Power Shift Revisited: A Retrospective Analysis of International Civil Society and the Ottawa Convention

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Abstract

In 1997 Jessica Mathews wrote that the world was witnessing a "power shift" within the international community.[2] That shift was being led by non-governmental organizations that were utilizing new technologies to garner international public participation on the issue of the environment, politics and anti-personnel landmines.[3] The prime example of this power-sift was the 1997 Ottawa Convention banning the use, stockpiling and production of anti-personnel landmines. The Convention has been hailed as a triumph of an emergent civil society—a claim that has done much to underwrite the legitimacy of the ban, efforts to extend it and ongoing mine action more generally. Transcending limitations of space, a watershed aspect of the mine ban movement was its use of new information and communication technologies to forge a transnational activist network and raise a global groundswell of popular sentiment pushing states to accede to the ban. While the centrality of civil society actors to this process is beyond dispute, the idea that the campaign is appropriately regarded as an initiative of international civil society may not as easily withstand scrutiny. To the extent that majority populations in lesser-developed countries were effectively excluded from equal participation in this transnational networks, then, the rhetoric of the international civil society movement rings rather hollow. This research will argue that this circumstance poses a serious challenge not only to the future in mine action but also to the notion of an international civil society as well.

The narrative of what has become to be generically known as the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel (AP) landmines says that the convention's origins reside not in any state action or initiative, but within civil society—in particular, with the committed activists and interested non-governmental organizations (NGOs).[4] To be sure, there is much to this account, since most

1 Associate Professor, Graduate School of International Political Economy, University of Tsukuba, Japan. This article is based on research conducted in Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia from 2002-2004. Additionally, this article is dedicated to the JICA students of the Area Studies program at the University of Tsukuba from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Indonesia -- who expressed to me that their voices were not then and are not now being heard in the context of international civil society -- thank you for your courage and inspiration for this article.

2 Jessica T. Mathews, "Power Shift," *Foreign Affairs 76* (January 1997), pp. 50-66. Also see Mathews, 'The Changing role of the state: keynote address to the Harvard School of Public Health 75th Anniversary Symposium,' Boston, 27-29 April 1997, at http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/digest/mathews.html, accessed November 4, 2004.

3 In this paper, 'mine' refers to landmines, unexploded ordinance (UXO) and other explosive remnants of war.

statesactually came late to the process that saw the treaty inaugurated with 122 initial signatories in December 1997.[5] Accordingly, the prevailing view of the ban has found its origins not in the traditional workings of diplomacy but in the coordinated efforts of a range of civil society actors who first brought the humanitarian crisis onto the government's agendas.[6] Taking full advantage not only of personnel mobility but also of the possibilities unlocked by new real-time information and communication technologies, activists and NGOs built a transnational network of advocacy and engagement, enabling them to seize the imitative and lead the process toward a anti-personal mine ban in new political spaces transcendent of state borders and relatively free from the slowness of conventional diplomatic processes. The dissemination of campaign information via the internet also helped in moving governments to act to the extent that it helped forge broad popular consensus that the humanitarian crisis wrought by AP landmines outweighed any military utility that might be claimed for keeping them in inventory.[7]

This narrative is invested with a considerable moral authority in the movement to ban landmines, the Ottawa Convention itself and the ongoing efforts to universalize the ban. In particular, all have been at least rhetorically marked apart from whatever suspicions might otherwise be aroused by cynicism regarding the underlying aims of self-interested states. That is to say, no ulterior motive on the part of the actual signatories to the Ottawa Convention can reasonably be linked to the founding moment of the ban. Instead, legitimacy adheres to the idea that in its founding the landmines prohibition derived not from foreign policy imperatives of some state (s), but from actors untainted by allegiances other than to mine victims themselves and, more broadly, to widely held principles of humanitarian justice. Moreover, its apparently international franchise seems to have insulated ongoing mine action from charges of incipient neo-colonialism or the sort leveled against, for example, liberal-inspired development discourses spoken from the privileged and authoritative North over and against the voices in the South.[8] Consequentially, questions about the ethics of mine action turn vitally on the rendering of the ban as an initiative rooted in an emergent international civil society transcendent of states and, therefore, of their more parochial interests.

While there is little room seriously to question the pivotal role played by civil society-based actors in the campaign to ban landmines, the rather less than modest claim to the effect that the

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4 The convention is formally known as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and Their Destruction. In this paper this will include UXO. Although not legally part of the Mine Ban Treaty, mine action operators in the field from a humanitarian point of view, treat UXO and landmines as a common threat and the same capacities are instrumental in tackling both.

5 As Kenneth Rutherford points out, "even as late as 1994, there was a consensus among all states that landmines were legal". K. R. Rutherford, "The evolving arms control agenda: implications of the role of NGOs in banning anti-personnel landmines," *World Politics*, 52 (1), 2000, p. 74.

6 For a sophisticated and through articulation of this perspective, see R. Price, "Reversing the gun sights: transnational civil society targets land mines", *International Organization*, 52 (3), 1998, pp. 613-644.

7 C. Horwood, Humanitarian Mine Action: The First Decade of a New Sector in Humanitarian Aid, London: Overseas Development Institute, 2000, pp. 34-46.

8 See D.C. Atwood, 'Implementing Ottawa: continuity and change in the role of NGOs', *Disarmament Forum: Framework for a Mine-Free World*, United Nations, 1999; and S Goose & M Wareham, Landmine Monitor: citizens' verification in action', *Disarmament Forum: Framework for a Mine Free World*, United Nations, 1999.

campaign is best understood as an initiative of international civil society may not as easily withstand critical scrutiny. The most serious implications of this reside in the legitimizing function performed by the international civil society rhetoric that has been such a critical element in the foundations of Ottawa Conference and the mine ban movement generally. Inasmuch as reference to international civil society has therefore been a vital enabling factor in the movement's successes to date, it can be read as a progressive rhetoric yielding tangible practical improvements in the lives of the people living in mine-affected areas. More generally, the liberal inspired hopes bound up in the idea of an international civil society imbue it with a decidedly emancipatory flavor—it bespeaks an open, democratic space wherein the aspirations of the globally disempowered might hope to find meaningful expression in concrete political action. The basis of such optimisms is, of course, the expectation that international civil society networks are broadly accessible, such that a full range of voices can be raised through them irrespective of whether they speak from sites of privilege or from the margin. And it is in from this view and the sense of broad franchise to which it gives rise that the legitimacy of the campaign to ban landmines adheres most fundamentally.

The international civil society story of the campaign to ban landmines has become an important part of the enabling narrative of both mine action itself and its rhetorical appeal. This has significant implications not only in terms of the practical lesson that some might hope to infer from the campaign, but also as regards to the ethical practice of ongoing mine action. With respect to the former, the failure to parlay the movement of the mine ban into similar restrictions on small arms, light weapons and the environment suggests that civil society actors might not be quite so fully the inexorable agents of change that civil society actors imagined in 1997.[9] More immediately, however, the legitimizing function of claims about the civil society sources of mine action initiatives is such that said claims' precise nature and contact beseech careful scrutiny lest they too readily obfuscate ethical dilemmas arising from the matter of whose voices really can contribute meaningfully to the shaping of the mine action agenda. In this sense, the case of mine action does expose an important issue confronting international civil society more generally. But before looking into this possibility directly, it is useful to consider briefly the basis upon which the campaign to ban landmines has been understood as both the project and the proof of a functioning international civil society.

Civil Society and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines

That the successes to date and future prospects of the campaign to ban landmines owe much to the dedication and determination of a wide range of civil society actors is beyond question. An umbrella organization that today brings together more that 1300 NGOs from over 90 countries

9 A. Denholm Crosby, 'Harnessing change for continuity: the play of political and economic forces behind the Ottawa Process', in M.A. Cameron, R.J. Lawson & B. W. Tomlin (eds), *To Walk Without Fear: The Global Movement To Ban Landmines*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 278; and S. Brem & K Rutherford, "Walking together or divided agenda? Comparing landmines and small arms campaigns', *Security Dialogue*, 32 (2), 2001, pp. 169-186.

around ongoing mine action efforts, the ICBL is well placed to trade on its impressive record of achievement.[10] By December 2002, just five years after the mine ban treaty opened for signature in Ottawa, only 48 holdout states have persisted in their refusal to disavow landmine use; in addition, tens of millions of stockpiled mines have been destroyed and both humanitarian de-mining and mine victim rehabilitation programs have been and are being expanded.[11] The ICBL also remains as engaged as ever in its efforts to universalize the landmine prohibition. And as much now as in its infancy, the movement to realize a global ban finds its hopes for success in the continuing efforts of committed civil society actors around the world who have come together under the ICBL's umbrella. In light of all that the unprecedented coalition built by the ICBL has achieved in little more than a decade, there is ample basis for the considerable attention it has garnered, not only from those concerned with issues of arms control and disarmament but also from policy makers, activists and scholars with an interest in the idea of an emergent international civil society. From a wide range of perspectives, it seems, the route to the Ottawa Convention signals a watershed event worthy of careful attention for the important lessons it has and can bring to bear and the hitherto unimagined possibilities it seems to promise.

In general, the origins of the movement to ban landmines has met with precious little in the way of critical scrutiny. Indeed, renderings of the landmine ban as the product of an emergent or already functioning international civil society have characterized much of the popular, activist and even scholarly literature on the subject. While this has sometimes been cast quite broadly, it is the central role of NGOs in particular that has most often been emphasized. According to Stephan Brem and Ken Rutherford, for instance, NGOs played a 'critical role'... in instigating and facilitating the landmine ban'.[12] Celina Tuttle concurs, describing the content of the Ottawa Convention as having been 'arrived at the sustained and concerned efforts of non-governmental organizations...and international agencies concerned about the social and economic devastation caused by AP landmines, working closely with like-minded governments'.[13] In addition, she continues, 'it is a disarmament treaty whose very existence is rooted in an intensive, global grass-roots effort, strongly supported by the will of people around the world'.[14] Similar claims abound, invoked even as empirical evidence in studies concerned with the oft-proclaimed changing nature of global goverence more generally. In one such study Craig Warkentin and Karen Mingst characterize the campaign to ban landmines as a 'victory' of international civil society.[15] Moreover, according to Cameron, whatever its certainty to the process, 'Canada's initiative would not have been possible without a civil society movement of global

10 International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 'More about the campaign', at http://www.icbl.org/info/about.html, accessed October 15, 2004.

11 International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 'Campaign celebrates on mine ban treaty fifth anniversary', at http//www.icbl.org/news/2002/263.php, accessed October 15, 2004.

12 Brem & Rutherford, 'Walking together or divided agenda?', p. 171.

13 C. Tuttle, 'Landmine ban rooted in civil society', *Peace Magazine*, 13 (6), 1997, p. 17.

14 Ibid.

15 C. Warkentin & K. Mingst, 'International institutions, the state, and global civil society in the age of the world wide web', *Global Goverence*, 6 (2), 2002, p. 246.

reach'.[16] From this perspective international civil society was not only vital to the founding of the mine ban movement, it remained essential to its successes even after interested states like Canada took up the cause in earnest.

What then, is this emergent or extent (the extent of the claim varying from one narrative to another) international civil society that has figured so prominently in dominant accounts of the campaign to ban landmines even as the latter has been invoked as evidence of its very existence? In an influential and pioneering analysis of what are increasingly regarded as important changes in the nature of local and global governance, Ronnie D. Lipschutz contrasts international civil society with the sharply delineated and discrete political spaces long marked out by separate nation-states, each containing it own civil society. It is the transcendence of precisely these boundaries, Lipschutz argues, that gives concrete expression to the idea of an international civil society:

> The spatial boundaries of international civil society are different, because its autonomy from the constructed knowledge of the state system also allows for the construction of new political spaces. These political spaces are delineated by networks of economic, social and cultural relations, and they are being occupied by the conscious association of actors, in physically separated locations, who link themselves together in networks for particular political and social purposes...While the participants in the networks of international civil society interact with states and governments over particular policy issues, the networks themselves extend over levels of analysis and state borders, and are not constrained by the state system itself.[17]

It should be understood that these international civil society networks do not replace nation-states as important sites of political action. Rather, they signal an enlarged political terrain populated by a wider range of meaningful actors than is suggested by the traditional preoccupation with the realist notion of the conduct of self-interested states. In Lipschutz's view, what we are witness to is 'the emergence of a parallel arrangement of political action, one that does not take anarchy or self help as central organizing principles, but is focused on the self-conscious constructions of networks of knowledge and action, by decentred, local actors, that cross the boundaries of space as though they were not there'.[18]

Not surprisingly, much of the attention devoted to questions and claims about the changing nature of global Goverence in general has been focused on the role and conduct of NGOs as increasingly important actors in transnational political processes. Here, the campaign to ban landmines is emblematic, but other mobilizations around issues ranging from particular visions of human rights to the protection of the biosphere are similarly instructive. Transnational political

16 M.A. Cameron, 'Democratization of foreign policy: the Ottawa Process as a model'. *Canadian Foreign Policy*, 5 (3), 1998, p. 163.

17 R.D. Lipschuts, 'Reconstructing world politics: the emergence of global civil society, *Millennium*, 21 (3), 1992, p. 393

18 Ibid, p. 390.

mobilizations are not a new phenomenon, however; this suggests that NGO activism alone is not a sufficient cause of whatever changes in the modalities of global goverence might seem to be suggested by the Ottawa Process and by comparable initiatives raised to some practical effect from beyond the confines of established circuits of state to state interaction. Underscoring this point are less recent experiences of transnational social movements that, despite having attracted significant NGO participation, were unable to transcend the limitations of spatial dispersion well enough to raise a co-coordinated movement of the sort exemplified by the ICBL. The peace movements of the late 1960s and the early 1980s are but two examples here: although a mass following was attracted in each case, it remained to a large degree parceled off into separate national contexts, each oriented vertically (that is, with civil society actors addressing themselves to national governments) much more than horizontally (i.e. across state boundaries through networks connecting like-minded civil society groups or epistemic communities in different countries). Moreover, the peace activists of the cold war era did not enjoy anything approaching the privileged access to active circuits of diplomatic practice that was achieved by the ICBL. This is not to say that they did not exert an infleunce from without; they did, perhaps even decisively in some instances. But these earlier movements nevertheless remained quite decidedly relegated to the margins not only of international diplomacy, but of domestic politics in most contexts as well.[19]

Clearly. Then, the remarkable achievements of the campaign to ban landmines must be the result of more than just the willingness of NGOs to become actively engaged in the cause. Lipschutz argues that the emergence of international civil society has been occasioned less by large-scale political activism—which, as noted above, is not a new phenomenon—than by a confluence of transformative trends that included the diminished inclination and/or ability of national governments to provide public goods and social welfare, as well as the 'leaking away of sovereignty from the state' towards both supra and sub-national institutions.[20] In combination with these developments, the spread of liberal norms and values—which find the locus of sovereignty with individuals rather than states—has undermined the state's claim to be the sole mediator between the 'secured' inside and the dangerous world outside of the domestic/international dichotomy of human socio-political interaction. This has occurred at time when the unprecented destructive potential of weapons technology has made traditional military solutions to problems of security less viable.[21] The result has been an opening up of political spaces such that both legitimacy and discursive authority have been conferred upon civil society voices, making them audible in realms that were once the exclusive preserve of those appointed to speak on the state's behalf.

Of course, while these developments are all significant, they tell us more about why it is that

19 This is not to overlook that the landmines issue was in many ways unique. For a fuller account of circumstances enabling a ban on landmines, see Beier & Denholm Crosby, 'Harnessing change for continuity'. Nevertheless, the campaign to ban landmines did achieve a degree of transnational integration and coordination not matched by earlier movements.

20 Lipschutz, 'Reconstructing World Politics', p. 339.

21 Ibid, pp. 405-407, 418-419.

voices from civil society can now be heard than how it has become possible for them to speak. That is to say, these too are necessary but not sufficient causes of the new possibilities for global governance seen in the campaign to ban landmines. Equally significant are the practical bases upon which transnational networks of political action are built and sustained.[22] The vital infrastructures of these civil society-based networks are expressed in technologies that produced the late-twentieth century revolutions in personal mobility, communications and information handling. Writing on the eve of the boom in personal computing and widespread Internet connectivity, Lipschutz places the emphasis on the mobility made possible by the advent of relatively inexpensive commercial air travel that has accompanied the dramatic expansion of carrier capacity since the middle of the last century. "Travel", in his view, 'is more than just a means of getting about, it is a process of knowledge exchange that allows all kinds of political and social transactions to take place outside of the purview or control of governments'.[23] In this sense it is a critical infrastructure of international civil society-based networks unbounded by the rigid territoriality of states. And more particularly, personal mobility has proved indispensable to the sort of transnational political activism enabled by these networks to the extent that members of civil society-based groups are empowered to make their presence felt at key sites of international decision-making at decisive moments. In the case of the campaign to ban landmines members of the engaged NGO community lobbied state diplomats directly in the corridors of international arms-control and disarmament meeting spaces. Mobility also played a part in the ICBL's coalition-building efforts as it worked to broaden its own membership base, mounting NGO conferences around the world and securing a presence in mine affected areas.

Arguably of even greater significance to the campaign to ban landmines, however, was the unprecented capacity to mobilize and coordinate a large transnational movement by making use of new information and communications technologies. Although the mobility of key members of the campaigns was important, the raising and coordination of a mass-movement was enabled more by the emergent 'wired world' of the mide-1990s.[24] The ability to communicate effortlessly and inexpensively in real time as to distribute (e-mail) or make available (websites) of vast amounts of information to an international audience unlocked the potential of transnational activist networks as a potent force in the international arena. Much more than a mere conduit through which an essentially passive audience might receive information, the interest opened up interactive channels of communication though which virtual communities of activists and supporters could be forged around shared objectives.[25] Richard Price notes that this also endowed civil society actors with a 'surveillance capability', carving out a role for them in the monitoring of state 'compliance with the desired norms of behavior'.[26] Indeed, cyberspace furnished a new realm for political action wherein

22 See John Hall, *Civil Society: Theory History Comparison*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.

23 Ibid, p. 413.

24 For an excellent analysis of this see Mary Catherine Bateson, 'Beyond Sovereignty: An Emerging Global Civilization', in R.B.J. Walker & Saul Mendlovitz, *Contending Sovereignties: Defining Political Community*, London: Lynne Reinner, 1990.

25 R. Thakur & W. Maley, 'The Ottawa convention on landmines: a landmark humanitarian treaty in arms control?' *Global Governance*, 5 (3), 1999, p. 282.

neither the fixed nature of territorial boundaries nor the privileged speaking positions of governments and diplomats could contain civil society-based networks of activism. According to Warkentin and Mingst, 'the nature and possibilities of the World Wide Web combined with those of an emergent international civil society—were able to work in novel and notably effective ways'.[27] Moreover, they argue, an important effect of new communications technologies, one that was quite unmistakable in the campaign to ban landmines, is that they have 'collapsed political time' by accelerating the pace at which transnational mobilizations can be made.[28]

Examining the Etymology of the ICBL

The sort of transnational activism exemplified in the campaign to ban landmines is aptly characterized as an instance of what Paul Wapner call 'world civil-politics'.[29] Taking on what is undeniably an issue belonging to the ambit of 'world politics', the mine ban movement originated from and was articulated through the realm of social life known as civil society: the 'complex network of economic, social and cultural practices based on friendship, family, the market and voluntary association'.[30] That the campaign to ban landmines is rightly regarded (at least in its origins) as a civil society-based movement, then, seems not to be in serious question. Similarly, the 'international' nature of the particular political problem to which the movement addressed itself is not at issue -- after all, even if the pernicious effects of AP landmine use are not universally felt, mines themselves have nevertheless long been a near-ubiquitous staple of states' military arsenals. To concede that the campaign to ban landmines is identifiable as a civil society-bases initiative in world politics is not, however, to make the more extravagant claim that it is appropriately rendered as an initiative of international civil society. Here, a more stringent test is in order: one that is signaled by the legitimizing effect of the notion of broad franchise imparted in the international civil society rhetoric of the mine ban movement's origins narrative.[31]

As Ann Marie Clark, Elisabeth J Friedman and Kathryn Hochstetler have argued, 'to describe

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26 R. Price, 'Compliance with international norms and the mines taboo, in Cameron et al, *To Walk Without Fear*, p. 343. Also see R. Price, "Reversing the gun sights: transnational civil society targets land mines', *International Movements in World Politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002.

27 Warkentin & Mingst, 'International institutions, the state, and global civil society in the age of the world wide web', p. 246.

28 Ibid, p. 253.

29 P. Wapner, 'Politics beyond the state: environmental activism and world civic politics', *World Politics*, 47 (3), 1995, p. 313. See also Michael Walzer, *Toward A Global Civil Society*, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 1995. See also, M. Mekata, 'Building partnerships toward a common goal: experiences of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines', in A.M. Florini (ed), *The Third Force: The Rise of Transnational Civil Society*, Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2000; N. Short, 'The role of NGOs in the Ottawa process to ban landmines', *International Negotiation*, 4 (3), 1999, pp. 481-500; and R.J. Lawson, M. Gwozdecky, J. Sinclair & R. Lysyshn, 'The Ottawa Process and the international movement to ban landmines', in Cameron et al, *To Walk Without Fear*.

30 Ibid.

31 A. McGrew, 'A Global Society?', in S. Hall & A. McGrew (eds), *Modernity and its Futures*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, pp. 61-102.

the social relations among nongovernmental actors as global is to assume that international civil society is widespread enough that actors as from all over the world are involved in the interactions'.[32] Globality, they note, 'raises the stakes considerably' because it implies 'geographically diverse' representation in the transnational processes of civic politics.[33] Obviously, in order for international civil society rhetoric discussed above to contribute to the legitimacy of mine action, this representation must be meaningful in comprehensiveness, in depth and in terms of the practical possibilities for affecting the mine action agenda. The last of these, in particular, is not to be overlooked—the relative (in) ability of those speaking from sites of margin to participate fully in the fashioning of political praxis is, after all, the litmus test by which the validity of the international civil society rhetoric must ultimately be judged. But as with other liberal discourses the Achilles heel of the more optimistic renderings of international civil society lies in the apparent assumption that formal right to speak is one with the practical ability to raise a voice. The best hopes and intentions of formal equality, however, are to often subverted by the exigencies of real inequality.[34]

Under these circumstances, there is a danger that the emancipatory designs spoken from sites of relative privilege will work violence of their own by dictating the terms of emancipation over and against less audible voices speaking from the margins, despite the fact that the latter's well-being may be most directly at stake.[35] Moreover, to the extent that such dissenters in marginal locales who might imagine the needs of their own salvation in terms different from or even contrary to those used without. Particularly instructive in this regard is Chandra Talpade Mohanty's celebrated critique of some stands of Western feminism that stands on universalized claims about the sources of women's oppression in ways that are profoundly disempowering of 'Third World' women.[36] In a similar vein, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reveals how even a radically emancipatory politics can have the effect of suppressing marginal voices in its very midst.[37] More broadly, from the liberal-inspired institutions of global goverence to radical development discourses, enduring structure of inequality frustrate emanicpatory designs by authorizing and enabling privileged voices whose universalist discourses subject marginal voices to erasure.[38] This is something that should be taken seriously vis-a-vis ethical practices in mine action, since the international civil society rhetoric from which mine

32 A.M. Clark, E.J. Friedman & K. Hochesetler, 'The sovereign limits of global civil society: a comparison of NGO participation in UN world conferences on the environment, human rights, and women', *World Politics*, 51 (1), 1998, pp. 2-3, emphasis in the original. Also see Robert Cox, "Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium', *Review of International Studies*, Vol 25, No. 1, Jan 1999.

33 Ibid, p. 3.

34 See Martin Shaw,' Global Society and Global responsibility: the theoretical, analytical and practical limits of International Society,. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol 21, No. 3, 1992-3, pp. 421-34.

35 P.G. Coy (ed), *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, Vol 22, Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 1997; and M.E. Keck & K. Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Ithaca, NY Cornell University Press, 1998.

36 C.T. Mohanty, 'Under Western eyes; feminist scholarship and colonial discourse', *Boundary*, 2, 12(3)/13 (1), 1984, pp. 333-358.

37 G.C. Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271-313.

action derives some measure of its legitimacy professes universality. It should be emphasized, however, that to raise this point is not to question the humanitarian motives of those engaged in mine action from sites of relative privilege. Rather it is to draw attention to the unfortunate circumstances that even the most well intended and thoughtfully conceived emancipatory projects become ethically problematic when largely spoke into a given local from without.[39]

Against this backdrop the details of the international civil society rhetoric of the mine ban movement bear closer examination. As Warkentin and Mingst point out, Lipschutz finds NGOs among the most important of the actors playing 'pivotal roles in the construction of an international civil society's constitutive networks'.[40] With more than 1300 NGOs under its umbrella, then, it is hardly surprising that the ICBL has attracted so much attention from those with an interest in what seem to be changing patterns of global governance. Of course, care should be taken not to conflate NGOs with civil society itself.[41] This is a caveat that sometimes seems to have been missed in the usual renditions of the origins narrative of the campaign to ban landmines, tending to focus as they do on the ICBL and its member organizations. Arguably, this has the effect of implying a more comprehensive franchise than might turn out to be the case in some countries. It should be remembered therefore that, although NGOs are civil society actors, it does not automatically follow that they represent a civil society consensus on any issue. The extent to which possibilities is thus a crucial consideration in any reasonable measure of civil society engagement.[42]

Equally significant is the matter of where the various member organizations of the ICBL are based geographically and how this maps with the specifics roles that they play in the campaign to extend the ban and in ongoing mine action more generally. The ICBL is, as noted above, able to boast a membership list made up of NGOs from over 90 countries. But somewhat belying this apparently global franchise, its founding members are all based in Northern countries, none of which are mine affected, with the ICBL itself is headquartered in the USA.[43] Certainly, member NGOs that

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38 The universalist pretensions of international law, for example, occlude enduring unequal relations of power that area legacy of European colonialism. See S.N. Grovogni, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self Determination in International Law*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. Even self-consciously critical emancipatory discourses such as dependency theory can have the unintended effect of erasing local specificity through totalizing narrative. See I. Kapoor, 'Capitalism, culture, agency: dependency versus postcolonial theory', *Third World Quarterly*, 23 (4). 2002, pp. 647-664.

39 Alejandro Colas, 'The Promises of International *Civil Society*', Global Society, Vol 11, No. 3, September 1997, pp. 261-278.

40 Warkentin & Mingst, 'International institutions, the state and global civil society in the age of the world wide web', p. 239.

41 The distinction here is not always well observed. Clark et al, 'The sovereign limits of global civil society', for example inquire into the possibility of global civil society by focusing on the NGO-State or NGO-IGO interfaces without die attention to the NGO-civil society interface. In much of the literature the problematic implications seems to be that NGOs *are* civil society.

42 See the entire article by Gernot Kohler, "The Three Meanings of Global Apartheid: Empirical, Normative, Existential', *Alternatives*, Vol 20, 1995.

43 The founding members of the ICBL are Handicap International (France), Human Rights Watch (USA), Medico International (Germany), Mines Advisory Group (UK), Physicians for Human Rights (USA), and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (USA).

are based in mine affected countries have been indispensable to the campaign and to mine action in general, but it is noteworthy that theirs is typically a local role: implementing humanitarian de-mining and victim rehabilitation 'on the ground' and, variously, lobbing their own governments to support the ban. They are thus characterized by a vertical insertion between their own local contexts and the larger campaign. It is the coordinating body of the ICBL and some of the larger Northern member NGOs, operating across many national contexts, that reach our horizontally across the globe, with the result that theirs are the privileged voices of mine action—a fact reflected in their increasingly close partnering with the United Nations on mine action initiatives.[44] As campaign organizers Jody Willaims and Steve Goose recall, 'large-scale expansion of the campaign throughout Asia and Africa did not occur until the ICBL network had been consolidated in the North and political momentum had begun to build.[45]

Nevertheless, there are, without a doubt, very good practical reasons for the leading role of Northern NGOs. Jackie Smith suggests that, although the disproportionate basing in cities like London and New York 'in part reflects global inequalities...it also results from strategic organizational choices'. Among the important considerations, according to Smith, is the reality that 'telecommunications are more reliable and often cheaper in more industrialized regions and transport to and form these places far more convenient, thus facilitating transnational organization'.[46] While there is no disputing this, the point should not be missed that these practical realities also reflect global inequalities. Moreover, the very fact of unequal access to mobility and the access to information and communication technologies calls into some question the idea of a meaning fully international civil society. In the case of the landmines campaign, as we have seen, accessible air travel and, more importantly, access to the internet were essential tot the forging of a transnational activist movement. It is primarily in the developing South, however, that these requisites of effective civil society mobilization are not readily available to the majority populations, which means that people living in many of the worlds most mine affected areas are effectively disenfranchised from equal participation in transnational networks in this case of mine action.

Since the 1990s activist communities have seen important changes in both the breadth and depth of their membership bases, as internet connectivity has enabled ordinary people in the more developed parts of the world to reach beyond local contexts to communicate with and even participate directly in transnational groups and movements.[47] Although activist organizations in the developing world do not enjoy the same quality and degree of access to the internet as their

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44 For example, in the case of the Survey Action Center, the United Nations Mine Action Service joined with the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining, Handicap International, the Landmine Survivors Network, Medico International, the Mines Advisory Group, Norwegian People's Aid and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation. See Thakur & Maley, 'The Ottawa convention on landmines', p. 283.

45 J. Williams & S. Goose, 'The international campaign to ban landmines', in Cameron et al, *To Walk Without Fear*, p. 25.

46 J. Smith,' Global Civil Society?', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 42 (1), 1998, p. 97.

47 P. Brophy & E. Halpin, 'Through the net to freedom: information, the internet and human rights', *Journal of Information Science*, 25 (5), 1999, p. 354.

counterparts in the developed North, neither are they cut off from it entirely. Moreover, transnational coalitions of related organizations are themselves networks through which 'information-poor' groups receive support from those who are more privileged, even to the extent of developing direct internet access.[48] But in a world where the global poor tend also to be the information-poor,[49] ordinary people in many mine affected areas are more likely to be left on the disadvantages side of the so-called 'digital divide'. According to Manuel Castells[50], the diffusion of internet access, though impressive, overwhelmingly favors urban centers over the rural areas where so many of the world's estimated 100 million mines are sown. Catherine Frost points out that while internet connectivity is a possibility wherever telephony is available, 'it should be remembered that there are still plenty of places where you can't take basic telephone service for granted'.[51]

Proceeding from the claim that the internet has enabled ordinary people to become more informed about issues such as landmines and to make their views known instantly to their governments, Warkentin and Mingst call attention to the collapsing of political time made possible by the new information and communication technologies.[52] Asking who these ordinary people are, however, yields a different sense of the situation because, while political time might have been compressed, political space, or at least the unequal division of it, remains relatively unchanged. In other words, voices of influence and authority still issue from more or less the same locales of privilege. Ironically, the rhetorical connection of the movement to ban landmines with the idea of an emergent international civil society is most profoundly unsettled by the ICBL's heavy reliance on that very technology. In light of this and taking account of the 'local' experience of the landmines issue in mine-affected areas, the idea of international civil society is destabilized by the confirmation that, from here, marginal voices cannot be heard. There are important senses in which they cannot 'hear' either, residing as they do beyond the pale of the internet-based outreach efforts of the campaign.[53] That those daily lived experiences are most intimately tied to the landmines issue are effectively excluded from full participation in the broader political mobilization that it has brought about is also illustrative of the problems of unequal power and material relations imposed by the legacy of colonialism and ongoing conditions of dependency—all of which poses a serious challenge not only to ethical practices in mine action but to the notion of an international civil society as well.

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48 Ibid, p. 356.

49 T. Cawkell, 'Socio-technology: the digital divide', *Journal of Information Science*, 27 (1), 2001, p. 56.

50 M. Castells, *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University press, 2001, pp. 262-263,

51 C. Frost, 'How Prometheus is bound: applying the Innis method of communication analysis to the internet', *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 28 (1), 2003, p. 21.

52 Warkentin & Mingst, 'International institutions, the state, and global civil society in the age of the internet', *Canadian Journal of Communications*, 28 (1), 2003, p. 21.

53 Underscoring the reality of the digital divide in this regard, the ICBL has reported that more than half of the endorsements and requests for information it receives via the internet come from US citizens. See http://www.icbl.org/action/us.html. Accessed 9 November 2004.

Findings: A Newly Emergent Paradigm for a Transnational "Northern" Civil Society

As they are most commonly articulated, the progressive and emancipatory hopes bound up in the idea of an international civil society—those of political liberalism—suggest a universal wherewithal to engage directly in political action and, consequently, a franchise that is potentially boundless. Unfortunately, such wherewithal is not evenly apportioned, and this should move us to sustain critical inquiry into whose emancipation is at stake and according to whom. These are the sorts of imperative self-reflective questions that are obviated by the claim that the mine ban movements and ongoing mine action are appropriately read as an initiative of the international civil society. It turns out that what we are witness to might more rightly be characterized as transanationalised elements of civil society—perhaps globalising elements of Northern civil society. The importance of distinctions such as these is that they highlight whose voices can be heard in the new political spaces opened up by, for example, information and communications technologies. Again, this is to suggest that they were deliberately so. But, whatever its sources, there is an exclusionary effect that calls for some reflection upon its potential implications for ethical practices in mine action. Besides conferring legitimacy, the international civil society rhetoric of the mine ban movement has a tendency to depoliticise mine action. This is something that must be self-consciously problematised and resisted inasmuch as the realities of deep structural inequality in the global political economy are such that opportunities for meaningful participation in transnational civil society-based networks and practices are not all equally apportioned across geopolitical space. This does not mean that ethical practices of mine action are a chimera, however. Rather, it enjoins us always to bear well in mind that even the best-conceived practices must be implemented across contacts that are shot through with persistent structures of inequality that can work to frustrate their aims.

As a discourse of legitmation, the internaitonal civil society origins narrative of the campaign to ban landmines has worked with great practical effect. However, the foundational claims bound up in it, whether implicit or explicit, should not be allowed to escape critical analysis in deference to political expediency. To be sure, civil society networks of activism have shown themselves to be a potent force in contemporary global governance, and the experience of the mine ban movement stands as a compelling expression of this. Most unprecedented in this regard is the demonstrated ability of ICBL activists to make effective use of new information and communication technologies, enabling them to lead the political agenda well enough to bring over a hundred states to a binding AP landmines prohibition in the remarkably short span of time of just a few years. But while this clearly bespeaks a compression of political time, the disposition of political space remains largely unaltered. It is this enduring reality that is most profoundly mystified by the unqualified invocation of international civil society rhetoric. A more nuanced understanding of transnational civil society initiatives and the inequality of opportunity for their meaningful engagement by people occupying different political spaces both unsettles this rhetoric and yields a repoliticised account of mine action. At the same time, it calls into question the extent to which the mine ban movement is itself appropriately taken as unproblematic evidence of a functioning international civil society. In the light

of these significant implications, we would do well not to allow a preoccupation with what is new in global governance to obscure from view the enduring influences of those things that remain essentially unchanged.