THE DUALITIES OF TRANSNATIONAL CONTENTION:
“TWO ACTIVIST SOLITUDES” OR A NEW WORLD ALTOGETHER?

Sidney Tarrow†

International protests against global capitalism have focused scholars’ attention on the highly visible activities of transnational activists and advocates; but the tough, incremental, and deeply embedded work of grassroots social movements has too often been sublimated under the slogan: “Think globally; act locally!” Are transnational activists isolated from domestic social movements, extensions of domestic contention, or bridges between the local and the global? Three problems in particular will be examined: First, the difficulty of establishing durable transnational coalitions; Second, the problem of bridging the gap between movement protesters and NGO advocates; and, third, that of escaping movement structuration by national cleavages, alignments, and opportunities.

Reflecting on the international protests against neoliberalism since the late 1990s, activist-intellectual Naomi Klein writes:

We need to be able to show that globalization—this version of globalization—has been built on the back of local human welfare. Too often these connections between local and global are not made. Instead, we sometimes seem to have two activist solitudes. On the one hand, there are the international antiglobalization activists who may be enjoying a triumphant mood. . . . On the other hand, there are community activists fighting daily struggles for survival, or for the preservation of the most elementary public services, who are often feeling burnt-out and demoralized. They are saying: “what in the hell are you guys so excited about?” (2004: 227).

The “activist solitudes” Klein is referring to are reflections of a gap between “insiders” and “outsiders,” between transnational activists and locals. Another example of this gap is that between the Zapatista communities in Chiapas, which suffer from their isolation, and their foreign support bases. From the first, the E.Z.L.N. had carefully cultivated external allies, both in Mexico and abroad, and thousands of the latter responded to the rebellion with an outpouring of aid and solidarity (Olesen 2004). But ten years after the rebellion ended, problems were evident (Earle and Simonelli 2004: 120-21). Support for outlying communities was uneven: villages on the geographic margins of the region had difficulty connecting with international allies; and a “virtual Chiapas” often distorted foreign visions of the rebellion (Hellman 1999). Outrages like the Acteal massacre or demonstrations like the 2001 march on Mexico City periodically rekindled international attention, but when the clamor over these events died down, “international attention seemed to wane” (Earle and Simonelli 2004: 122).

The problem for social movement scholars can be stated more generally: International protests against global capitalism have focused scholars’ attention on the highly visible activities of transnational activists and advocates; but the tough, incremental, and deeply

* My thanks to Evelyn Bush, Mario Diani, Jai Kwan Jung, Javier Lezaun, Hanspeter Kriesi, Hans Peter Schmitz, Jackie Smith, Chuck Tilly, and Bogdan Vasi, for their typically astute comments on an earlier draft of this article, some of which draws on my forthcoming book, The New Transnational Activism. Doug Hillebrandt’s research assistance was precious to its completion.
† Sidney Tarrow is Maxwell Upson Professor of Government, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853

© Mobilization: An International Journal 10(1): 53-72
embedded work of grassroots social movements has too often been sublimated under the facile slogan, “Think globally; act locally!” As Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward long ago wrote in a different context:

People experience deprivation and oppression within a concrete setting, not as the end product of large and abstract processes, and it is the concrete experience that molds their discontent into specific grievances against specific targets. Workers experience the factory, the speeding rhythm of the assembly line, the foreman, the spies and the guard, the owner and the paycheck. They do not experience monopoly capitalism (1977: 20).

Are transnational advocates “merchants of morality,” as Clifford Bob has provocatively proposed (2002)? My view is more nuanced but no less troubling. Transnational activism has had profound impacts over the past decade, as I have argued elsewhere (Tarrow 2001, 2005). But major problems have emerged since it exploded on the global scene a decade ago. Three problems in particular will be examined in this article: first, the difficulty of establishing durable transnational coalitions; second, the problem of bridging the gap between movement protesters and NGO advocates; and, third, that of escaping movement structuration by national cleavages, alignments, and opportunities.

As Mobilization enters its second decade, the time may be ripe to examine the new transnational activism, both from the heights of international contention and at the base of domestic mobilization. Drawing on the contributions of a research group at Cornell University¹ and on the work of other scholars, my first task in this article will be to interrogate the international aspects of transnational activism—both positive and negative. My second is to try to understand its impacts on domestic politics. And the third—if only speculatively—is to ask whether the entire dichotomy between insiders and outsiders is giving way to a new world altogether, or is doomed to vacillate between “two activist solitudes.”

INSIDERS OUTSIDE: THE INTERNATIONAL IMPACTS OF TRANSMATIONAL ACTIVISM

In the space of a brief article it is impossible to survey all the evidence that has accumulated on the international impacts of transnational activists. In some areas, like landmine control, there has been clear evidence of success in pressuring governments to accept international norms and implement international agreements (Cameron, Lawson, et al. 1998; Price 1998). In others, like global warming, progress balances on a thin razor’s edge, supported by a vast coalition of climate-change groups and a majority of the world’s states but opposed by the most important state (Vasi 2005). And in others, as in the massively supported campaign to stop American aggression against Iraq, there were enormous international protests (Verhulst and Walgrave 2003), but once unleashed, the war machine could not be stopped.

It will be come as no surprise to readers of Mobilization that some movements are more successful than others. But it is worth underscoring the both the extent and the limits of the international successes of the new transnational activism before turning to its problems of domestication and domestic-international linkages. We can see both successes and problems in three international effects: the movement’s broad scope, the intersection between social movement “outsiders” and NGO “insiders,” and its capacity to draw on both seasoned activists and new recruits.

The Decade of Megaprotests

The most spectacular international effect of transnational activism has been the drama, since 1994, of enormous numbers of people mounting countersummits to oppose the
workings of international financial institutions. Sequestered in their hotels and vacation spas, government officials have been unable to ignore these popular pressures. At first taken by surprise, police forces have had to adjust their strategies and tactics (see below) to these vast assemblies and their innovative tactics. And although the media’s coverage is typically slanted, even they have had to take note of these gatherings (Bennett et al. 2004).

Mark Lichbach and Helma de Vries (2004) have made the most complete attempt to chart the rise of international protest events against multilateral economic institutions. They find that during the late 1990s the frequency and level of protest mobilization taking place during the MEI (multilateral economic institutions) meetings have increased. (2004: 31). The trend continued after the WTO meetings in Seattle through at least 2001. These protests, they conclude, “may in fact now be standard features of MEI meetings” (p. 32). Not only that, although each MEI meeting has been identified with the name of the city in which it was held, Lichbach and de Vries show that these events were often coordinated internationally. “The Battle of Seattle,” for example, was simultaneously mounted in over fifty cities around the world (Lichbach and de Vries: table 12). The most dramatic examples of international coordination were the anti-Iraq war protests on February 15, 2003, in which over ten million people followed the sun with their demonstrations around the world (Verhulst and Walgrave 2003). In fact, Lichbach and de Vries find evidence that the antiwar campaign was, if anything, even more broadly networked than its global justice predecessors (2004: 6, 52-56).

These are truly important impacts, but social movement theory suggests that the cycle of international megaprotests that began in the mid-1990s may be just that. On the one hand, never again will WTO or World Bank officials be able to assume that their decisions can be made outside the glare of publicity or that global neoliberalism is everyone’s “common sense.” On the other hand, they were able to shift their meetings to out-of-the-way places like Doha or the Canadian Rockies, driving down the level of participation of protesters. And although the main victims of neoliberal globalization are widely believed to live in the global South, global justice protests are still primarily mounted in the affluent countries of the North (Lichbach and de Vries: 37). Social movement theorists are not surprised that those who mobilize are not necessarily the most affected, but a decade after the major antiglobal justice protests began, it is striking that many of their themes, tactics, and organizational preferences have failed to penetrate the South.

Moreover, the global justice movement may even have been displaced by the far more pressing movement against war and military hegemony. Activists and some scholars may respond that these movements are hard to separate. For example, the February 15th antiwar marchers came heavily out of the global justice movement. But as close as the connections between global neoliberalism and international power politics are, it is possible that we are at the end of a cycle dominated by opposition to international financial institutions, rather than at the beginning of a long wave.

Outsiders and Insiders: A Radical Flank Effect?

Global justice protesters employ a radical rhetoric but their successes need to be seen in a broader context of transnational contentious politics. A classical reflex of emergent movements is to reject the efforts of more moderate and more institutionalized groups. As today’s transnational activists contemplate the efforts of reformist trade unions and NGOs on the international scene, they follow in the tradition of dismissing the efforts of moderates. Insurgent activists argue that by working with institutions, advocates working out of high-rise offices in New York, Brussels or Geneva lend legitimacy to these institutions and deprive the people they claim to represent of an authentic voice.

There is some truth to these accusations, but scholars interested in contentious politics in the broader sense should make more nuanced judgments:
• First, making searing criticisms of moderate advocacy groups are functional for insurgents, helping them to attract followers by laying claim to what Charles Tilly calls WUNC: *worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment* (2004: 4).

• Second, NGOs and labor unions do not always deserve the opprobrium heaped on them by social movement outsiders (Tarrow 2005: ch. 8). At Seattle, for example, where two-thirds of the protesters came from the unions (Lichbach and de Vries 2004: table 14), it was local unionists who defended the rights of the protesters against police violence (Levi and Murphy 2004). In the negotiations to establish a landmines convention, it was NGOs that did the hard work of consensus mobilization and lobbying national governments (Price 1998).

• Third, movement outsiders and NGO insiders can work together fruitfully, as was demonstrated in the campaign surrounding the Free Trade Association of the Americas (Korzeniewicz and Smith 2001) and at the Chiapas summit in 2003, when a coalition of southern countries, backed by insurgents in the streets, held out for access to northern markets for southern agricultural goods.

• Fourth, even when they have no contact with NGO insiders, movement outsiders increase their leverage by proposing more radical claims from the outside. Given a choice between negotiating with reformist NGO advocates or radical activists in the streets, officials will always prefer to work with the former (Gupta 2003; Tarrow 1998: ch. 10). This seems to have been the case at the Cancun summit, in which outsiders lent their external strength to Southern delegates within the conference hall to block the passage of a free-trade agreement.

These connections between outsiders and insiders make it incumbent upon scholars of social movements to reach beyond our traditional terrain of “social movements” to transnational contention in general (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). When we do so, we will see that transnational activists draw on domestic activism with little regard to academic distinctions between “insiders” and “outsiders.”

**Insiders Outside: Drawing on Domestic Activism**

Global justice activists are at pains to establish that a global identity drives their activism. Collective identities are important for any social movement—especially one that does not relate to an existing state target and there are signs that those who participate in global justice demonstrations do identify with broader—if still inchoate—collectivities. But the construction of a “global” collective identity comes up against the enduring attachments of national citizenries to their own countries, even as they oppose their policies.

Basing her conclusions on her research group’s studies of the European Social Forum, Donatella della Porta argues that a large majority of the activists taking part in recent demonstrations against international summits identify themselves with a movement “critical of globalization” (2004). “Through continual work of ‘frame bridging,’” she continues, “the fragments of diverse cultures—lay and Catholic, radical and reformist, youth or ‘mature’—have been brought together into a more complex discourse that has chosen the theme of social justice as an adhesive, while leaving broad margins for autonomous developments” (p. 200; also see Andretta 2003).

I do not dispute della Porta’s argument that the young people who participate in international demonstrations like the Genoa G-8 protest or in encounters like the World Social Forum, share an identification with people like themselves from other parts of the world. For one thing, a global or continental consciousness is more typical of young people than of their elders (Jung 2004). Figure 1, drawn from Jai Kwan Jung’s reanalysis of World Values Surveys, shows that successive cohorts of young people are consistently more likely to have strong global or continental identities than their elders.
Figure 1. Strong Supranational Identities by Age-Cohort in 1981-2001 (17-Country Sample from World Values Surveys)


But it would be premature to conclude that the assumption of global identities is general enough to have produced an international cadre of cosmopolitans. In most activists’ consciousness, supranational or global identities sit comfortably alongside traditional national and local identities. For example, as Christopher Ansell notes, “national identities remain the dominant political identities in Europe, though compatible with a European identity for a significant fraction of citizens” (Ansell 2004: 12; also see Citrin and Sides 2003).

Transnational contention has not created a new cadre of international activists without domestic roots but instead draws on the efforts of what I call “rooted cosmopolitans” who are active in domestic civil society and politics (Tarrow 2005: ch. 3). Consider the participants in the “Battle of Seattle” with Lichbach and de Vries: Although Seattle was widely trumpeted as an incident in the struggle of the “South” against the “North,” in fact most of the protesters came from the American or Canadian Northwest and by far the largest proportion had experience as domestic unionists (Lichbach and de Vries 2004: table 13). When Gillian Murphy and Margaret Levi traced the coalition that planned the Seattle protests, they found that the core activists were largely drawn from experiences in domestic movements that had worked together in the United States (Levi and Murphy 2004).

This is not surprising, given the cost of travel and the vast distances involved in North America, but evidence from Western Europe collected by della Porta and her collaborators shows a similar domestic background of the activists who attended the 2001 Genoa W-8 protest, the 2002 European Social Forum in Florence, and the February 15, 2003, anti-Iraq War protest. Summarizing this evidence, della Porta and Mario Diani found a widespread rooting of these participants in traditional sectors of Italian activism: a trade union background was reported by between nineteen and forty percent; political party alignment by
roughly one-third; religious activism by between eighteen and thirty-one percent; volunteerism by between thirty and forty-one percent; and student activism by between forty and fifty-two percent (della Porta and Diani 2004).

These findings do not indicate that North American or Western European participants in global justice or antiwar protests were simply locals out for a transnational lark. Global days of action help to make more concrete the experience of being part of the same protest events that take place in remote cities. Protesters who take part in such protests may return to their domestic activism transformed by their transnational experience and will bring both transnational ties and global insights to their future activities. They may even become participants in enduring transnational coalitions and movement organizations. All we can claim with confidence is that we are witnessing to an increasing degree the formation of a broad spectrum of activists who face both inward and outward and combine domestic and transnational contention.

**THE DILEMMAS OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM**

But there are major difficulties in mounting and sustaining transnational mobilization that go beyond the usual collective action problems. The first problem is how to build multinational coalitions out of international “megaprotests” (Bandy and Smith 2004); the second arises from what often is a virtue—the movement’s penchant for decentralization; and a third comes from effects on movements from the different opportunity structures of their home countries.

*From “Event Coalitions” to Campaign Coalitions*

After the first World Social Forum in 2001, activist Katharine Ainger wrote of that event:

> Ugandan fishworkers, Brazilian landless peasants, Indian dam protesters, Colombian trade unionists, French financial tax campaigners, young anticapitalists, pan-African debt campaigners, Nobel prize winning novelists, international peasant farmer unions like Via Campesina, met to talk, strategize, and describe another possible world. No one participant came to the meeting understanding the true dimensions of the movement—no one left without a dizzying sense of the millions and millions involved.

But the picture drawn by a *New York Times* reporter of the Social Forum held in Mumbai three years later was very different:


Taken together with Ainger’s ebullient claim, the *Times* reporter’s acid comment tells us important truths:

- First, people coming from very different walks of life often find resonance in the same global encounters, as Ainger argued;
- Second, it is hard to build a coalition for sustained collective action across borders that will encompass the interests of so broad a collection of actors, as the *Times* reporter claimed;
- Third, the formation of coalitions is a dynamic process that reveals many of the same
problems domestic political organizations face as they shift towards institutionalized coalitions.

Understanding these dilemmas of coalition formation is a major task of students of transnational activism today (Bandy and Smith 2004; Sikkink, 2004; Tarrow 2005: ch. 9).

Not all coalitions need to be durable: event coalitions offer a precise, if temporary, focal point, an overarching theme, and a set of political opportunities and opponents, while durable coalitions tend towards the abstract, the spatially diffuse, and have to deal with shifting opportunities and opponents. In fact, the inherent problems of maintaining long-distance collaboration favors medium-term campaign coalitions—like the landmines campaign—over long-term, federated coalitions. The landmines coalition resisted broadening to a general disarmament/peace campaign but combined high-intensity cooperation around precise goals with at least a modest degree of institutionalization.

To put my argument succinctly: international protest events make it possible for domestic actors to externalize their claims and identify international allies, and this may eventually produce longer-term coalitions. But the opportunities around which they form are short-term, difficult to use in building future coalitions, and face particular problems related to the pervasive culture of decentralization described below. To become more enduring, coalitions must overcome cultural differences, correct imbalances in resources, and bridge the differences in opportunities and constraints that their different states and societies impose on activists once they return home. Between event and enduring coalitions, “campaign coalitions” like the landmine coalition combine the virtues of informality with the intensity of commitment offered by issue specificity.6

The Ambivalences of Decentralization

The participatory ethic of the new transnational activism has drawn a wide variety of activists into international protest events but the bulk of social movement research teaches us to be skeptical of the veneration of spontaneity and grassroots autonomy. Let us distinguish first between two issues that are often conflated: on the one hand, the genius for direct action of global justice activists (Klein 2002; Wood 2004), which is considerable; and, on the other hand, the organizational forms of the movement, which take the hereditary decentralization of the Left to a new level of autonomy. “The result,” David Graeber writes, “is a rich and growing panoply of organizational instruments—spokescouncils, affinity groups, facilitation tools, breakouts, fishbowls, blocking concerns, vibe-watches, and so on” (2002: 71). These are terms that not only accept the necessity of decentralization to build a global movement, they celebrate it.

Decentralization has advantages familiar to scholars of social movements, but it has defects that are also well-known. We can summarize these in the three main problems that it poses:

- **Frame Incoherence.** Beyond the “master frame” of global justice, it is difficult for the global justice movement to develop concrete unified programs.
- **Tactical Outbidding.** The tactical creativity of affinity groups in protest demonstrations can easily turn to violence as activists—frustrated by failure and enraged by the predictable excesses of the police—turn to extreme tactics in the absence of leaders entitled to convince them to “cool it.”
- **Undemocracy.** While the most common defense of decentralization is its supposed connection to democracy, in fact, when no institutionalized rules exist to choose leaders, regulate debate, and canvass opinions, the most militant members, in Stephanie Ross’s words, “are able to act as vanguards by default” (2002: 282). As
Barbara Epstein argues, “antileadership ideology can not eliminate leaders, but it can lead a movement to deny that it has leaders, thus undermining democratic constraints on those who assume the roles of leadership” (Epstein 2001).

Whether it will be possible for the new global activists to combine decentralization with coherence and continuity in longer-term campaign coalitions will only become clear when we have enough data to examine the next generation of international protest events and their composition. If the same groups of activists can maintain their organizational coherence between international protest events, that will be far better evidence of a movement in formation than massive demonstrations on the part of new waves of activists.

**Domestic Structuration**

The international focus of transnational activism poses a paradox. On the one hand, international meetings, institutions, and processes offer protesters a focal point for activism around which they can organize, meet others like themselves, and form transnational networks (Lichbach and de Vries: 2004: 25, 50; Tarrow 2001, 2005). On the other hand, the opportunity structures of the states to which they return to carry out their domestic activities have a powerful effect on the discourse and the practice of transnational activists.

Since most public policy is carried out by states and since the political cultures, cleavage structures, and political processes of states vary enormously, the downward scale shift of transnational movements to the national level can produce great differences among their national branches. This was illustrated by the peace movement of the 1980s, when European and American activists diverged in the tactics they employed, their long-term or short-term goals, and their relation to the different opportunity structures they faced in their respective countries (Tarrow and McAdam 2004). Although the American antiwar movement espoused a broad variety of ultimate goals, its leaders quickly zeroed in on the purely bilateral, and more limited strategy of the “nuclear freeze.” In contrast, the European campaign focused on the planned emplacement of the American cruise and Pershing missiles and was unilateral in its central thrust. Secondly, although the American movement began with popular initiatives at the local level (Meyer and Kleidman 1991: 231; 243-5), as its leaders saw the possibility of political support growing, their strategy rapidly gravitated to institutional politics. Conversely, as European governments showed a stolid indifference to mass pressure, a coordinated transnational protest campaign outside of institutional politics emerged on that continent (Rochon 1988: 6).

It may be objected that the 1980s peace movement came before the end of the cold war, predated the rise of globalization, and was less transnational than the current global justice movement. These are valid arguments. But recent research shows a similar “revenge” of the national against the international. For example, in his reconstruction of the struggle for democratization in Kenya, Hans Peter Schmitz found that while international human rights NGOs helped to launch the movement in Kenya, once the Moi regime accepted the need to gesture towards democratization, these ties did not help in facing the very different problems of domestic campaigning. On the contrary, their dependence on international allies left Kenyan activists unprepared for the rough-and-tumble of domestic politics. Transnational networks, in Schmitz’s telling metaphor, not only “bind,” but “blind” (Schmitz 2001).

The campaign against global warming illustrates the same process of localization comparatively, as Ion Bogdan Vasi’s research shows. Although climate change is generally seen by experts and advocates as a global problem, it was soon recognized that the sources of pollution can be addressed at the local level as well. International efforts to enlist localities in the fight against global climate change began with the urban CO2 reduction program in 1991, followed by the creation of the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI). Its mission was to build and serve a worldwide movement of local governments to
achieve and monitor tangible improvements in global environmental conditions through cumulative local actions. The Climate Change Program (CCP) was established as the vehicle to spread this message (ICLEI 1997). “The CCP,” writes Vasi, “provides an opportunity for local governments that are concerned about the effects of global climate change to take action by reducing their greenhouse gas emissions” (2005: 8). While national and international efforts have been stalled by the endless negotiations over the Kyoto Protocol, figure 2, from Vasi’s research, shows the wide diffusion of the international CCP to cities in Australia, Canada, and the United States during the 1990s.7

Figure 2 also shows that different institutional arrangements and relations between domestic and transnational activists are determining of the degree and speed of domestication of the global environmental movement. Australia’s and Canada’s rapid and more complete reception of the CCP can be traced to the closer cooperation of their federal governments with climate change activists, while the slower and less complete American implementation of the program reflects the U.S. federal government’s opposition to the Kyoto Protocol.

In summary, building sustained coalitions across borders and between levels of the international system is a daunting task. Violent or disruptive tactics pursued autonomously can take authorities by surprise but the decentralized forms of organization they imply risk decomposition and are not inherently democratic. Finally, the need to domesticate international movements introduces them to domestic structures that can dissolve an international movement into separate strands, take different directions, and catch activists in the toils of domestic conflict structures. This takes us to my broadest concern: in linking transnational
contention to domestic activism, are we dealing with two activist solitudes or with a new world altogether?

OUTSIDERS INSIDE: THE DOMESTIC IMPACTS OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM

If the international impacts of transnational activism remain uncertain, what of its domestic impacts? “Think global, act local!” is an inspiring aphorism but it provides little guidance to how and where transnational activism can have a significant impact. Two areas of research are beginning to provide data on these impacts: the effects of international experiences on the repertoire of domestic contention, and the impact of international activism on public policy.

Domesticating Protest Repertoires

Mario Diani asks: “Are the most visible transnational demonstrations/gatherings the products of largely occasional coalitions of actors that are mostly integrated in domestic networks. . . . Or can we instead identify some continuity between the two levels?” In other words, how much do global issues shape grassroots political organizations’ strategies and orientations? (Diani 2004: 45). This is the fundamental question that needs to be addressed if we are to find out whether the new transnational activism reaches beyond sporadic international demonstrations into the lives of ordinary people.

Different authors working in a variety of countries and on different sectors of contentious politics offer a variety of answers to Diani’s question. For example, Christopher Rootes calls the environmental movement in Western Europe “the most globally conscious social movement in the most highly developed existing supranational polity.” But despite the increasing reach and power of EU institutions and the extensive transnational organization of the European environmental movement, Rootes finds in it only a limited degree of transnationalization (2004: 22). Focusing on British environmental protests reported in the Guardian from 1988 to 1999, Rootes found very small numbers of protests that were European in their level of mobilization, in the scope of their underlying issues, or in their targets. Similar patterns emerged in six other EU countries (p. 26). 8

Of the five British environmental organizations that Rootes studied in detail, three (Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and the World Wildlife Federation) that were always transnational “in inspiration and aspiration” have, in recent years, become more effectively transnational, both in the conception of their agenda and their alliances. This results, in Rootes’s view, not from the incentives and opportunities offered by the EU, but by global events like the Rio Earth Summit and the processes it set in motion (p. 39). For environmental group leaders, this was no more than an incremental change in what were already globalized ways of seeing the world; more significant would be “the development of a substantial non-elite audience/constituency for such views” (pp. 39-41).

The development of such an audience is the subject of Diani’s own research in two British cities, Glasgow and Bristol. Diani found that while the main focus of the civic organizations he studied in these two cities was on local issues (2004: 53), self-identification as political organizations significantly raised the chances of their being interested in global issues. Global issues were not equally appealing to the whole spectrum of organizations in these two cities. They appealed to actors “structurally more prepared to experiment with new strategies of action, and to use their political orientations to secure a niche” (Diani 2004: 64-65). Most important, engagement in local events on ethnic and minority issues and environmental justice issues also predicts engagement in actions with global implications.

In the civic politics of Bristol and Glasgow, we are very far from “the most conspicuous displays of “no-global” (or new global) activism” (Diani: 2004: 54), and that is exactly Diani’s point. We still need to ask how participation at international countersummits, in
transnational coalitions, and in international NGOs affects repertoires of collective action when activists return home. Is transnational activism followed by a return to the old ways of doing things or are participants in “global” events transformed by that participation in their local practice, thereby producing the “global in the local” that enthusiastic advocates of global civil society hope for?

One way of specifying these questions builds on Charles Tilly’s concept of the “repertoire of contention” (1978; 1995), as Lesley Wood has done in her research in Toronto and New York City. Many North American activists took part in the now-canonical anti-WTO protest in Seattle and some tried to bring the “Seattle model” home. In her analysis of New York and Toronto activists who went to Seattle, Wood sketches six attributes of this model, consisting of “black bloc” street tactics, radical puppetry, blockade tactics, legal collectives, affinity groups, and a spokescouncil mode of organization. In the year following Seattle, local social movement organizations working on immigration, police brutality, housing, and student issues experimented with these tactics in both cities, which were “promoted through trainings, debated on listservs, and experimented with,” especially through coalitions explicitly linked to the antiglobalization movement (2004: 1).

Wood found that while both groups of activists made efforts to bring the Seattle model home, it was only in New York City that the transfer was successful. What can explain these differences? New York is a larger urban center with a greater number and variety of activist organizations. Wood argues that the city’s larger size and its greater number of activist organizations allowed for a wider repertoire of tactics around a large number of issues. In Toronto, the Ontario provincial government serves as a magnet for public claims making and the use of commissions serves to coopt activists. Toronto’s structure of activism seems to resist innovation while New York’s is more open to innovation.

Combining the insights of Rootes’s and Diani’s research in the United Kingdom with Wood’s in the United States and Canada, it would be fair to say that transnational activism has so far had some, but only limited, impact on the practice of local activism. But these are relatively isolated gems of research in a field that has tended to celebrate, rather than analyze, the domestication of transnational activism. We still lack the serious investment in panel studies or time-series analyses that can tell us whether and how the new transnationalism is becoming rooted in domestic practice. And we still know very little about its effects on the framing of domestic conflicts or on the making of public policy.

Movement Impacts on Public Policy

Few social movement theorists think that movements on their own have a direct impact on public policy. More typically, movements mobilize public opinion, reinforcing their allies within decision-making arenas and weakening their opponents. This depends on movement actions that gain support from public opinion, rather than offending it, and on elites that divide over the movements’ claims, rather than combining against them. In the first case, governments can respond to transnational movements with positive policy initiatives—as we will see in the certification of indigenous groups in the United Nations; in the second, governments can ratchet up the level of repression—as we will see in the militarization of protest policing after Seattle.

**Certification: A Positive Policy Impact**

By certification, I mean *the validation of actors, their performances, and their claims by authorities*. Certification operates as a powerful selective mechanism in contentious politics, because a certifying site always recognizes a limited range of identities, performances, and claims. Consider the claim of nationhood: although the United Nations has evaluated
thousands of claims to nationhood since 1945, it has accepted only a hundred-odd of them. In 1986, the UN acted as a certifying agent for the Philippine opposition to President Marcos, but it has refused to recognize hundreds of other insurgent groups that threaten the sovereignty of one or another of its member states (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 158).

Certification by the United Nations is an important mechanism in the validation of non-state actors too. The UN accredits nonstate actors to take part in its various activities. It has played an important role in certifying national minorities as “indigenous” by admitting them to membership in its Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Since 1982, that group has met annually in Geneva, partly in response to the wave of indigenous protest that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in many parts of the world, especially in the Americas. The mandate of the working group is, first, to monitor the current circumstances of indigenous peoples and, second, to elaborate “formal standards regarding the rights of indigenous peoples and the responsibilities of states” (Dietz 2000: 40-41).

How does the UN’s certification of a group as “indigenous” affect its domestic position? Kelly Dietz’s research suggests that “the institutionalized recognition of a political category at the level of international organizations is an indicator that—for better or worse—it has acquired some degree of status as an ‘international problem’ rather than a domestic matter of the state” (2000: 76). Groups that are certified as “indigenous” by the UN can use that recognition as leverage for gaining political influence or to seek independence at home. According to Dietz, this is why UN certification of groups as indigenous is often strongly opposed by their governments and why the UN is careful to categorize some groups as “minorities,” as opposed to “indigenous” (2000: 79-80).

Protest Policing: A Negative Policy Impact

Not all domestic policy impacts of transnational mobilization are positive; there is as much evidence that transnational protest has contributed to repression as it has to reform. At the Genoa anti-G-8 protests in July 2001, a young protester named Carlo Giuliani was shot by a panicked carabiniere riding in a jeep that had become isolated and was surrounded by protesters. The Giuliani shooting came as a shock not only because it took place during an international summit; it also broke a long-term truce between Italian protesters and the police that had resulted from the latter’s adoption of a pacific practice of protest after the protest cycle of the 1960s.

In the three decades since the mass protest and sectarian violence of the 1960s and early 1970s, the interactions between Italian demonstrators and the police were—if not harmonious—at least civil. This was the result of innovations in police practice that were adopted at the same time by most of the major governments of the West. As practiced routinely in Washington, Paris, and Berlin since the late 1960s, the new strategy was based on three main rules of police behavior:

- negotiate the marching routes, tactics, and objects of protest with protest leaders;
- maintain continual contact with them through a single police command center which controls the actions of all the units in the field;
- keep troublemakers away from peaceful demonstrators, never attack the latter when the former get violent, and never break off contact with demonstration leaders (della Porta and Rieter 1998, 2004).

Every one of these rules was broken in Genoa. The police failed to maintain contact with protest leaders. They did not separate the violent fringe of black bloc anarchists from the rest. When the former threw rocks at them, the police turned their guns, tear gas, batons, and jeeps on the peaceful protesters.

An attack on a school where protesters were lodged was the culmination of this strategy.
Their faces masked, the police erupted into the school, swinging truncheons to left and right before transporting anyone they could catch to a police barracks. The activists were beaten, made to stand spread-eagled for hours, and remained incommunicado for up to three days. When these “dangerous anarchists” were finally hauled before the magistrates to be booked, all but one was immediately freed for improper arrest. Hearings since then have verified not only that the police were disorganized and unprepared but that many of them behaved towards the protesters as enemies of the state (della Porta and Reiter 2004).

What explains the abandonment of a police practice that had maintained relative calm on the streets of Italy for twenty-five years? Three main reasons come to mind. First, as in Seattle, there was a radical fringe in Genoa that was bent on destruction. Second, the police had studied the anti-WTO protests and might have decided that the Seattle police had been too lenient. From the first day of the Genoa summit, they went on the offensive. Third, the Berlusconi government wanted to demonstrate its international legitimacy and its domestic law-and-order credentials.

If Italy’s had been an isolated case, the police riot in Genoa could be explained by such largely domestic factors. But there was a third factor: the Italian police were attempting to implement a new transnational strategy of protest policing, one that substitutes militarization for negotiation, truncheons for the provision of portapotties, and isolating protesters with chain-link fences for agreed-upon parade routes. We seem to be witnessing an international trend away from pacific protest policing to the militarization of police tactics. From Gothenburg to Prague, from Davos to Washington and Miami, police forces have been adopting harder and more punitive strategies towards protesters at international summits. And given the similarity of the tactics used and the growing collaboration of police forces arrayed in “the war on terror,” it is hard not to believe we are seeing a common domestic policy impact of transnational activism.

But these are still speculations based on fragments of evidence and not yet on systematic research. Our goal should be to examine the commonalities and differences in police practice around the world, give concerted attention to the consultation and collaboration among police forces, and attempt to gauge whether it is the “global” in the new transnational activism, the radicalization of protesters’ behavior, or parallel changes in domestic politics that explain the shift from peaceful to violent police practice.

A NEW WORLD ALTOGETHER?

When, in the late 1990s, social movement scholars began to turn their attention to contention beyond the nation state, we tended to identify the problem in three main ways:

- the externalization of domestic social movements beyond the borders of their own nation states;
- the internalization of international issues and pressures in domestic contention; and
- the formation of transnational social movements.11

But as social movement scholars were taking their tools beyond the borders of national social movements, other scholars starting from different perspectives were attacking the problem from other angles. Political economists and economic sociologists offered the broadest vision, emphasizing global capitalism, countermovements, and the shifting arenas of conflict from the local to the global level. New-institutional sociologists provided a broad picture of trends in global culture, focusing on the growth of international organizations and the diffusion of Western “rationalizing” values.15 At the other extreme of generality, anthropologists and students of global public opinion were beginning to track the impact of global trends on local actors,13 while scholars of international politics provided precious information...
on transnational advocacy networks and on how nonstate actors interacted with powerful international financial institutions like the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO. Finally, advocates of global civil society offered stimulating proposals for opposing neoliberal globalization with one or another version of "globalization from below."

Even this inadequate summary of these many strands of research reveals how narrow our own perspective has been. We should not, of course, give up our relative advantages as social movement scholars. But by specifying our subject somewhat more broadly and drawing on the theoretical insights and methodological approaches from other specialties, we may come to a broader understanding of the new transnational activism.

Consider the absence of NGOs and unions from the purview of most social movement research on transnational contention: rather than ignore these entities, dismiss them as "insiders," or place them under the social movement umbrella, we should see them as other forms of contentious politics and examine their relationship to movements, states and international institutions. Movement actors in some ways resemble and in other ways interact with these more institutional forms of collective action (Smith 2002; Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997). By recognizing both the differences and the interactions among them, we will come to a better understanding of transnational contention.

The same is true of international institutions. The study of domestic social movements has tended to see movements as agents of resistance to such institutions. This is often true, but movements formulate their strategy in the context of institutions—local, national and international (Fox and Brown 1998; O'Brien et al. 2000; Stiles 2000). The institutional parameters of these institutions should be part of the analysis of transnational activism. For example, it would make little sense to apply the same calculus of opposition and cooperation to the relations between challengers and the European Union—which welcomes the participation of "civil society groups"—as to the utter rejection of such groups on the part of the World Trade Organization.

These two lacunae—the limitation of attention to "social movements" and the lack of specification of international institutions—are both important in responding to the changes in the nature of territoriality. To the extent that activists engage in contention beyond their borders, they encounter other actors, other publics, and a range of institutional settings beyond the borders of the national state. But if we are to understand whether we are entering "a new world" of activism or "two activist solitudes," we must begin with territoriality and with the effects of the changes in territoriality on the collective actions of social movements and other nonstate actors.

For example, in their 2004 collective volume, Restructuring Territoriality, Christopher Ansell and Giuseppe di Palma take up the challenge of what international relations specialist John Ruggie called an "unbundling of territoriality" (1993). Ruggie argued that the combination of the retreat of the welfare state, the globalization of trade and finance, and the formation of transnational actors is producing a world in which traditional state-bounded territories are becoming unbundled. While agreeing with Ruggie that these trends are important and that they challenge traditional concepts of sovereignty, Ansell and di Palma argue that territory is being rebundled in a world in which "the mutually reinforcing relations among territory, authority, and social interests and identities can no longer be taken for granted" (Ansell 2004: 9).

Two main theoretical perspectives guide Ansell and di Palma as they examine the restructuring of territoriality in Western Europe and the United States:

First, territorial exit: Drawing on the work of Stefano Bartolini, Stein Rokkan, and Albert Hirschman, they put forward the view that a reduced coincidence of cultural, economic, and political/administrative boundaries characteristic of our age. We see this, for example, in the shift of negotiation of industrial standards from the national to the European level. These processes increase the "exit" options for cultural, economic, and political interests and identities and challenges the state’s domestic authority and capacity to order domestic affairs.
authoritatively (Ansell 2004: 10; Bartolini 2004). The result is the reemergence of Rokkanian center-periphery cleavages, the appearance of subnational territorial competition, and challenges to the functional organization of interests and identities premised on the territorial organization of nation states (Ansell 2004: 10).

Second, territorial political exchange: Drawing on the work of Alessandro Pizzorno, Charles Tilly, and this author, Ansell and di Palma also propose a second form of internationalization in which social actors do not so much “exit” from their national settings as exercise “voice” by combining resources from these settings with the resources and opportunities that they gain from international institutions to engage in political exchange at different levels of the international system—subnational, national, and international (Ansell: 2004: 10; Imig and Tarrow 2001; Tarrow 2005). From this perspective, national and functional models of interest representation are not being disorganized as much as being reorganized through the layering of new opportunities for political exchange on top of old ones. This process offers opportunities for venue shopping, for the formation of insider-outsider coalitions, and for the domestication of international problems (Ansell 2004: 11; Sikkink 2004; Tarrow 2005: ch. 10).

These complementary perspectives help us to see that beneath the macroprocess of globalization, there are a number of smaller interlocking processes that are at work for both social movements and a host of other actors (di Palma 2004). Take Bartolini’s “territorial exit,” for example. With the creation of the European Union and globalization, “exit” has become an option both for national corporations that can segment their production processes internationally and for the trade unions that attempt to respond to them through labor transnationalism (Anner 2004; Gentile 2002).

But most actors that “exit” from national political structures also remain ensconced there. Consider Pizzorno’s mechanisms of “political exchange.” It is at work both in the “boomerang effect” that links northern advocacy groups with their allies in the South (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Sikkink 2004) and for environmental, feminist, and union activists who increasingly use European institutions to fight pollution and oppose gender inequality in the workplace (Cichowski 1998, 2001). These activists remain active in the venues from which they emerged.

Finally, think of how the layering of authority structures from the local to the national to the supranational levels give nonstate actors alternative sites to which to take their claims—what political scientists have called “venue shopping.” We see it both in business groups that organize both at the national and international levels and in the campaign of European anti-GMO campaigners as they shift back and forth between the European Union and their national states (Kettnaker 2001).

This is far from an exhaustive list of the processes that have been unleashed by the restructuring of territoriality. I put it forward not to offer an answer to the dilemma that Klein raised at the beginning of this article but to suggest an approach that recognizes the multiactor nature of globalization. Such an approach would focus on both social movements and other nonstate actors as they cross territorial boundaries; it would resist the tendency to reduce all such movements to resisters to globalization; it would seek to trace the variety of mechanisms and processes that bring them across territorial lines; and it would focus on how activists negotiate the boundaries between their domestic political settings, national governments, and international institutions. If we are entering “a new world of activism altogether,” it will take place not through globalization or the reaction to it but through the binding together of international, national, and local politics through processes such as these.
NOTES

1 The project is called “Transnational Advocacy and Grassroots Activism” and was funded by a three-year grant from the Ford Foundation. For a description of the project, go to http://falcon.arts.cornell.edu/sgt2/contention/. Research reports will be found by clicking on “working papers.” I am grateful to Mark Anner, Evelyn Bush, Kelly Dietz, Antonina Gentile, Dev Gupta, Jai Kwan Jung, Javier Lezaun, Hans Peter Schmitz, and Bogdan Vasi for their collaboration in the project. A final report will be published in Tarrow 2005. The original research reports of my collaborators are cited in this article’s bibliography.


3 I am grateful to Jai Kwan Jung for allowing me to reproduce the following figure from his original work on the World Values Surveys.

4 I am grateful to Jackie Smith for this observation.


6 This argument is elaborated and illustrated in three sectors of transnational mobilization in Tarrow 2005: ch 9. It draws on the important theoretical work by Margaret Levi and Gillian Murphy, to whom I am grateful for sharing their unpublished paper with me.

7 I am grateful to Bogdan Vasi for allowing me to cite his work and to reproduce this figure from his forthcoming Ph.D. thesis (2005), “Thinking Globally, Planning Nationally, Acting Locally,” Cornell University.

8 Opinions are divided on this point. Jackie Smith found in her research on NGOs that environmental issues fostered more regionally based ties while issues that are governed at a more universal level economic justice and human rights generated more cross-regional ties (2004: 22). Environmental groups stood out as the most locally focused, compared to human rights and economic justice activists. See Smith 2004.

9 I am grateful to Kelly Dietz for her advice over the years on indigenous certification. Her forthcoming dissertation will examine the process in Okinawa, where indigenous activism, has developed out of the campaign for removal of American bases.

10 This passage draws on della Porta and Tarrow 2001.

11 For major sources see della Porta, Kriesi and Rucht, eds., 1999; Guidry, Kennedy and Zald eds, 2000, and Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco 1997. For definitions and extended examinations of these three processes, see Tarrow forthcoming, chs. 5, 7 and 8.


REFERENCES


The Dualities of Transnational Contention


