper debt relief was by no means negligible. Moreover, the German government had a longstanding position on debt relief and its proposed financing to defend, the Bundesbank having consistently opposed the sale of IMF gold for that purpose. Yet in Germany, like in Britain, the arrival of leftwing governments gave the campaign a major impetus.

In the UK, the support of Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown proved especially critical. In September 1997, shortly before the creation of the Jubilee 2000 Coalition and, according to activists, partly in response to representations made to him, Chancellor Brown launched the Commonwealth Debt Initiative.<sup>x</sup> He later proved passionate in his support for Jubilee 2000, famously paying tribute to his father, a Church of Scotland minister, as he described third world debt relief as a moral issue (*The Guardian*, 11 May 1999), and repeatedly endorsing the movement's goals. He relentlessly pressed his G7 colleagues on the matter, tabling key proposals in advance of most summits. The Jubilee 2000 campaign thus provides a striking illustration of the role played by state actors as institutional allies in cross-border campaigns, an aspect often overlooked in empirical work (Tarrow 2002: 22).

In its early years, the German 'Red-Green' coalition also showed 'a clear and unprecedented commitment to the issue of development cooperation and poverty reduction' (DAC 2001: 20). The impact of this policy shift was keenly felt by anti-

debt activists, as reported by left-leaning Erlassjahr member WEED: ‘The change of national government in 1998 provided a new context for WEED’s work’ (Eurodad 1999: 27). As the new government of Social Democrats and Greens – the latter longstanding supporters of poor country debt relief – took a more proactive stance in the discussion on debt reduction, Erlassjahr representatives repeatedly emphasized their contribution to shaping the German position, leading to the German debt initiative of January 1999. Conversely, German officials were happy to acknowledge the role played by the coalition in bringing about progress on the debt issue, none more so than SPD BMZ Minister Heidemarie Wieczoreck-Zeul.

By contrast, in France, where a leftwing coalition had come to power in May 1997, political support remained sparse. Socialist Finance Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn rarely referred to the debt issue. When, in March 1999, he finally declared the time had come ‘to abandon the politics of small steps’, his opinions were said not to have full governmental backing (*Libération*, 12 March 2000). Happy to dwell on what was left of his *domaine réservé* under *cohabitation*, President Chirac was one of few to affirm his support for debt cancellation - in Okinawa in July 2000, in Genoa the following year, both times claiming credit for launching the HIPC initiative at Lyon. But debt relief (or development assistance writ large) was not seen as a priority by a Socialist government intent on reigning in budget deficits in the run up to Economic and Monetary Union (Josselin 2004).

It is only in the months preceding the 2002 elections (parliamentary and presidential) that debt cancellation seemed to surface on the mainstream agenda. On 5 October 2001, PS Secretary François Hollande called for the cancellation of the bilateral and multilateral debt of the poorest countries, and of part of that of emerging

market countries, a move widely seen as designed to occupy Jacques Chirac's territory and to offset Lionel Jospin's apparent lack of interest for debt relief and development assistance (Losson and Quinio 2002: 283). By January 2002, candidates of all political hues were claiming support for the cancellation of third world debt.

### **Past and concomitant movement activity**

As explained above, any explanation of British, German and French participation in the global debt campaign must also consider the effect of emulation and competition among social movements. Both actors' perception of political opportunity structures and their ability to frame their message to maximum effect can change as a result of past or parallel protests. Here the British case clearly stands out. UK activism on the debt issue was by no means a novelty: in 1986, an Oxfam UK media campaign had exposed the fact that African debt repayments to Britain exceeded aid monies. The campaign, and subsequent efforts by the Debt Crisis Network, partly accounted for the April 1987 Declaration by Chancellor Lawson that the British government favored the cancellation of two-thirds of the principal of bilateral debt owed by the poorest countries and longer terms at lower interest rates to repay the remaining debts – so-called Trinidad Terms (Donnelly 2002: 173). Significantly, the initiative was 'popular at home, giving Nigel Lawson a rare rave review in *The Guardian*, as well as approval by *The Financial Times*' (Evans 1999: 277). According to OXFAM organizer John Clark, the Debt Crisis Network succeeded in bringing 'the debt crisis into popular culture' (Clark 1987: 26). This might explain why, in the 1990s, the debt issue seemed to resonate especially strongly in the UK: in a 1996 MORI survey, third



world debt already came 7th in the list of Britons' top ten global concerns, versus 9th for Europe as a whole.<sup>xi</sup>

No such levels of awareness and support existed across the Channel. While no data could be found on French public opinion regarding debt relief prior to the Jubilee 2000 campaign, later figures suggest that support among the French public was far from unambiguous: in a BVA survey dated March 2001, asked if they would support full, large, limited or no debt cancellation, 49 percent of respondents responded limited or no cancellation, and only 44 percent full or large cancellation. Aid fatigue may well have contributed to the low response of French publics and politicians: by the end of 2001, France could claim to be carrying the heaviest burden by far among G7 countries, with the planned cancellation of \$10.3bn under HIPC. Data on aid policy (no separate indicators could be found for debt relief), suggest public support may have been even weaker in Germany. In a poll dated July 1999, 68 percent of respondents agreed with the statement: 'Instead of continuously supporting other countries with credits and economic aid, we should invest the money in Germany' (Noelle-Neumann, 2002).

In both Germany and France, attempts were made to 'adapt' the British-inspired frame to the domestic environment, with varying degrees of success. Like their British counterparts, who saw the adoption of the biblical name Jubilee 2000 as a key ingredient in the campaign's rapid success,<sup>xii</sup> German campaigners – many of them grassroots Christian organizations – were happy to emphasize the religious overtones of the campaign, thus appropriating ready-made symbols and solidarities (Smith 1996). However, using what could be qualified as a 'rhetoric of guilt', German anti-debt campaigners also drew repeated parallels between the plight of poor

countries and that of post-war Germany, a country whose debts had been cancelled in 1953. These efforts may well have contributed to shaking public apathy, ensuring a broad and swift mobilization in the early years. However, in a context of budgetary austerity, and with the costs of reunification still painfully apparent, public support proved difficult to sustain. Significantly, the emergence of ATTAC Germany and its shrewd use of the news media in the aftermath of the 2001 Genoa Summit may also have contributed to marginalizing the Erlassjahr campaign (Kolb 2005).

In France, where the cleavage between Church and secularized state has retained unique political salience (Kriesi et al. 1995: 12), activists groups – many of them confessional – avoided references to the term 'Jubilee', opting instead for more neutral formulas such as 'Pour l'an 2000, annulons la dette' and Dette & Développement. Once ATTAC had joined the campaign, in early 2000, efforts were also made to align its values with those of the master frame developed in the aftermath of the 1995 strikes, in which issues of citizen control and market regulation resonated more strongly than questions of equity and redistribution (Ancelevici 2002: 432-6). Debt cancellation was largely framed as a necessary precondition for Southern citizens and governments to reject the diktats of the IMF-G7-commercial banks nexus (ATTAC 2002: 122-8), rather than as a matter of social justice or even growth and development per se. However, debt relief struggled to emerge as a mobilizing cause, and from 2000 on remained best seen as one element of a broadening *altermondialiste* agenda.

### **International opportunities**

Finally, the coincidence between explicit political support, mobilization surges and G7 Summits cannot be ignored. Initially taken aback by the sheer scope of the Birmingham mobilization (Pettifor 1998), Labour leaders soon saw an opportunity to demonstrate (at relatively limited budgetary cost) both commitment to the Third World and international leadership. As a result, the British campaign turned into one of 'offensive transnationalization': operating in an open domestic political opportunity structure, and no doubt further encouraged by the rapid internationalization of the campaign, British activists used a wide range of protest and political pressure activities directed at the home government and, partly through it, at other international actors. Conversely, as stated by a key member of the coalition: 'At crucial moments CAFOD has mobilized sister agencies in the US, Japan, Germany and France in furtherance of the DFID debt position which CAFOD has shared' (DFID 2002: 3; see also Evans 1999: 276). British activists thus utilized their relatively congenial domestic environment to open up new international political opportunities, with significant consequences for other campaigns, not least the German one.

Indeed, the 1999 'U-turn' of the German government provides another, possibly even more striking example of intertwining domestic and international opportunities. Eager to establish his credentials on the world stage after the impressive performance of fellow left winger Tony Blair, aware of the transnational scope and impetus of advocacy efforts, the incoming Chancellor broke with years of governmental opposition to debt cancellation when he declared his intention to present an initiative at his first G7 Summit, and his administration provided critical backing to the adoption of the enhanced HIPC initiative and associated commitments on bilateral debt reduction, including the sale of IMF gold. In explaining Germany's

new stance, the arrival of a 'Red-Green' coalition must therefore be considered in conjunction with an impending international event (the Cologne Summit) as well as a transnational protest wave (that initiated around the Birmingham Summit). Domestic and international political opportunity structures were altered, favoring rapid German mobilization and policy innovation. The window of opportunity thus opened was short lived however: with G7 leadership passing to another (even more debt relief-averse) country, and budgetary constraints reasserting themselves, by the time of the 2000 Okinawa Summit, Chancellor Schröder had reverted to a much cooler posture and Erlassjahr 2000 had begun its decline.

The French campaign also offers interesting insights. In the absence of favorable domestic political opportunities, mobilization surged only modestly and episodically. The run up to Cologne saw some progress, as the Birmingham-born wave of protest and G7 peer pressure interacted to produce new opportunities. Thereafter however, organizers CCFD and (from January 2000) ATTAC struggled to keep the campaign alive. As was showed above, it is only in the months preceding the 2002 elections that debt cancellation seemed to finally surface on the mainstream political agenda. There is little doubt that the impending elections did affect the domestic political opportunity structure: competition between the Socialist Prime Minister and the Gaullist President, both presidential candidates, became acute, and as Lionel Jospin tried to enter the *domaine réservé* of international development, debt relief gained in political salience. Yet we would argue that the 2001 Genoa Summit and World Social Forum, both of which received considerable political endorsement and media coverage in France, provide another piece of the jigsaw. After Genoa, no French political leader could ignore the 'movement for global justice', in which

ATTAC France was a key participant (Fougier 2002). Once again, a shifting political environment at home and major protests abroad interacted, enabling debt relief to garner political support, and debt activists to gain new institutional access. However neither election-induced domestic shifts nor somewhat distant (and, post 9/11, receding) transnational activism sufficed to affect enduringly the structure of domestic political opportunities, as showed by post-2002 developments.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Overall, this survey of the British, German and French anti-debt campaigns supports earlier calls for a better understanding of the domestic embeddedness of transnational activism (Tarrow 1998; Risse 2002; Ancelovici 2002; Tilly 2004). By comparing national campaigns, we can gain a greater feel for domestic political settings and how congenial these are to the birth or spread of transnational protest. Of course, other factors may have played a role in the mobilization processes recounted here.

Organizational resources in particular differed, sometimes significantly.<sup>xiii</sup> Yet we would argue that resources alone cannot explain either the scope or the dynamics of the mobilizations: to take but one illustration, the yearly income of Misereor, the German branch of CIDSE and a key member of *Erlassjahr 2000*, far surpassed that of its British counterpart CAFOD. Still, despite humble beginnings (Pettifor 1998), the British coalition proved more adept at generating dedicated resources, seizing the political initiative and maintaining interest in the debt issue.

Moreover, this work showed how a greater focus on the interplay between

domestic and international opportunities could add to our understanding of the success and limits of cross-border campaigns. Institutional access seemed significantly reduced in the French case compared to the other two, with likely consequences for the ability of French activists to mobilize public and politicians. Yet this relative lack of access could not adequately explain differences in either timing or dynamics. These, shifts in the domestic political environment (new coalitions in the British and German cases, forthcoming elections in the French one) went a long way towards accounting for. At the same time, their impact was best evaluated in the light of changing international opportunities. Not only did G7 Summits provide focal points and meeting places for transnational activists; they also affected domestic political opportunity structures and perceptions thereof, creating short-lived, but in the case of Germany critical, windows of opportunity.

Finally, the importance of past or parallel social movement activity was apparent. Not only did it explain the different rhetoric used in the three countries; it was also essential in accounting for the scope, and even more the sustainability, of mobilization efforts. In the UK past movement activity appeared to have considerably broadened the appeal of (and opportunities open to) the Jubilee 2000 coalition. The successful Oxfam UK campaign established a precedent for both state and non-state actors; it left an institutional imprint in the form of the Debt Crisis Network; and, perhaps most importantly, it enshrined the debt issue in popular culture, defining a 'master frame' Jubilee 2000 would later draw on. More generally, the 1986 campaign and its follow ups opened up new opportunities for debt activists by enhancing expectations of success. In the absence of such legacy the German and the French campaigns struggled to impose their frame onto largely apathetic publics and

officials; they also suffered from the competition of newcomer ATTAC, the message of which either blurred or marginalized their own.

More work is now needed on these two dimensions of political opportunity structures, both to better articulate the mechanisms at play and to test their relevance to other cross-national and cross-campaign comparisons. However, focusing on the articulation between domestic and international political opportunities and on the way pre-existing (or concomitant) movements and frames may interfere with cross-border diffusion should help shed more light on a phenomenon still under-studied from a comparative perspective: the rise of transnational activism.

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<sup>i</sup> The author would like to thank Miriam Allam for her efficient research assistance on the German case, and the two anonymous referees for *Social Movement Studies* for their helpful comments.

<sup>ii</sup> Work has since continued, notably with the establishment in April 2001 of follow up movement Jubilee Movement International.

<sup>iii</sup> The other being Japan, which later established its own Jubilee coalitions.

<sup>iv</sup> Eurodad (European Network on Debt and Development) is a network of 48 development non-governmental organizations from 15 European countries.

Throughout the campaign, Eurodad's secretariat provided advice and support and circulated relevant information to member organizations.

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<sup>v</sup> After siding with the French refusal to cancel Iraq's debts, Finance Minister Eichel declined to support Gordon Brown's October 2004 initiative, on the grounds that it would not be acceptable to cancel the debts of African states even as the German people were asked to shoulder harsh social cuts (*Tagesspiegel*, 5 October 2004).

<sup>vi</sup> The March 2001 creation of a Paris Club web site, coupled with pledges of greater transparency by President Jean-Pierre Jouyet, would later be hailed as a significant breakthrough by campaign coordinators.

<sup>vii</sup> The demands of the Comité pour l'Annulation de la Dette du Tiers Monde (CADTM) range from the cancellation of Third World external debt to the conversion of military spending into social and cultural expenditures.

<sup>viii</sup> In 2003, the Evangelical and Catholic churches received euros 160mn from the federal government.

<sup>ix</sup> Data from national Finance Ministries, accessible at:  
"<http://www.jubileepius.org/databank/debttables/bilateral.htm>"

<sup>x</sup> Within the CDI the government would cancel the remaining aid debts, worth £132 million of those poorer (lower-middle income) Commonwealth countries that would meet certain economic performance and good governance criteria. As of 2002, 12 countries had benefited from the initiative.

<sup>xi</sup> In 2001, the issue came 4th in the UK and 8th in the European panel, this time a  
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testimony to the particular impact of the Jubilee campaign in Britain.

<sup>xii</sup> This is notably asserted by Martin Dent, co-founder of the campaign: 'In our original committee we rejected a proposal that the name should be changed from 'Jubilee 2000' to 'Debt-Free 2000', and, subsequently, we have derived enormous momentum from the support of all the churches' (Dent 1999: 32).

<sup>xiii</sup> When asked why the French debt relief campaign had failed to replicate the success of the British one, CCFD coordinator Alex de la Forest-Divonne pointed to differences in both resources and tactics: 'We do not have the same striking power [...]. Jubilee 2000 had more than twenty full-time staff in London, whereas we are only two, part-time. Jubilee 2000 used the media to the full, attracted stars like Bono, even produced its own TV ads' (*Libération*, 19 June 2002). In 1999, *Erlassjahr 2000* was employing five full time staff.