

## Chapter 8

# GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY: FROM DISSIDENT DISCOURSE TO WORLD BANK PARLANCE

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In a visionary article first published in 1986, Marc Nerfin provided a powerful and dynamic model to help in understanding the new interconnectedness of local and global social change and the emerging world-view coupled with it. According to Nerfin, the roots of the global crisis that unfolded in the 1980s was the growing gap between the perception of the world in 1945 when the UN was founded, and the second half of the 1980s when development policies proved ineffective vis-à-vis the growing anomalies of globalized capitalism. Developmental strategies essentially reflected a white, Western, Christian and elitist world-view and were based on the paradigm that developing societies '... have more often than not proved unable by themselves to offer solutions to the crisis and even less to contribute to the search for alternatives' (Nerfin 1987: 172).

The beginnings of this alternative-seeking and systemic approach go back to the late 1970s to a rather modest initiative of the International Foundation for Development Alternatives (IFDA), or the Third System Project which tried to offer an alternative to the UN International Development Strategy in the 1980s. There is a conscious reference in the concept of the Third System to the Third World, and even to Third Order which could be interpreted as a reference to the transcendence of the *ancien régime*. This struck a chord at the time by exposing a widespread social need and political sentiment. Although Nerfin never mentions civil society *expressis verbis*, this is *de facto* what he means when he elaborates the concept:



The third system is not coterminous with the people. It brings together only those among the people who are reaching a critical consciousness of the role they may play. It is not a party or an organization, but the movement of those associations or citizens who perceive that the essence of history is an endless effort for emancipation ... The third system does not seek governmental or economic power. On the contrary, its function is to help people to assert their own autonomous power *vis-à-vis* both Prince and Merchant. It endeavors to listen to those never or rarely heard and at least to offer a tribune to the unheard voices (Nerfin 1987: 182).

Nerfin's definition takes particular account of the problems of people living in underdeveloped societies. His words echo many voices from the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s and are expressions of a new world-view emerging 'from below'. This powerful metaphor, the locally and globally self-organizing Citizen *vis-à-vis* the already well-organized financial and market forces of the Merchant and the states and governments of the Prince, became a rich source of linguistic and theoretical innovation and proliferation. Nerfin's model is neither static nor rigid. His 'third system' is a terrain of diverse and self-organizing movements, initiatives and associations. He mentions peace, women's liberation, human rights, environment, local self-reliance, alternative lifestyles, consumer defence, solidarity with the Third World, and new forms of trade unionism such as *Solidarnosc* among them. The new spirit is an obvious continuation of the social movements from the late 1960s and early 1970s, expressed in a vocabulary of a new and emerging global consciousness:

Citizens and their associations usually act in a determined space – local, regional, national, multinational, global – but also, and increasingly so, in several spaces simultaneously. Amnesty International ... acts in the global space through representations to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, in the national space through pressure on governments, and in the local space through the many groups which 'adopt' a political prisoner and campaign for his/her liberation. (ibid.: 174)

Nerfin recognizes the important and powerful networking capacity of civil society. Civil society associations, NGOs and civic initiatives started to gather together at parallel summits already in the early 1980s. UN conferences opened new space for networking. This networking, which offers an alternative to the Prince and the Merchant's pyramidal and hierarchical organization with centre and periphery, is organized horizontally:

Their centres are everywhere, their peripheries nowhere. Networking simply means that a number of autonomous, equal and usually small groups link up

to share knowledge, practice, solidarity or act jointly and/or simultaneously in different spaces. (ibid.: 186–87)

This ideal-type description of civil society networks certainly shaped the imagination of many NGOs during the past decades and served as a model for their activities. Nerfin's rich metaphor gave rise to a whole literature during the 1990s dealing with the 'third sector'. It strongly influenced the language of civil society organizations working in the fields of development, human rights and the environment and the formulation of a new world-view by global civil society networks and social movements.

From the mid-1990s there is an explosion in interpretation of the role of 'civil society' in democracy, democratization and development. The confusion about the meaning of the notion, however, has contributed to the abuse of the concept by players (mostly authorities, governments, transnational organizations and politicians) in whose interest it is to keep 'politically correct' discourse moving ahead, creating the impression of openness and readiness for change; but whose interests *de facto* lie somewhere else.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenal carrier of the notion in the last decade deserves not only attention, but also a careful and more detailed analysis. The language of civil society has become a crucial determinant of the game of 'Who speaks to whom?' And on what terms? What definitions are adopted by donors and authorities (such as 'partners') of civil society organizations? Is there a genuine language of civil society to be heard from independent, grass-roots circles and social movements? Or can one no longer distinguish the real voices from below from the more sophisticated 'dear-friend'-type<sup>2</sup> of discourse emanating from above?

In order to 'measure' the real weight of civil society in particular political contexts, one has to be able to separate out genuine civil society talk from pseudo-civil society language. Hence critical discourse is the key to the survival of the meaning of civil society. This critique, however, presupposes a widespread consensus and readiness to fight for the realization of the 'common good' among constituting elements of civil society. What is understood as common good in a community depends, among other factors, on the cultural-political context and the existence of independent mediating institutions such as the media, the educational system and the availability and accessibility to channels of information, information technology and communication.

### Civil Society and NGOs: Conceptual and Language Wars

Most authors agree that the meaning of the term 'civil society' has undergone significant change since the end of the Cold War. According to Mary Kaldor, at the core of what is new in the concept since 1989 is

globalization. The prerequisite social contract between civil society and the State is seen in the constitution of 'a global system of rules, underpinned by overlapping inter-governmental, governmental and global authorities' (Kaldor 2003: 2). The fact that no consensus can be reached on the definition of civil society, its inherent ambiguity, says Kaldor, reveals one of its attractions. Habermas also points out that its 'rediscovery' today has placed it in 'wholly new historical constellations' (Habermas 1996). Civil society is no longer viewed as constituted by markets, capital and commodities, but rather encompasses 'nongovernmental and noneconomic connections and voluntary associations that anchor the communication structures of the public sphere in the society component of the lifeworld' (ibid.: 367). Civil society, as a network of associations, articulates and amplifies social problems of the private life spheres in the public sphere; and these associations are both egalitarian and open (ibid.: 367).

Civil society can express itself in a great variety of forms, from individual initiatives through social movements, clubs, associations, societies and other organizations. More importantly, however, it is embodied in a spirit of civic solidarity, civil courage and community *ethos*. This can manifest itself rather spontaneously and can take a wide variety of forms, from mild deliberation to strong protest. It is, therefore, never a mechanical sum total of existing or potential formations. To quote Alan Fowler, 'civil society is the location from where legitimacy must be obtained if one is to talk of a democratic political system' (Fowler 1996: 25). Civil society in this sense is more a philosophical concept than a set of organizations.

Civil society can be viewed as a potential – an ad hoc melting pot and battleground of diverse interests and actors, ranging from public individuals to international NGOs. It is the terrain of self-reflection, self-articulation and autonomy that inherently presupposes and necessitates a self-organizing public arena, where the critique, the control and containment of existing and prevailing power-monopolies (the State, the army, the police, multinational companies, intergovernmental institutions, local authorities, and so on) can be practiced. This public arena is not homogenous; it is constituted rather as a permanent regrouping and renegotiating process between and among new and old participants. Its non-constant social fabric and catalyzed interdependencies are built on the autonomous and voluntary will of the individual who actively takes part in social and political affairs.

The need for civil society stems from democracy's deficiencies. This special social space assumes a strong consciousness of being a citizen as well as citizen participation in social processes. Pure deliberative civil society is not enough, however, to strengthen democracy. Strong civil societies presuppose effective and enabling institutions along with legal

guarantees. This interrelatedness between the individual, his/her associations and a larger framework of mediating institutions is the key to understanding civil society's added value to democracy as is emphasized in recent literature on civil society and NGOs. Lars Jorgensen, for example, envisions civil society as a 'meeting place for debate and common endeavour', acknowledging that 'the right of each individual to participate in the workings of society, and the recognition that periodical elections and referendums ... are not sufficient' (Jorgensen 1996: 36). In other words, there is nothing stable or mechanistic about civil society, especially not as far as its 'institutions' are concerned. Mary Kaldor suggests that 'the advantage of the language of civil society is precisely its political content, its implications for participation and citizenship' (Kaldor 1997: 23).

Those who do take up the challenge of reframing the conceptual discourse are conscious of the dangers of the lack of self-reflection on the part of NGOs and the lack of conceptual clarity on the part of intellectuals which has led to confusion in practice. Jenny Pearce asks simply: 'What and who is your practice for?' And she reminds us that the 'failure to ask such questions has led to the false linguistic consensus of the 1990s and ... to an intellectual lazy reliance on a handful of concepts and words as a substitute for thought' (Pearce 1993: 12). She continues by arguing that if we are not guided by praxis, theoretical clarity and ethical practices, words can be defined by whoever chooses for whatever purpose.<sup>3</sup> The danger is that civil society is turned into a project by Western donors, instead of being seen as a process of complex interactions among different players; and in the absence of self-reflection on their own side, NGOs end up simply implementing the vision of donors. Thus, there is not one model, one discourse or one correct definition of civil society. Its very essence lies in its diversity, difference, spontaneity and pluralism. Hence, a polished dialogue with Mr/Ms Civil Society, a wish often expressed by governments and politicians, will never be possible. This is what distinguishes the Citizen (and its public space) from the Merchant and the Prince. Civil society is multilingual and cannot be taught one exclusive and particular language.

The philosopher W.T. Jones, pondering on the often ineffective character of the dialogical processes taking place between interlocutors concerned with the same subject, demonstrated that discontinuities in communication can be described in terms of pre-rational axes of bias on the part of the participants or schools of thought. These differences can be reflected in, among other things, policy and action preferences, and also in the preferred style of discussion.<sup>4</sup> Differences in position among people along an axis give rise to discontinuity which is difficult to manage in a rational frame of reference. Some of these axes include preferences as listed in the following table:

## PREFERENCES

<b>ORDER</b> System, structure, conceptual clarity	<b>DISORDER</b> Fluidity, muddle, chaos
<b>STATIC</b> Changeless, eternal	<b>DYNAMIC</b> Movement, explanation in genetic and process terms
<b>CONTINUITY</b> Wholeness, unity	<b>DISCRETENESS</b> Plurality, diversity
<b>PROCESS</b> Explanations subject to laws, defineable processes	<b>SPONTANEITY</b> Change, freedom, accident

This model can be useful when comparing the internal discourse of civil society with and about itself to the external discourse of global and international institutions about civil society. The compulsion of institutions is to what some term 'colonize' the language of civil society – to objectify, normatively define and compartmentalize the concept, whereas civil society actors often see themselves and their activities rather as a dynamic and fluid process. In fact, much of the critique from international institutions, like the WTO and IMF, relating to the limitations of 'dialogue' with civil society, is focused on the perception that civil society is non-static, ungraspable and ultimately undefinable. Where is Mr/Ms Civil Society, they ask? Since no one seems to step forward, except for some self-appointed old apparatchiks from former communist countries, governments and politicians strive to carry out their own 'civil society' expressed by their own language of civil society. The construction of frames to compartmentalize NGOs and civil society organizations has ultimately led to selective exclusion of certain groups from participation at the global institutional level.

*Institutional* definitions tend to rely on the preferences of order, continuity and process. From an abundance of relative classifications related to the WTO we could mention below the following as characteristic:

**Conformers:** those who accept present trade discourse, as well as aims and activities of the WTO. **Reformers:** those who accept the need for a global trade regime, but seek changes to current theory, policy or procedures. **Radicals:** those who seek to extensively change the WTO's scope, powers or even existence (Scholte 1999).

**Reformists:** those who seek minor reforms to the WTO for more openness, accountability and representation. **Stakeholders:** those who

seek representation stakes for a wider range of view points or interests. **Cosmopolitans:** those who seek more direct democracy and participatory structures (McGrew 1999).

**Responsive globalists:** those who accept globalization, trade liberalism and the WTO, but also accept the need for slightly wider input to and participation in WTO processes. **Participatory:** those who accept the above mentioned premises but want more participation for particular key changes; LINGOs (labour NGOs) typically take this view. **Reformists:** these groups vary in their degree of acceptance of globalization and the currently-constituted WTO, so they propose a wide range of changes to WTO's scope, subject matter, procedures, transparency, representativeness, and so on; most environmental NGOs and development NGOs fit this bill. **Radical critics:** those who fundamentally question the legitimacy of current trade and globalization mechanisms, thus proposing extensive changes to the present global order, without wanting abolition of all global trade or economic structures (Dunkley 2000).

*Non-institutional* approaches to definition tend to embody the preferences of disorder, dynamism, discreteness and spontaneity. We were able to differentiate according to the user's attitude quite a few languages of civil society. Some of the most outstanding are:

**The 'innovative':** the best example of this category is probably Anthony Judge, a language virtuoso. Other examples include John Keane, Jan Aart Scholte, Marc Nerfin, Ronnie Lipschutz and Manuel Castells.

**The 'patronizing':** the 'civil society language' of most intergovernmental organizations belongs to this category. An outstanding example is the IMF-initiated newsletter 'Dear Friend ...' and the entire process of 'accrediting' civil society organizations as partners in dialogue. Guy Verhofstadt's open letter is another good example (Verhofstadt 2001).

**The 'radical':** those who refuse the patronizing language and demand real participation in dialogues and decision-making at the global level. The best examples are the movements and networks categorized by multilateral economic institutions (MEIs) as 'absolutists' such as *50 Years was Enough*, *Greenpeace*, *Jubilee 2000*, *Ruckus Society*, etc.

**The 'global enthusiasts':** those who speak the 'pozy' language of Anthony Judge. Edward Comor's 'global civil society progressives'; John Keane's 'civil society purists'.

**'Civil society fakers':** 'I am Mr/Ms Civil Society!' A lucrative job for benefactors of former authoritarian regimes who have the skills and networks to create fake coalitions that they represent at national, European or global fora. This is particularly evident in post-communist, feckless democracies.

**The 'practical practitioners' of the 'third sector':** they rarely talk civil society explicitly and show little enthusiasm for theoretical civil society debates.

**'Theoreticians of civil society':** academics who do the opposite of the practical practitioners.

**The 'totalizing':** from Aristotle to Alan Greenspan, 'the whole world is civil society' including, of course, uncivil society!

**The 'empiricist':** 'statistics please!' Only measurable NGOs count. The rest is fantasy. Representatives of American mainstream social sciences literature are leading this group. They would be labelled as 'neggies' in Anthony Judge's classification. Those who are always sceptical for good reason. They actually help detect the mistakes and failures of others in the civil society literature.

There are obviously many overlaps between the users of these ways of speaking and these categories can, of course, be extended. The different languages used by rather influential representatives of the above-mentioned categories are reflections of the significance of this peculiar term and the new social, political and economic terrains it occupies. In order to better understand the expanding worldwide usage of the term 'civil society' one needs to discover the less obvious reasons behind its usage. Besides pragmatic and prescriptive work on the one hand, and grand historical-theoretical analysis on the other, the proposal to see civil society as metaphor offers one of the most genuine and convincing discursive formulations of this issue.

In a recent publication, Hakan Seckinelgin (2002) makes a sharp distinction between the meaning and image of 'civil society' in the 1980s advocated by East Central European intellectuals dedicated to social change, and the most recent use of the term that attempts to involve people in the process of development. Seckinelgin incisively observes that one must recognize the 'aspirational formation' of the concept which maps an intellectual situation, based on experience elsewhere, onto a target context (Seckinelgin 2002: 357). What he detects is that the usage of the concept of civil society this way combines two meanings: one is real life experience, the other is an imagined and desired, 'would-be'

reality. This general aspirational usage presupposes the reduction of different historic and political contexts to one ahistorical concept. This is related to Pearce's argument regarding the normative application of the concept. Seckinelgin defines the language of civil society employed by international development organizations and multilateral economic institutions (MEIs) as a metaphor. He argues that the process of involvement of civil society organizations by MEIs in the development context contributes to the spread of Western, neo-liberal social relations; in other words, it strengthens rather than changes the present state of affairs. The essential outcome of this process is the establishment of a 'new organizational culture based on Western sectoral divisions'.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Seckinelgin is adamant that each 'way of speaking a *civil society* ... reflects a way of distinct life and relations particular to that life' (Seckinelgin 2002:359). Using the ahistorical concept of civil society as a metaphor can be seen as an invitation to participation by the 'sender' of the message. The accepted invitation might create the impression of similarity between fundamentally different participants of the linguistic game (sender/recipient), thereby acknowledging a similarity that creates the impression of community (see Cohen 1980, cited in Seckinelgin 2002: 361). A crucial point in Seckinelgin's argument is that the message sent by the metaphor of civil society is not necessarily understood by the recipient in its complexity and could result in 'unexpected consequences for those who are ascribed to be civil society' (ibid.: 359).

According to Seckinelgin, besides the general, aspirational metaphor of civil society, it also plays a major role in signifying the 'intended' participants of the civil society discourse.<sup>6</sup> Explicitly and implicitly, the mindset, the cognitive map and the interest of donors or the 'sender' of the metaphor are some of the determinants of reality. Choosing and selecting the NGOs who are supposed to represent civil society is an attempt to create a certain kind of civil society or, using Seckinelgin's phrase, an attempt to reformulate the space for civil society. Therefore, the particular language of civil society used by the reports has a transformative effect on the existing civil societies of the recipients. It is clear from their documents and programmes that the World Bank and other MEIs recognize and 'accredit' their own civil society organizations according to what fits their criteria. They build and advertise their civil society model upon that empirical base. The civil society – and the civil society language – created are not only problematic and ungenue but also become a hotbed for further social, cultural and political tensions. International organizations have a great capacity to create and popularize concepts and images, especially by attracting the attention of the global media and influencing their member-governments in order to foster social changes and alter the way societies and their members function. Civil society is used, thus, as an attempt by international organizations to continue the 'process of civilization':

By using civil society organizations, an attempt is made to bring long-term socio-political change on the basis of Western experience. Therefore, the seemingly technical recommendations made by these international organizations, in which the metaphor is an agent of change for the social functions,... are actually political interventions, insofar as they intervene in the entirety of society for a change implicitly encoded in the metaphor (Seckinelgin 2002: 376).

However fine-tuned and precise it might be, this analysis encompasses only one part of the whole picture. Although conscious and unconscious attempts to further develop the process of Western civilization can be seen as powerful and potentially successful, the emerging post-national condition and information society/economy is profoundly different from the age of early capitalism. Influential international organizations, MEIs and others are seriously challenged by powerful social movements, ad hoc global alliances, and transnational networks of civil society. These new and old actors employ their own civil society language to shape reality, trying to carve out, occupy and dominate real and virtual social spaces with their own discourse and metaphors. The international or rather intergovernmental organizations – globalized representatives of the Prince and the Merchant – have formidable tools at their disposal, but lack the legitimacy of the nation-state which played such a decisive role in the development of Western civilization. In many ways they are more defensive, trying to attract, seduce or convince their chosen civil society partners (and through them a larger global audience) of their good intentions, usefulness, and inevitability.

### **Global Civil Society and Global Citizenship**

Vaclav Havel understands civil society as the universality of human rights that allow us to fulfill our potential in all of our roles: as members of our nation, our family, our region, our church, our community, profession, political party, and so on. In other words, by becoming citizens 'in the broadest and deepest sense of the word' (cited in Dahrendorf 1997: 58). Civil society, and the organically related concept of citizenship, therefore provide a protective umbrella, a guarantee of security, an experience of belonging, of home. Jeffrey Alexander voices a similar idea:

Civil society should be conceived as a solidarity sphere in which a certain kind of universalising community exists, it is exhibited by 'public opinion', possesses its own cultural codes and narratives in a democratic idiom, is patterned by a set of peculiar institutions, most notably legal and journalistic ones, and is visible in historically distinctive sets of interactional practices like civility, equality, criticism, and respect. This kind of civil community can never exist as such; it can exist only 'to one degree or another' (Alexander 1998: 58).

In our understanding, the key actor of civil society is the Citizen, for example, the sovereign individual who possesses rights and responsibilities and is ready to accept the rules of cooperation for the good of him/herself and the community, in this way sacrificing a part of his/her own sovereignty. However, there is no complete, strong and efficient civil society without the universal status of citizenship. It is the set of rights and capacities related to citizenship that guarantees a defence against *anomie* and protects against an over-indulgent market of turbo-capitalism. Dahrendorf characterises citizenship as the epitome of freedom, and civil society as the medium through which this freedom is projected, boosted and dispersed. It thus constitutes the home of the Citizen:

... citizenship and civil society go one important step further than elections and markets. They are goals to strive for rather than dangers to avoid. In this sense they are moral objectives ... (Dahrendorf 1997: 60)

Alexander calls our attention to the fact that although civil society is dependent on other spheres, the sphere of solidarity still enjoys relative autonomy (and as such should be studied independently). He reminds us that civil society cannot be reduced to the realm of institutions. The world of civil society is also the world of structured, socially constructed conscience, 'a network of understandings that operates beneath and above explicit institutions' (ibid.: 97). Alexander points out that the world created by the discourse is polarized. It offers the image of open society in contrast to the model of a closed, secretive, conspiratorial world. The symbolic characteristics on the positive side can guarantee the preservation of society; the networks of solidarity on the negative side serve the purpose of undermining mutual respect and destroying social integration.

Language, therefore, carries with it the danger of polarization and the creation of enemy images. The questions are always the same: Who is it that speaks in the name of civil society? Who delineates the 'insiders' and the 'outsiders'? Who distinguishes the 'good guys' from the 'bad guys'? Who has access to the necessary resources to sustain civil society? In societies that are in the early stages of democratic development, the danger is especially great. On the one hand, new enemies are created through the use of language and, on the other hand, the discourse of civil or open society can be kidnapped in a way that is not civil, not open, and not democratic.

For a long time analysis of the impact of civil society on citizenship remained within national boundaries and more recently within the European Union (see Callahan 1996: 1–25; Castells 1998; Davidson 1997: 33–56; De Swaan 1997: 561–75; Heater 1996; Huntington 1993: 22–49; Hutchings 1996; Walzer 1995). Theoretical and empirical analysis of the emerging global civil society was sporadic in the 1990s and started

to accumulate only around the turn of the century (see Lipschutz 1992: 389–420; Edwards 2002: 71–76; Falk 1995; Falk 1998: 99–111; Florini 2000; Kaldor 2003; Keane 2003; Magone 2000; Scholte 2002: 281–304). Most authors agree with Michael Muetzelfeldt and Gary Smith that analysing global civil society presupposes the analysis of global governance and the democratic deficit on the global level. They draw a parallel between nation-states and global institutions concerning their treatment of their corresponding civil society partners.

Just as states may facilitate or obstruct the emergence and development of national civil society, so too, global governance institutions may facilitate or obstruct an emerging global civil society (Muetzelfeldt and Smith 2002: 56; see chapter 6).

The 'mutually emergent approach' focuses on the interdependence among the major players in the global arena. Their main question, whether civil society is able to extend its reach 'in step with the globalization of markets and systems of governance, and with what effects?' (ibid.: 59) again echoes Nerfin's model and the most recent literature on global civil society.

Institutions of an emerging global governance such as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, focused both in their activities and their language on pursuing their original aim of developing and supporting global finance and trade markets. This socially and politically rather one-sided approach and behaviour went through a significant change during the second half of the 1990s. First the World Bank, then the IMF and the WTO recognized that they could not achieve their objectives any longer without trying to create some harmony between the economic, social and political aspects of global development. In order to do so, they had to convince some major players (INGOs and social movements) about the correctness of their activities. In other words, they had to enter a structured and regular dialogue with identifiable actors of global civil society. This has opened a new period of intermediate interfaces that gave impetus for both political debates and social scientific analysis.

Since the mid-1990s, there is a growing consensus among global civil society representatives that their activity can be instrumental in solving transnational issues which individual governments or intergovernmental organizations are unable to solve by themselves. This new optimism has been reflected in the recent literature on global civil society. Lester Salamon's (1994) phrase, 'associational revolution', whose significance equals for the author the emergence of the nation state, is a good example of the academic/activist optimism which provoked more support than contempt. As John Keane (2003) and others repeatedly point out, this optimism is often unfounded and reflects the growing desire of many

intellectuals to identify actors who are able to solve the mounting problems of the world. By the same token, it is hard to deny that there is an unprecedented shift on the global stage in activities and organizational capacities and as a consequence in achievements of global networks, movements and organizations, including ad hoc initiatives. Although the distinction between ungrounded and therefore sometimes irresponsible optimism from real progress and civil society empowerment is difficult to sustain, it nevertheless presents social science with one of its major tasks.

Jan Aart Scholte seems to be moving towards this direction and his challenging theory of civil society is largely based on an acute awareness of the need to cast doubt on traditional conceptual schemata. His starting point is that global civil society played an important role in recasting politics in the late twentieth century, since it offered new chances for the enhancement of security, equity and democracy in the contemporary world (Scholte 1999). Along with other authors, Scholte understands civil society to reside outside the boundaries of the market, yet he is aware of overlaps and interfaces. Dissatisfied with the negative definition of non-governmental organizations and the non-profit sector, he provides a more focused and practical definition, according to which '... civil society exists when people make concerted efforts through voluntary associations to mould rules' (ibid.: 7). 'Moreover', he continues 'a distinction is drawn between *civil society* which is seen as the collective noun and *civic groups*, organizations etc. [that] are [seen as being] the individual elements within civil society' (ibid.: 4). More explicitly put, 'civil society exists whenever people mobilize through voluntary associations in initiatives to shape the social order' (ibid.: 7). He believes, that further generalization is difficult since really existing civil societies are greatly varied and diverse.

Even if the history of transnational or international organizations goes back to the nineteenth century, global civil society is a relatively new phenomenon and global civil society 'talk' emerged only in the early 1990s (see Falk 1992: 219–39; Lipschutz 1992; *Citizens Strengthening Global Civil Society* 1994; Shaw 1994: 647–67). Global civil society surfaced with many related terms, such as international non-governmental organizations, transnational advocacy networks, global social movements, new multilateralism, and so on, heralding not only an associational but also a linguistic revolution. Scholte observes that among the different meanings associated with the new phenomenon of globality (internationalisation, universalization, Westernization, Americanization and deterritorialization), only deterritorialization can be seen as a distinctive trend which signals a turning point. Deterritorialization means that territorial locations, distance, borders, and so on, no longer have a determining influence. 'In global space, "place" is not territorially fixed, territorial distance is covered in effectively no time, and territorial

frontiers present no particular impediment. Thus global relations have what could be called a “supraterritorial”, “transborder” or “transworld” character’ (Scholte 1999: 7). Deterritorialization does not mean, however, that territorial geography has lost all of its relevance and, as Scholte emphasizes, ‘we inhibit a globalizing rather than a completely globalized world’ (ibid.: 9).

Territoriality and non-territoriality, as demonstrated in the case of the European Union and European integration, exist in a rich amalgamation and interdependence (Tunander et al. 1997). This coexistence, however, does not blur the fact that we are at the beginning of a new epoch where although ‘territoriality may continue to be important, globalization has brought an end to territorialism’ (Scholte 1999: 9). Inventing and introducing a new vocabulary, Scholte identifies globality as supraterritoriality and constructs his notion of global civil society accordingly:

If we identify globality as supraterritoriality, then what does global civil society involve? In short, global civil society encompasses civic activity that: (a) addresses transworld issues; (b) involves transborder communication; (c) has a global organisation; (d) works on a premise of supraterritorial solidarity. Often these four attributes go hand in hand, but civic associations can also have a global character in only one or several of these four respects. For example, a localised group that campaigns on supraterritorial problems like climate change could be considered part of global civil society even though the association lacks a transborder organization and indeed might only rarely communicate with civic groups elsewhere in the world. Conversely, global civic networks might mobilise around a local development like the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (ibid.: 10).

What are those new conditions that can be seen as responsible for the expansion of the vocabulary, the horizon and the further development of the language of civil society? And what are the causes of such an enormous change? First of all, there is the worldwide restructuring of power-relations, that is the rise of the postnational constellation, the emergence of new transnational units, cross-border frameworks and regional institutions. Scholte admits that civic associations operate regionally and in global spaces as well as locally and nationally, and consequently our notions of ‘civil society need to be recast to reflect these changed circumstances’ (ibid.: 285).

This conclusion is based on the recognition that we have reached a new epoch of global civil society development which is highly relevant for students as well as activists and clients (partners, interlocutors) of civil society organizations. The new vocabulary is a reflection of diversified meanings and, as a consequence, the language of civil society has gone through significant change: a new epoch gave birth to a new

discourse. This does not mean, however, that the remarkable intellectual and political history of civil society theory has become obsolete or irrelevant. Instead, the linguistically expanded development in civil society discourse throws new light on previous concepts and conceptualizations. Retrospectively, it is becoming clearer why the term had such rich potential from the very moment of its resurfacing in the second half of the 1970s in Latin America and East Central Europe (see chapters 6 and 7 above). This potential has been unfolding in present political and academic debates on global, transnational, European, and regional civil society, and is manifested in the 4.2 million shots on the Internet search of the different categories of civil society. The table below represents one type of categorization by subject. The breadth and variety available under the heading 'civil society' is impressive.

	Google.com	Questia.com	Amazon.com	EBSCO
European civil society	1.270.000	29.176	29	105
Trans-national civil society	229.000	213	1	52
Democracy + civil society	1.070.000	110	149	377
Language of civil society	1.280.000	32.556	22	29
Public spheres + civil society	143.000	7	0	9
Citizenship + civil society	388.000	49	68	98
Globalization + civil society	370.000	2	17	106
Development + civil society	2.170.000	34	74	461
Citizenship + civil society	388.000	49	68	98
Social movement + civil society	994.000	93	25	96
Networks + civil society	823.000	5	17	43
Governance + civil society	797.000	4	25	124
Media + civil society	1.630.000	21	25	86
Civic discourse + civil society	40.900	4	4	6

This result does not simply provide a *post festum* justification of the ongoing civil society debate in academia. It is rather an attempt to explain the perseverance and proliferation of the concept, on the one hand, and the growing demand of the market of ideas and intellectual innovations, on the other. It is a reflection of a broader and more fundamental social need and an expression of interest by various groups and associations in society to find the proper way to create a common denominator so their voices will be heard.

Civil society literature began to grow from the late 1980s and, with certain ups and downs, continued to accelerate through the 1990s. In the early 1990s there was a stronger tendency of scepticism about the usefulness of civil society as a social scientific category. Some authors

expressed strong opinions about the uselessness and inadequacy of the category, in the first place mentioning its blurred character and its normative and political-ideological loadedness (see, for example, Seligman 1992; Kumar 1994: 127–30; Gáspár 1994: 205–22). Many political and academic analyses in the 1990s revealed that it was a necessary but outdated and romantic expression of the heroic decade when the struggle was waged against weakening dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. Since – the argument goes – that epoch is over, we no longer need unclear, overstretched, value-loaded categories to describe or analyse economic transition and social democratization. These analyses believe that democracy and market economy sufficiently serve intellectual and analytical demands.

This assumption, however, proved to be wrong. As a result, from the mid-1990s onwards, we can observe a somewhat surprising growth and expansion of interest in the concept, both in the fields of praxis and in theory-building, as the abundance of literature shows. The old concept of civil society does, however, need restructuring since its meaning has gone through significant change. Scholte argues that consequently other related categories – first of all democracy – need to be reconceptualized under the radically new political-economic constellation, which Habermas (2000) calls postnational for good reason. Both democracy and civil society (not to speak of even broader categories, such as society) belonged to the era of modernity which overlaps with that of the modern nation state. Within this era, the natural unit of both political life and social analysis used to be the universally perceived nation state.

The nation state paradigm dominated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but the two world wars fundamentally undermined its claim of absolute sovereignty and relativised its practical usefulness. Although this constellation has significantly changed since the end of – and even during – the Second World War, the domination of the nation-state paradigm has survived fundamental changes and transition towards crossborder, trans- and supranational and even global structures first in the economic then in the political and social realms. The belatedness of the social-scientific world to grasp this fundamental restructuring is partly due to the rigidity and conservative character of our system of knowledge production and its institutions. This time lag in perception of changing realities contributed to the present cacophony of social scientific interpretations.

Already in 1992, Ronnie Lipschutz reasoned that ‘the growth of global civil society represents an ongoing project of civil society to reconstruct, re-imagine, or re-map world politics’ (Lipschutz 1992: 391). The emergence of global civil society at this particular juncture has been seen as a response to the ‘leaking away of sovereignty from the state both upwards, to supranational institutions, and downwards, to subnational

ones' and therefore as a 'functional response to the decreasing ability and willingness of governments to undertake a variety of welfare functions' (Lipschutz 1992: 399). The state, we should be reminded, had its origins not in the desire to provide welfare service, but rather to sell protection whether it was wanted or not. The Second World War destroyed the pact between society and the state because in its pursuit of security the state was willing to sacrifice millions of people. State incompetence with regard to managing highly complex problems (like global mass media, environmental problems, illegal arms trade), rather than the traditional ones of war and finance, has led to increasing the need for societal competence (*ibid.*: 399).

Integration, as in the case of the EU, has loosened the links between territory and collective destiny. Transborder solidarity networks were already strengthening during the 1970s and 1980s; and cosmopolitan bonds have been developing for centuries. The meaning of 'people' has certainly lost its unequivocal or predominantly nation-state-oriented character. Globalization, the process of European integration and the re-emergence of historic regions along with new crossborder Euroregions, are making claims for their own 'public'. Crossborder cooperation also strengthens 'supraterritorial networks' which provide new loyalties and regional identities. As a consequence, there is a shift in the 'geography of values' which supports the argument for an emerging global civil society. Identification with the nation-state as the primary social grouping has begun to wither in some places. At the same time identity based on consumption and the market was insufficient for establishing new identities. Therefore we have seen a rise in new forms of collective identities, new nationalisms in some places but also the creation of cosmopolitan identities and a global consciousness (Scholte 2002: 287):

Democracy is constructed in relation to context and should be reconstructed when that context changes.... Contemporary globalization constitutes the sort of change of situation that requires new approaches to democracy (*ibid.*: 285).

Scholte recognizes the democratic deficit on the level of global governance, and wonders whether and how civil society can contribute to reducing it, dynamizing the process of global democratization. More precisely, he is concerned with the role civil society could play in the context for a reconfigured democracy for global governance. In this approach, the distinctive feature of globalization is deterritorialization, in the rise of 'supraterritoriality':

Globality refers to a particular kind of social space ... a realm, that substantially transcends the confines of territorial place, territorial distance and territorial borders. Whereas territorial spaces are mapped in terms of longitude, latitude and altitude, global relations transpire in the world as a

single place, as one more or less seamless realm. Globality in this sense has a 'transworld' or 'transborder' quality. A supraterritorial phenomenon can appear simultaneously at any location on earth (ibid.: 286).

This theorization of the postnational constellation or 'supranationality' does not deny the continuity and significance of territoriality and its institutions and geographic as well as metaphoric identities. Scholte and others emphasize that globality has not taken over territoriality but territoriality no longer has the monopoly on social geography. One can argue about the unequal character of globalization along the faultlines of asymmetrical dichotomies such as urban–rural, South–North, affluent–poor, male–female categories, but 'globality' is an undeniable and significant phenomenon that has significant consequences for the social sciences, political praxis and social relations.

### Global Civil Society and Global Governance

As the wide literature on European integration has emphasized in the last decade, 'governance' involves many more layers than the State; and in contemporary multilevel (multicentred) governance civil society should play a significant role. Global governance, however, is not an embryonic form of a world government modelled after the modern nation-state. It appears that global relations are regulated without a single centre of authority. As a consequence, the governance of supraterritorial spaces is characterized by democratic deficit, since 'global governance is not democratically legitimate' (Scholte 2002: 292). Civil society, therefore, serves a different function than in the previous epoch and has to find new ways for establishing itself within this new global, postnational constellation. Many authors talk about the democratic promise of globalizing civil society which can give voice to stakeholders and even empower them, and by doing so enhancing participation on the global level; can contribute to the quality and scope of public education since the complexities and rapidly changing 'realities' of globalized information societies need permanent learning and education; can foster discussions about actual challenges of global governance – locally as well as on the supranational level; can contribute to enhancing the transparency of global governance; and can increase accountability. Altogether these opportunities, if realized, would give legitimacy both for global governance and for civil society actors playing on the global stage. Likewise, the engagement 'between civil society and regulatory mechanisms can ... enhance the respect that citizens accord to global governance' (ibid.: 294).<sup>7</sup>

During the 1990s, both the engagement and the representation of civil society organizations and networks shifted from monitoring to active

participation in governance (see Foster 2001; Edwards 2002). Benjamin Barber (2001) speaks about 'signs of an emerging internationalism' around transnational civil institutions, global social movements, and a world public opinion. There is a growing agreement in recent literature that an 'associational revolution' took place during the 1990s on all possible levels – global, regional, local. Although the development of social movements, NGOs and civil society organizations is uneven worldwide, their 'growth in number and reach around the world is unquestioned' (Salamon 1994: 113).

The move from monitoring to governing (actively shaping decision-making and participating in confrontative dialogues with decision-makers) is partly a result of the dramatically changed global economic and political constellations which led the UN to initiate a series of world conferences on the most contested issues, such as the environment, human rights, gender, and global economic policies. This opened up rather closed intergovernmental organizations or MEIs such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO towards dialogue and cooperation. It is also the result of a growing global consciousness and global sense of responsibility. It represents the changing values of an unprecedented and growing number of citizens who not only protest, gather and organize themselves across frontiers, but who are also consciously developing their networks of networks on a more or less permanent basis. Consequently, the World Conferences of the 1990s resulted in a cumulative vision of a desired future.

This growing discrepancy between words and deeds, between the civil society language used by representatives of the Merchant and the Prince on the one hand, and a genuine civil society discourse of self-organizing Citizens on the other, proved to be a creative confrontation and an expression of the growing role of civil society in settling global matters. Looking at the rewards of subsequent parallel summits and significant changes in global issues as a result of protest and structured criticism, Foster's claim that the associational revolution is extended by an organizational revolution on the side of civil society is strong.

Manuel Castells in *The Rise of the Network Society* (Castells 2000) offers other challenging and comprehensive conceptual tools of analysis. His main argument is that networks are the 'critical sources of domination and change in our society' (ibid.: 500) and consequently social morphology enjoys pre-eminence vis-à-vis social action.

... this networking logic includes a social determination of a higher level than that of the specific social interests expressed through the networks: the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power (ibid.: 500).

Castells sees the network society as a dynamic and open system that can innovate without undermining itself. The rise of the network society has

fundamental consequences for social relations, structures and institutions and redefines the dimensions, scope and boundaries of social action. In this continuously reshaped and radically new reality, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand the different roles of old and new actors, their inter-relatedness, interfaces and overlaps.

It is an open question whether civil society in its globalized, but still fragmented forms reflecting global inequalities in terms of participation and accessibility to technology, is capable or not of creating meaningful links of interdependence between individuals and social groups. The attempt is clearly present. The humanized aims of a global future are formulated, while the vocabulary of a global and local civil society is growing. However, different languages are spoken at one and the same time and the institutionalized forms and frames for a more systematic and structured dialogue are still missing. It is too early to tell whether emerging transnational, European and global publics and civil networks will be able to deliver enabling frameworks, institutions and fora which will be powerful and persistent enough to shape a new order of regional and transnational publics and contribute to what we could call 'global governance' with global civil society.

Intergovernmental institutions like the IMF, WTO, and World Bank have come under increasing pressure from criticism by a coalition of civil society networks with regard to their decision-making process and operations. This has resulted in attempts by each of these organizations to address in a variety of ways, with more or less success and sincerity, to engage elements of what they define as civil society actors in their discourse. Increasingly vocal and concerted criticism that fostered weaker and stronger attempts at dialogue can be reviewed in the framework of a general mistrust of organizations that operate in a culture of secrecy, and who are viewed as having destabilized and undermined economic development in developing countries for decades to the benefit of developed countries. The lack of transparency and exclusionary decision-making processes evidenced in their operations, and the human and social costs of their implemented programmes erupted in violent protests against these institutions in an unprecedented manner – unprecedented because of the cross-issue, transnational character of civil society's response. The message to the WTO, for example, by the Seattle to Brussels Network (a pan-European network of ninety-nine associations) was 'Shrink or Sink!'

The WTO, in its Marrakesh Agreement, provides the potential for relationships with NGOs in Article V (2):

The General Council may make appropriate arrangements for consultation and co-operation with non-governmental organisations concerned with matters related to those of the WTO.<sup>8</sup>

However, further guidelines adopted by the General Council of the WTO state:

... there is currently a broadly held view that it would not be possible for NGOs to be directly involved in the work of the WTO or its meetings. Closer consultation and cooperation with NGOs can also be met constructively through appropriate processes at the national level where lies primary responsibility for taking into account the different elements of public interest which are brought to bear on trade policy-making.

This expresses a typical argument against NGO observership as representatives of national interest groups whose concerns should be met at national levels. Another argument runs that the WTO is a forum for negotiations between governments not societies and a third, practical argument relates to the increased demand for physical space required by NGO presence and involvement. Smaller WTO members would then fear that most negotiations would be held in private, marginalizing them, and the sessions of WTO bodies would become mere public relations exercises. The IMF has also been reticent to open up its policy-making process to what they may observe as undisciplined if not openly hostile representatives of civil society.

In the contemporary context it seems evident that there will be increasing probability of conflicts between such institutions as the WTO, IMF and WB and the societies in which they work. More challenges to the system will be made, including the questioning of power relations. The challenge to these institutions takes the form of questioning their democratic structure and decision-making processes, their lack of transparency, legitimacy and capacity to deal with an increasing range of complex, interrelated and divisive issues. Besides securing better access to information emanating from the agencies which would increase the possibility of building public trust in their operations, inclusion of civil society promotes accountability at the global level. In the emerging arena of global governance, NGO-nized civil society has an important role to play (see Willetts 2002).<sup>9</sup> This new force on the global stage may be expected to increasingly influence the global agenda, decision-making and policy implementation.

Although the United Nations led in the engagement of civil groups in its proceedings,<sup>10</sup> today the World Bank, among the mentioned institutions, has made the most assertive attempt to speak the language of civil society with a high profile at least with regard to appearance. Its relatively new (as of 28 May 2003) website ([www.worldbank.org/civilsociety](http://www.worldbank.org/civilsociety)) could be taken as a model for the new discourse and resultant organizational restructuring. The World Bank boasts a Civil Society Team (CST), the Civil Society Group (CSG) and over eighty Civil Society Country Staff (CSC). The stated purpose of these new structures and the website is 'to provide CSOs with

COMPARATIVE TABLES OF NGO PARTICIPATION IN A SELECTION OF INTERNATIONAL BODIES

	WTO	ITO	ECOSOC (UN)	UNCTAD (UN)	CBD Convention on Biodiversity	UNCED (UN)	NGO-World Bank Committee	OECD	JPAC (NAFTA)
<b>Who selects the NGOs?</b>	Secretarial + Member States consent	Member States on rec. of the Secretariat	Member States on rec. of a Cite on NGOs composed of Member States	Member States on rec. of the Secretariat	Member States on rec. of the Secretariat	Member States on rec. of the Secretariat	The NGOs themselves	Member States on rec. of the Secretariat	Member States individually
<b>Main criteria for selection</b>	NGOs 'concerned with matters related to those of the WTO'	Expertise ECOSOC accreditation	Expertise Representativity UN's work and principles Democratic structure Accountability	Expertise Representativity UNCTAD's work and principles International structure	Expertise May be admitted unless 1/3 of the Parties present object	Expertise Representativity UN's work and principles Organic structure ECOSOC accreditation	NGOs elected by regional assemblies of NGOWB Expertise Geographical representativity International/ National structure	Expertise Representativity International structure	Criteria set by Member States individually
<b>Form of participation</b>	<i>Ad hoc</i> consultation	<i>Ad hoc</i> consultation + Advisory Committee	Consultative Status (General, Special, Roster)	Consultative Status (General, Special, Register)	Consultative Status	Consultative Status	NGO Advisory Committee at global and regional levels	NGO Advisory Committee – obs status at some meetings	NGO Advisory Committee
<b>Who administers NGO participation</b>	Secretariat	Director General	Secretariat (NGLS, UN Department of Public Info., etc.)	Secretariat (NGLS, UN Department of Public Info., etc.)	Secretariat (NGLS, UN Department of Public Info., etc.)	Secretariat (NGLS, UN Department of Public Info., etc.)	NGOs and Bank staff	Secretary-General + Liaison Committee with NGOs	JPAC Member + Council

	WTO	ITO	ECOSOC (UN)	UNCTAD (UN)	CBD Convention on Biodiversity	UNCED (UN)	NGO-World Bank Committee	OECD	JPAC (NAFTA)
Access to meetings of the org.	None except Ministerial Conferences	None except Ministerial Conferences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Can propose agenda items	No	Only for the Annual Conference	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Can speak at some meetings	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Circ. Written statements	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Access to information	NGOs only have access to unrestricted documents	Receive copies of all unrestricted documents	The Secretariat is authorised to distribute docs as appropriate in its judgement	The Secretariat is authorised to distribute docs as appropriate in its judgement	NGOs have access to official documents	NGOs have access to official documents	The Bank may distribute docs as appropriate in its judgement	The Secretariat is authorised to distribute docs as appropriate in its judgement	Members may receive information including confidential docs from the Secretariat, the Council and the Parties

Source: ICTSD, *Accreditation Schemes and Other Arrangements for Public Participation in International Fora*, International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, Geneva, November 1999.

information and materials on the World Bank's evolving relationship with civil society throughout the world'. This is taken in response to what the WB sees as the significant growth of civil society involvement in the area of international development which has led to partnerships that effectively reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development.

Even its strongest proponents acknowledge that the actual reality and the progressive potential of global civil society are very far from each other. Michael Edwards, who talks enthusiastically about the positive impact of global social movements on decision-making and their ability to reduce the democratic deficit of global governance, also soberly warns that the outcome of civil society involvement depends, among other factors, on whose voices are heard in global debates, and on 'whether civil groups are effective in playing the roles assigned to them in the evolving international system' (Edwards 2002: 72). The danger he sees is real: in the absence of accepted rules of the game, the loudest, the strongest, and the best connected groups will dominate the discourse.

Another often cited criticism is the lack of legitimacy and/or transparency on the side of global civil society actors. This claim may be exaggerated, since they represent their own views and values and should be judged upon their achievements and activities compared to their mission statements. There is, however, a strong tendency among internationally recognized, efficient and well-funded NGOs to develop a neo-liberal, bureaucratized 'professional' language, reproducing thereby power relations and hierarchies. Doubling the contested world is a self-generating way of co-optation.

Stanley Hoffmann provides an even bleaker view when he says that global civil society is still embryonic, and that NGOs have little independence from governments (Hoffmann 2002: 109). In addition, what we call 'global governance' is partial and weak, 'at a time when economic globalization deprives many states of independent monetary and fiscal policies, or it obliges them to make cruel choices between economic competitiveness and the preservation of social safety nets' (ibid.: 110). In contrast to Scholte and others, Hoffmann does not see the rise of a collective global consciousness or solidarity and as a consequence a sense of world citizenship, but he rather insists that in opposition to economic life, 'human identity remains national' (ibid.: 111).

The EU is viewed as rather weak in terms of institutions where the emergence of a supranational identity has just begun (see also chapter 6 above), and the United States as a hegemon unable to resist the temptation of unilateralism:

We live in a world where a society of uneven and often virtual states overlaps with a global society burdened by weak public institutions and underdeveloped civil society. A single power dominates but its economy could become unmanageable or disrupted by future terrorist attacks (ibid.: 114).

Edward Comor, another critic of global civil society enthusiasm, directs his attention not so much to the structural unevenness of the processes of globalization, but rather to what he calls the 'GCS progressives' lack of understanding, misinterpretation or superficial analysis of global communication, communication technologies and the deeper interrelatedness between information and knowledge. He stresses that most of the 'GCS progressives' neglect to see how information becomes knowledge and as a consequence they fall into the trap of Internet-fascination. Comor certainly brings an important insight into the global civil society debate, in arguing that

Human beings ... do not process information in ... necessarily 'rational' or instrumental ways. Instead, our mediating conceptual systems are shaped by lifestyles, work experiences, customs, language, mythologies – by cultures. (Comor 2001: 395)

Although it can be said that 'GCS progressives' have some intimation of the importance of culture, Comor rightly stresses that

... GCS literature generally tends to overestimate our collective capacity to be resocialized directly through communications and ideas, the power of individuals and groups to overcome the structural conditions of their lives, and the importance of spatial integration despite the related dismantling of time. (ibid.: 405).

Although Comor does not deny the significance of the new role of communication technologies, and their strategic usefulness as organizational tools, he warns that '... paradoxically they also weaken the reflexive capabilities of collectives, inspiring rapid mobilization but leaving little time for critical reflection' (ibid.: 405). Consequently, if global civil society is going to develop its own genuine language, it cannot be exclusively that of the Internet.

### Expanding and Narrowing Horizons of Civil Society

Even if much of the criticism mentioned earlier is well taken, it is hard to deny that an 'organizational revolution' is taking place beyond the surface of public events, street confrontations, and at parallel summits that one-sidedly attract the media. It is expressed by the expanding impact of the Internet (information, communication, shrinking of time-space); by growing networking among a great number and variety of locales; and by the re-emergence of transnational social movements, including civil society networks, and so on (Foster 2001: 6).

Beyond the teargas clouds of riot police and the violence of a small group of protesters (often coupled with police brutality), movements and broad alliances of NGOs, CSOs and concerned individuals have started to reshape global 'realities' and introduced new habits in dealing with world affairs. The worldwide civic movement against landmines, initiated by Jody Williams, enacted a treaty subscribed to by most nations; Jubilee 2000, an anti-debt movement, achieved putting international debt on the agenda of world leaders; a rapidly growing number of NGOs and CSOs are creating new alliances and gathering in transnational organizations such as the World Forum on Democracy, People's Summits at the WTO, or Summits of the Americas, and so on. Far from being 'one-issue movements', as were many of their predecessors from the 1970s and 1980s, these new social movements not only protest, network and raise a critical voice against outstanding injustices, inequalities or power monopolies, they have also begun work on 'alternative futures' (ibid.: 6), and for that they have started to create and develop alternative, transnational publics.

As Michael Edwards, the director of Governance and Civil Society at the Ford Foundation, reports, more than 49 million people joined the 'Hemispheric Social Alliance' to control the Free Trade Agreements of the Americas, and more than 30 thousand INGOs are active on the world stage, along with 20 thousand transnational civil society networks (Edwards 2002: 77). Edwards gives a clear answer to why civil society should be involved:

In theory ... civil society can make two contributions to effective global governance: First, improving the quality of debate and decision-making by injecting more information, transparency and accountability into the international system, based on a recognition that government and business have no monopoly of ideas or expertise. The Jubilee 2000 movement created enormous pressure for debt relief, but it also put new models and policy suggestions on the table that gradually worked their way into the international establishment.

Second, strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of decisions ... by providing a broader spectrum of those whose support is required to make them work. Governments can confer authority on decisions but rarely a complete sense of legitimacy, especially in a 'wired world' ... In this scenario, the weight of public pressure will be felt much more keenly by decision-makers ... and support from non-actors will be crucial in ensuring that decisions are actually implemented ... This was part of the rationale behind the success, for example, of the landmines campaign in 1997, the international certification of the diamond trade in 2000, and concessions at the Doha world trade talks in 2001 around intellectual property rights (ibid.: 77).

All of these civil engagements and crossborder, transnational networking activities, combined with a growing civic responsibility on the one hand,

and a growing global democratic deficit on the other, lead to strengthening the global representation of civil society. This occurs simultaneously with the articulation of common – globally shared – visions, goals and proposals.

From the early 1980s, when the concept was reintroduced by small circles of East Central European and Latin American dissident intellectuals, to the first decade of the third Millennium, civil society has travelled a long way. Myriads of networks, local, regional, global movements, NGOs, INGOs, and also donors, intergovernmental agencies, multilateral economic institutions and governments, are using it in their everyday parlance in order to attract a sceptical or reluctant audience and sell their policies as 'socially and politically correct'. It seemed for a while that after the relative success of the Velvet Revolutions of 1989, the concept would be forgotten and rendered useless by academia and politics as part of a heroic and short-lived period in East European and Latin American history.

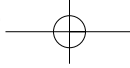
These expectations have partially been realized. Indeed, the mobilizing energies under the banner of civil society, together with East-West dialogue, began to evaporate in East Central Europe by the early 1990s. This left behind a vacuum and frustration. But the concept of civil society proved to be more durable and resilient than the movements of East European intellectuals. It found new places, spaces, forms and languages for its development. Against forecasts and expectations, it not only popped up in an East-West European form and perspective, but in more remote areas like Africa and Asia where it has become part of everyday language and research programs. Although many valid arguments can be made about the adequate or inadequate usage of the concept and its Western bias and origin (and we do need more social scientific, interdisciplinary analysis of its widespread usage and proliferating languages), it seems nothing can halt its linguistic and public expansion. In fact, this is the manifestation of a great need to reinterpret and partly replace the nineteenth century concepts of political and scientific analysis. Civil society, with its elasticity and 'in-betweenness' has proved to be the metaphor for fulfilling needs that come from different and sometimes opposite corners of our rapidly globalizing and evaporating realities. It can represent generically different social contents and political intentions and still offers a promising, deliberative framework for protest, compromise and legitimacy.

We conclude that the tension between the different languages of civil society and its users is inevitable. But, in fact, the very essence of the concept lies exactly in the creative potential conflicts among the different definitions and interpretations. The long chain of interpretations, reinterpretations, and subsequent emerging of new aspects and domains of civil society stem from the discourse generated by these conflicts and

are valuable contributions to the crystallization of a new understanding. This newly emerging understanding is a reflection of a rapidly changing reality which is fundamentally different from the realities which gave birth to theories of civil society in the eighteenth and later in the twentieth centuries.

## Notes

1. Nerfin warns that the UN considers 'NGOs as conveyor belts of intergovernmental or bureaucratic wisdom distilled from above, to the public which is seen as a passive receptacle' and believes that only 'full accountability' will help the third system to avoid the traps of bureaucratization and cooptation (Nerfin 1987: 189).
2. See the IMF approach in Dawson and Bhatt (2001: 11).
3. 'The use of the term as a normative concept, that is, what we would like civil society to be or what we think it ought to be, is often confused with an empirical description ... the constant slippage between the two in the development literature and in the practice of multilateral agencies, governments, and NGOs has contributed to a technical and depoliticising approach to the strengthening of civil society which ultimately has had political implications' (Pearce 1993: 14).
4. 'Global Strategies Project – Notes and Commentaries' in *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*, [http://www.uia.be/strategies/stratcom\\_bodies.php](http://www.uia.be/strategies/stratcom_bodies.php).
5. The author's strategy in order to 'unpack' this language and to understand the implied meaning 'beyond the veil of ahistorical aspirational form' (Seckinelgin 2002: 358) involves the analysis of two reports, one by the British Department for International Development (DfID 2001 – available online at [http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/tsp\\_government.pdf](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/tsp_government.pdf)) and one by the World Bank (2001). Both reports, whose major goal is to find efficient ways and tools to fight poverty, identify civil society with the sum-total of NGOs. The reports present 'Ngo-nized' civil society as a strategic ally of the private sector that 'can promote political empowerment of poor people, pressuring the state to better serve their interest' (World Bank 2001: 99–102).
6. 'The metaphor of civil society organizations is not a coincidence or an accidental construction. It is produced within a particular cultural context and it fits a certain understanding of civil society. It is clear that the reports posit a particular relationship between civil society organizations, the market and the state for the effective governance of people and their issues. Furthermore, they explicitly attribute an already decided role to the civil society organizations' (Seckinelgin 2002: 365).
7. Scholte is very explicit about the role of civil society in global governance: civil society can offer a means for affected publics to affirm that global governance arrangements should guide – and where necessary, constrain – their behaviour. Likewise, civil society can also provide a space for the expression of discontent and the pursuit of change when existing governance arrangements are regarded as illegitimate (ibid.: 294).
8. This should be compared to the text of Article 71 of the UN Charter: 'The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence'. In fact, comparison of the texts suggests that the WTO's inclusion of the word 'co-operation' reveals a more positive attitude had the article been implemented, which it has not. There are no consultative arrangements between the WTO and NGOs to date (see Willetts 2002).
9. Other successes can be found as well including the role of civil society in raising awareness of global environmental crises (global warming, protection of biodiversity)



which has been instrumental in bringing governments together to attempt to address these issues. Also, in Doha, NGOs and developing countries successfully united to confront pharmaceutical companies on the issue of patents against the objections of countries like the US, Germany and the UK (see Ritchie 2001).

10. Participation of NGOs in the UN system are characterized as: 1) unstructured, open access, 2) structured, open access, 3) indirect, open access through a network, 4) external campaigning by a network, 5) limited access to the secretariat, 6) limited access to delegations (see Willetts 2002).

