

Changing World and the Growing Importance of the Transnational Advocacy Network on Global Governance

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ABSTRACT

In the recent decades, the process of globalization contributed for ‘desestatization’ of the global governance, opening the doors for non-state actors participations. In this context, the Civil Society Organizations have had a growing fundamental role in the protection of the common public goods such as environmental and human rights promotion and gender equality. One way of acting is through Transnational Advocacy Networks (TAN), that albeit have historical precedents like transnational campaigns for the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century, have increasing in number, size and influence, and been important sources of information and alternative views about international. Despite of their traditional advocacy function, these networks are operating in the international norm’s setting, moving toward a rising active participation. The purpose of this article is to show how civil society has acted by Transnational Advocacy Networks and how this acting is important to make civil society’s participation active and vital on the global governance process.

Key words: Civil Society; Transnational Advocacy Network; Global Governance.

Introduction

With the structural change in world politics in the post Cold War, the international relations started to deal with a wider range of issues – environment, human beings, and culture’s issues – and in addition incorporated the nonstate actors and NGOs participation in an increasingly institutionalized form. A decentralized character was ascribed to international politics, what Vesselin Popovski (2010) called “desestatization” of global governance, recognizing the news agents importance in global dynamics. According to Letícia Pinheiro and Carlos Milani (2011, p. 16, our translation):

Companies, non-governmental organizations, media, social movements, public bodies of the municipal or state level, for example, have passed to act internationally in a more organic and articulate manner, acting in many occasions in absentia of the State, on behalf of private interests or in defense of the most diverse political causes.

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The allusion to the three-dimensional chess game as a symbolic representation of the distribution of power in the world today, mentioned by theoretic Joseph Nye, exemplifies this idea. While the top and medium chessboard represent respectively the military and economic power, the bottom chessboard symbolizes the “realm of transnational relations” composed of various types of nonstate actors – bankers to terrorist groups – including also new transnational challenges. The author points out that beyond the power transition among states at present, there is also power diffusion away from all states to nonstate actors. Because of the Information Revolution and the drastic reduction of the costs of computing and communication, barriers to entry in global politics declined and thus, nonstate actors gained space (NYE, 2011).

The Civil Society Organizations are considered significant part of transnational actors. They assumed a relevant role in the international politics, making their performance and existence as an object of scientific research in diverse fields – Political Science, Sociology, International Relations. Despite of many interpretations, the civil society concept in general make reference to organization of associational life; possibilities of movements and voluntary associations that operate outside the state and market, oriented to shape the public sphere. It is composed of social movements, NGOs, community-based organizations, independent unions, advocacy groups, etc (CHAMBERS, KYMLICKA, 2002; GOHN, 2005; HELLER, 2013).

Although the concept has arisen for analysis of domestic society, with the interpenetration of markets and the advancement of communications and technologies, this has begun to be applied to analysis of global relations. There was an expansion of relational networks, which now form beyond the state, allowing people to express themselves collectively and voluntarily associate to achieve certain goals, whether they belong to a particular state (WAPNER, 1997). The academy has forged the concept of “global civil society”, which despite having a controversial and comprehensive definition (LAGE, 2012), seeks to clarify the political dimension beyond the relational networks (WAPNER, 1997). In other words, the capacity of these civil society groups to shape and influence the behavior of actors in the international arena.

In this sense, our goal through this article is to explore the theme of transnational activism in contemporaneity on one of their specific formats, the advocacy networks. Firstly, we aim to show how civil society had been articulated through the advocacy networks, explaining its conceptual bases and composition. Then, we discuss the historical and new structural and organizational aspects that have come to characterize the societal networks since the twenty-first century. Finally, we will retake the notion of power allocated to

transnational actors – and presented in this introduction – trying to analyze how advocacy networks performance at present has contributed to global governance.

The transnational Advocacy Networks

Despite the international activism have a history even before becoming an analytical object², that differentiates modern advocacy networks of transnational historical campaigns – Anglo-American campaign to end the slave regime in USA (1833-1865) or international movement in favor of universal suffrage (1888-1928), for example – is that in the last quarter of century their number, size, speed, professionalism, density and complexity have grown dramatically (KECK, SIKKINK, 1998). The technical-scientific-informational revolution and the emergence of new issues on the international agenda in the 1970s were key factors in this process.

The concept of traditional networks, imported from sociological tradition, refers to relations among individuals that influence and constrain the behavior concerning to an issue or group of issues by building frames intersubjective meaning (RODRIGUES, 2004). By applying this concept transnationally, we seek to establish bridges between domestic and international, recognizing the distinct nature of the actors (NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, states, local social movements) and their performance on several levels. In both cases, the concept brings elements of agents and structure. The reference to the term can point to the specific pattern of interaction among individuals and organizations (*networks* as structure) or to their own organizations and individuals (*networks* as an agent/actor), which possess a specific and distinct agency of the agency of its components.

The concept of networks, as the authors Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) point out, offers a refinement to "transnationalists theories" then existing in International Relations to infer certain categories established according to the motivations of transnational actors. The network theory distinguishes three types of transnational networks: i) those formed by essentially instrumental motivations and goals, usually transnational corporations and banks; ii) those motivated by shared ideas and causes, such as groups of scientists that form epistemic communities; iii) networks whose motivation is seen primarily by shared values and principles, which are the *transnational advocacy networks* or advocacy networks.

² Some authors who dealt with the historical precedents of modern transnational activism were: Margaret Keck e Kathryn Sikkink (1998), John Boli e George Thomas (1999) e Donatella Della Porta e Sidney George Tarrow (2005).

The role of networks of advocacy is to connect civil society actors with states and international organizations multiplying channels of access for such actors to the international system. One of his main exercises is to conduct exchanges of strategic information in order to place the issues into categories that may persuade, press and influence actors in decision-making (KECK, SIKKINK, 1998).

By creating new issues and placing them on international and national agendas, providing crucial information to actors, and most importantly by creating and publicizing new norms and discourses, transnational advocacy groups help restructure world politics (SIKKINK, 2002, p. 306).

What distinguishes advocacy networks from other existing transnational associative categories – transnational social movements, coalitions, transnational non-governmental organizations (TNGO) – is the plurality of actors that compose it and the role played by domestic and international NGOs. These as central actors, would be the promoters of voluntary associations through formal or informal relationships between members of the network. According to Keck and Sikkink (1998), besides NGOs, the main actors that make up the advocacy network are: local social movements, foundations, media, churches, trade unions, international and regional organizations and parts of the executive and the parliamentary body of the states when they joint into the cause promoted by the network.

Transnational [advocacy] networks have become the paradigmatic form of civil society plurality (as a mode of association and solidarity) in this first part of the twenty-first century. This is a new form of social movements' organization, a new layer of "associational activity", which is added to the others COHEN, 2003, p. 434, our translation).

However, the role of NGOs does not mean that there are patterns of hierarchical organization, since the very idea of advocacy network assumes horizontal relationships among members. Nevertheless, many authors have pointed out from a critical perspective the existence of asymmetries in the operationalization process networks (NELSON, 2002; BALLESTRIN, 2010).

Also regarding the specificity of associative form of networking, Jonathan Fox (2002 *apud* BANDY, SMITH, 2005) states that, differently from transnational social movements that have more formal structures, networks have lower levels of integration and formal organizational ties. For Bandy and Smith (2005), although networks establish typically informal relationships, some of them are more dense and durable. Moreover, by having NGOs

as central actor, which has a distinct organizational structure of social movements³, it is customary assign to networks a more moderate character concerning their objectives and goals, in contrast of social movements that would be more radical (TARROW, 2011).

It is possible to draw a parallel between the Keck and Sikkink's concept of advocacy networks and the process that Tarrow (2011) has called the *transnational coalition form between insiders/outsiders*, referring to one of the five forms of transnational contention developing today⁴. The author defines "contentious politics" as the joining of forces of collective actors in order to confront elites, opponents and authorities to defend certain cause, which can be the actors themselves or a group they represent. The contentious politics are articulated when changes in political opportunities create incentives for people who do not have regular access to representative institutions leverage their new or unacceptable claims defying the authorities or other types of opponents. Among the dynamic containment analyzed by Tarrow (2011) is what he called "transnational contention", a long, gradual and slow process by which containment actions and their actors begin operating across borders, uniting activists to different countries or that focus on external or international targets.

As mentioned above, one of the forms of transnational contention is the formation of coalitions between domestic actors and international allies (*insider/outsider coalition*), which is nothing but the involvement of international NGOs in claims and causes raised by domestic activists (TARROW, 2011). External support can be triggered when, in an authoritarian regime, domestic actors have been blocked from participation; or when the internal participation in open systems, choose to seek greater external support to increase their influence over the state and / or international institutions. This form of coalition refers to the practice that authors Keck and Sikkink (1998) called "boomerang effect", which permeates the formation of many networks of advocacy.

The changing world and the new forms of Transnational Advocacy Network

Transnational networks of civil society have grown at a rapid pace since the late 1980s, when the ending of the Cold War created an environment of greater opportunities for the transnational organization. This phenomenon was evident in the significant increasing number of NGOs concerned about the development of global public goods, such as protecting the environment, and those involved with the expansion and consolidation of human rights

³ See GOHN, 2005, p. 96.

⁴ The other four forms of transnational contention to which the author refers are: *Domestication*, *Global Framing*, *Transnational Diffusion* and *Externalization* (TARROW, 2011, p.235).

(VIOLA; FRANCHINI; RIBEIRO, 2013). The 1990s is considered the decade of prominence of civil society organizations. Scholars, NGOs, advocacy groups, social movements were optimistic that a "global civil society" was being formed. It was the decade of big conferences, protests against neo-liberalism – the slogan of these activists was “*Another world is possible*” – and the expansion of peaceful forms of contention among ordinary people.

In the case of transnational NGOs (TNGOs), after a period of rapid growth during the 1990s, much of which was financed by governments and foundations of North, they began to receive strong criticism from both the Right wing, as the Left. For the Left, the TNGO maintained a very close relationship with Western authorities and therefore always opted for more conventional forms of action; for Rightists, especially the governments of the South, TNGO came out to establish ties with domestic insurgents who defied the government (SCHMITZ, 2001 *apud* TARROW, 2011). However, despite the criticism anecdotal evidence points to a multiplication in the number of TNGO and other societal networks in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century.

After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, there was a change in scenario of the civil society organizations, in which the extremely favorable environment that had marked the previous decade was replaced by a climate of distrust and big obstacles to the construction of collective identities across borders. According to Tarrow (2005) sustaining collective action transnationally is no easy task, because it requires people from different cultures develop bonds of trust. For the author, if it was already hard to build trust in 1990s, with the wave of chauvinism that followed 9/11, nationalisms became exacerbated and made this construction even harder.

Another key point is that the events of 9/11 revealed the “dark side” of transnational activism; the same conditions that favored the formation of advocacy networks and other coalitions motivated by democratic causes or social/environmental justice, allowed connections and the growth of terrorist groups, as well as the trafficking and other transnational crimes. Therefore, governments have adopted more vigilant and restrictive policy stance, maintaining greater control over the activities of activists and somehow contributing to that part of them returned to private life (KALDOR *et al*, 2003 *apud* VIOLA; FRANCHINI; RIBEIRO, 2013).

Contrary to what many had preached, the states remained with robust status in the international arena and transnational activism showed greater weakness than some scholars had imagined. The return of the tensions and disputes in a systemic level, the advent of the

unilateralist Bush Administration and its belligerent responses to the 9/11 attacks, the rise of religious fundamentalism, and divergent national responses to the global financial crisis led to disbelief that the international system was walking in short-term to global governance (TARROW, 2005; TARROW, 2011).

However, even with the redefinition of the role and power given to civil society organizations, as well as a reaffirmation of the prominent role of the state in the international arena, advocacy networks, coalitions and transnational movements and TNGO continued to grow. Despite the international environment difficulties of the early twenty-first century, societal networks remained an upward trend in the international arena.

In 2003 it was detected an overall increase of approximately one third in the number of transnational social organizations, compared to the period from 1978 to 1993; transnational protests began to occur more frequently, registering growth rates from 1990 to 2004; the number of transnational civil society events quintupled from 1999 to 2005 (PODOBNIK, 2009 and PIANTA, MARCHETTI, 2007 apud TARROW, 2011). Sidney Tarrow (2011) points out that the 9/11 events had negative effects primarily among American activists and transnational organizations headquartered in USA. Furthermore, the imminent attack on Iraq in 2002-2003 was a revitalizing factor to mobilization movements – in this case, the peace movement – both in the U.S. and internationally.

Considering these contextual changes and the fact that transnational advocacy network had emerged as analytical object of Social Sciences and International Relations just over two decades, scholars of the subject identified new features, formats and structures in transnational society organizations over the years – fact that is direct and indirectly related to the changes that happened in the International System. In this article, we identified nine aspects that came to characterize the advocacy networks and other associative structures of transnational civil society from the twenty first century.

1. The transnational activism has become a more complex phenomenon

The “new” transnational activism can be considered a phenomenon of multiple sides, increasingly multifaceted (TARROW, 2005). Three dimensions can illustrate this complexity: increasing globalization of advocacy work; expansion in the civil society diversity; increasing diversity of structures and advocacy strategies (COATES, DAVID, 2002). In the 1990s, the TNGO enjoyed an aura of purity by emphasizing for liberal and progressive movements, “principled issue” and values motivations. More recently they have been seen as more

strategic actors – though acting on behalf of a principle and strategically is not contradictory in itself (TARROW, 2011).

2. The increasing transposition of the domestic activism to transnational sphere

Nowadays, younger people have a greater chance to feel part of the wider spheres (continental or global) beyond the nation-state to which they belong. Although there is no evidence that we have a newer mass or elite globalism, we can say that people in these groups communicate more easily across borders and activists increasingly participate in common themes around the world (TARROW, 2005). “The new activists represent less a migration from domestic to international arenas than a transmutation of domestic activism” (TARROW, 2005, p. 210).

3. Incorporation of contentious themes and greater emphasis in right-wing movements

From the mid-1990s there was an increasingly large number of meetings involving “contentious themes”, especially the meetings of neoliberal groups proposing alternatives agendas to the international financial institutions – transnational articulations clearly left-winged (TARROW, 2011). On the other hand, recent research shows that religious TNGOs or those who have right illiberal themes have also articulated internationally. According to Clifford Bob (2012), conservative character of these networks brings to them major advantages, as they receive support from the church and even the government.

4. Shifts to more transgressive character by the TNGO

At the turn of the twenty-first century, some TNGOs started to adopt new forms of contention, redirecting their strategies so far with political focus to more repressive actions. As an evidence is the growth of transnational events with more transgressive character (DELLA PORTA, TARROW, 2010 *apud* TARROW, 2011). The event considered the turning point for succession of a series of "transgressive transnational events" was the protest that took place in Seattle in 1999, against the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

5. Resocialization process among 'insiders' and 'outsiders' activists

Some authors discuss the classifications of insiders/outsideers to refer to organizations and movements that respectively support or oppose the established order⁵. They consider ‘insiders’ movements operating within the rules and procedures established by exerting a bridge between governments, governmental agencies, and civil society. Outsiders demand accountability and end up posing as sympathetic to leftist protests and movements (DE LA TORRE, 2011).

However, a rapid look at these movements show that the distinction between insiders and outsiders may be more diffuse than it looks. As seen in protests in Seattle, attending international protests may lead insiders to be resocialized in outsiders’ movements. In the mentioned case, after police reprisal, groups operating in accordance with the order began to respond to the attacks in a confrontational way (TARROW, 2005).

6. *New forms of organization*

According to Nye (2011), there has been not only an increase in the number of transnational actors at present, but also a change in its kind. While in the past, much of the transnational flow was controlled by large structures formally organized as multinational corporations, the Catholic Church, today, although these remain important, there is a wide space for the emergence of loosely structured network organizations and even the collective action of individuals.

New forms of organization are being created so that aggregate ordinary people in transnational campaigns. The bureaucratic, rigid and hierarchical structures are being overlaid by multiple networks and coalitions that employ new strategies, formulas, research and act quickly with new sources of information (COATES, DAVID, 2002).

There is no doubt that information technology, especially the Internet, is an essential factor in this process. The internet “is at the core of a new type of movement organization, one that is no longer dependent on fixed, place-based activities” (BENNETT, 2005 *apud* TARROW, 2005, p. 210). “The interplay of local, national, and international campaigns means that there are many different campaign pathways and targets. Systems for coordination and accountability have been developed to encourage broad participation and a central role for the voices and demands of those primarily affected” (COATES, DAVID, 2002, p.532). It is worth remembering that the Internet also serves to cyber terrorism, allowing the growth and proliferation of the "dark side" of transnational activism.

⁵ This is different from the above sense when referring to internal and external activists (see page 5).

7. New strategies

As stated above, the forms and activities of transnational activism are changing. For advocacy networks, for example, the different social, institutional, economic and cultural circumstances are increasingly demanding the development of new advocacy strategies. According to Coates and David (2002), the diversity of approaches to advocacy multiplied transnational campaigns involving new coalitions of civil society and seeking new global challenges.

One strategy often used between transnational networks of organized civil society is the “re-framing process” that is redirect the focus of a campaign to topics cognate to the first, allowing greater flexibility of activists to seek effectiveness in their campaigns. A case exemplified by Tarrow (2005, p. 211): “there was a rapid ‘spillover’ of activists from the global justice protests of the late 1990s to the antiwar movement at the beginning of the Iraq war”.

8. Growth of multiple-issue organizations

Scholars in the field have found that the natural composition of transnational organizations and movements have undergone a change over the past three decades, from framing their struggles in a scope that involves multiple issues, rather than a single issue. (BANDY, SMITH, 2005; TARROW, 2005). Groups, especially transnational social movements, are associating more questions like “environment” and “human rights” or “peace” and “human rights”; these new compositions reflect the need for activists to mobilize transnationally from a broader base and reflect the understanding that new challenges have interconnected causal relations (BANDY, SMITH, 2005).

9. Largest regional grouping

Another pattern identified in transnational movements is the preference for organizing in the scope of own hemisphere; the number of transnational social movements organizations grew more in the North and South, than those that involve both hemispheres. Attempts to cross the North and South divided between different civil society groups have proven to be very difficult, so activists preferred to seek regional coalitions rather than devote extensive amount of energy and time to build coalitions among groups as diverse (BANDY, SMITH, 2005).

NGOs from the global South have simply become more resourced, more effective and more recognized than was the case just a decade ago. Direct South-to-South networking and diffusion are becoming increasingly common, with the World Social Forum providing a particularly dramatic example of an alternative venue for civil societies of the global South (HELLER, 2013).

The importance of advocacy networks in global governance process

The turn of the century and the events that followed in the international arena brought disbelief that the "ideal of global governance", emphasized since the end of the Cold War, would indeed be possible – at least in a short time. However, although it has assumed a less idealized bias since, and although its applicability and conceptual strength is no consensus among theorists over the twenty-first century –mostly because its complex and plural definition – the idea of global governance remains for many as one of the central topics in guiding practice and study of international relations (BARNETT, DUVALL, 2005).

In general, the idea of global governance suggests a complex interaction between large number of actors who, through horizontal relations, coordinate public-private and elaborate and legitimize collective rules (SMOUTHS 1998 apud COMPAGNON, 2008). In other words, represents the collective effort of sovereign states, international organizations and other nonstate actors to encompass common challenges, creating opportunities that transcend national boundaries (PATRICK, 2014). While states remain as the dominant players, the growing number of nonstate actors have increasingly contributed to structuring the global agenda, setting rules and monitoring international obligations.

The diffusion of power from states to nonstate actors mentioned earlier in this article, is a process already built by leading analysts of international relations; however, there are differences concerning to the meanings and understandings assigned to process (VIOLA, FRANCHINI, RIBEIRO, 2013).

For Nye (2011), the power of transnational actors is still widely diffused. From his concepts of “hard power” (coercive resources) and “soft power” (institutional resources, ideological, cultural), he states that “in terms of power resources, those groups rarely possess much hard power, but Information Revolution has greatly enhanced their soft power” (2011, p. 120). Along the same lines, Hurrell (2005) argues that civil society organizations can even have some compelling power at certain times, but this cannot be compared with the power wielded by corporations and capital. As for Heller (2013), there are not many ways to exercise

direct influence on the part of the transnational civil society organizations, however, the spaces for indirect influence has multiplied, bringing significant results since these actors act as forces countervailing power of states and markets.

Therefore, although the transnational civil society actors do not have, in most cases, the same level of influence that other actors in the international system, its performance has been essential to global governance.

The CSOs [civil society organizations] are now vital actors in global governance, which includes normative intergovernmental processes that deal with issues of development, security, human rights and disarmament. Global CSOs now play a key role in the definition and establishment of international norms and standards, as well as in the implementation of development objectives. Norms and standards are mutually agreed upon by members of international and regional organizations, and then communicated to the national and subnational levels, where CSOs can advocate on their behalf, pressuring governments for their institutionalization and helping implement them in practice through partnerships to improve service and access, as well as monitoring and assessing government policies and practices (CHEEMA, 2010, p.14-15).

In this sense, we return to the question: what is the role played by advocacy networks? How the advocacy groups have contributed to global governance?

International advocacy non-governmental organizations (IANGOs) have played an important role in global governance to contribute to the expansion of the rarely heard voices of minorities (CHEEMA, POPOVSKI, 2010). Besides that, they have exerted great influence on policy changes related to global justice, in the process of developing standards and processes of institutionalization (HURRELL, 2005).

As Tarrow (2005) argues transnational activists linked to advocacy grow in number, but not homogeneously. Each group acts in a certain way, exerting different types of influence. Some are norms entrepreneurs and try to spread its values among the countries of the globe; others act on the international level as representatives of specific groups (women, indigenous people, peasants, etc.); there are still those who direct their activities to international institutions; international NGOs that engage with the cause of the societies of the South; and others are responsible for mediating the cooperation between different levels of representation (local, national, global).

Finally, we mention that recently, along with other organizations of organized civil society, advocacy groups worked in political openings authoritarian societies and contributed to the expansion of human rights – from the Arab Spring to indigenous movements in Latin

America. These facts show the ability of the contentious popular movements to transform politics and the development of the international system (HELLER, 2013).

Final Thoughts

In this article we observed that the recent history of transnational activism has two interpretive extremes with regard to the role, influence and real power that transnational actors – more specifically, transnational societal networks – have played in the international sphere. Optimists emphasize the density of TNGOs, their increasing participation in the negotiations, the existence of a global awareness on issues of human rights, ecology, gender, peace, factors that lead to a decline in the power of states and increased global governance. Pessimistic or realist – in reference to realist tradition of International Relations – turn to the phenomena of conflict, emphasize the hierarchies of power between the actors of the international system and point to the lack of representation of these groups.

In addressing the role of transnational advocacy networks we seek to show the development of transnational activism in recent decades and how it reflected in international relations. One may say that we follow a line “moderately optimistic”, to show that although transnational networks have resources of limited power, these are not inexpressible. The events of the early twenty-first century, in fact, break the utopianism of the previous decade, but this did not cause the phenomenon of transnational networks disappearance, on the contrary, the number of coalitions, networks, advocacy, lobbying organized transnationally only increased.

The power of states has not been eliminated, but needed to adapt to new dynamics and trends that came to characterize the international system in the post Cold War; among these, the new formations of activists organized transnationally. We conclude, therefore, recovering the metaphor used by Tarrow (2005) to describe the phenomenon of transnational activism. For the author, transnational activism should not be treated as a big wave that grows and expands as the course of history, but a series of waves that lap on an international beach and retreat repeatedly to inland seas, leaving, however, incremental changes to the beach.

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