

## Review Article

# TRANSNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND ADVOCACY IN WORLD POLITICS

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Susan Burgerman. *Moral Victories: How Activists Provoke Multilateral Action*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001, 186 pp.

Ann Marie Clark. *Diplomacy of Conscience: Amnesty International and Changing Human Rights Norms*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, 183 pp.

Matthew Evangelista. *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999, 406 pp.

Ann Florini, ed. *The Third Force: The Rise of Transnational Civil Society*. Tokyo and Washington: Japan Center for International Change and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999, 295 pp.

Richard Higgott, Geoffrey Underhill, and Andreas Bieler. *Non-State Actors and Authority in the Global System*. New York: Routledge, 2000, 301 pp.

Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink. *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988, 227 pp.

Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds. *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 366 pp.

HOW powerful is transnational civil society? How sustainable is its influence? How desirable is that influence?" Thus Ann Florini (p. 5) encapsulates the important questions motivating not only her own edited volume but also a plethora of other recent works by international relations scholars examining the flowering of transnational advocacy. What then are the principal responses of this literature to these and other central questions? How does this most contemporary round of research deal with previous criticisms of earlier work?

This review article considers the above volumes to take stock of contemporary research on the role of transnational civil society advocacy in

\*The author thanks Christian Reus-Smit, Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom, Katherine Morton, and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

world politics.<sup>1</sup> I argue that this body of work contributes to a progressive research agenda that has met with a number of successive criticisms. In the process new areas of inquiry have opened up, including the need to afford a central place to normative international theory. I also contend that the focus of this research on the transnationalization of civil society provides a trenchant response to an important puzzle concerning the leverage of civil society vis-à-vis the contemporary state in an era of globalization. Further, the liberal variant of transnational advocacy research constitutes a powerful theoretical counter not only to other nonliberal theories that privilege other agents or structures but also to other varieties of contemporary liberal international theory, such as those privileging preexisting domestic preference formation or state-centric versions of liberal constructivism.

### I. WHAT ARE WE STUDYING?

Numerous terms are used to denote phenomena under consideration here—nonstate actors, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), transnational advocacy networks, transnational or global civil society, and so on. Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink usefully distinguish between transnational networks, coalitions and advocacy campaigns, and social movements, which respectively involve informal transnational contacts, coordinated tactics, and the mobilization of large numbers of people in protest (p. 7). Civil society in general is commonly employed to refer to a “third system” of agents, namely, privately organized citizens as distinguished from government or profit-seeking actors. Transnational civil society (TCS), the term employed by Florini, serves as an umbrella term in this article. It refers to self-organized advocacy groups that undertake voluntary collective action across state borders in pursuit of what they deem the wider public interest. Besides being distinguished from other transnational agents like private economic actors or government authorities institutionally empowered by the state, the term civil society denotes how they are also distinguished from other transnational actors whose prominence has of course exploded on to the global agenda with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Unlike terrorists and other transnational criminals (who might be said to represent elements of “uncivil society”), these actors eschew the deployment of armed violence for their ends. This makes their influence all the more

<sup>1</sup> It does so with the important proviso that the works under consideration are but a few of numerous other recent works in this genre.

of a puzzle, and it is this feature that animates the contemporary research program on transnational civil society. If you are a private citizen who wants to effect change in world politics without becoming a member of an armed group and resorting to violence, is there anything you can do?

The introductory essay of the Higgott, Underhill, and Bieler volume takes sensible notice of the difficulty in differentiating many private actors from states and state policy processes (p. 6). Such difficulties are particularly striking in Evangelista's analysis of Soviet scientists, who could not be considered private citizens, since in the socialist USSR they were all in the employ of the government. Rather than an analytical inconvenience, however, this is a tenet of the Gramscian school of international relations—that there is no such thing as civil society independent from state and corporate power. The Gramscians see civil society as intertwined in a hegemonic historic bloc. Although the Higgott, Underhill, and Bieler volume sets out to explore the plausibility of the Gramscian thesis, a number of the case studies presented therein do not support the sweeping assertions that civil society has been co-opted by the state or that the power of multinational corporations invariably carries the day in the era of globalization.<sup>2</sup> While hardly closing the door on the issue, such findings reinforce the utility of thinking of transnational activists in terms of the civil society sector.

## II. WHAT DO THEY DO AND HOW DO THEY DO IT?

A primary task of this research has been to establish that transnational civil society matters. Indeed the case studies in the volumes under review often take on some least likely cases and provide an abundance of powerful empirical evidence of the transnational vitality of the civil society sector. This evidence challenges the hegemonic pretensions of the chief theoretical contenders that privilege other agents or structures in world politics, such as the realist or neoliberal emphasis on the predominance of the state and the emphasis on the structural power of capitalism in an era of globalization.

What has TCS accomplished that would not have happened otherwise? Much, as evidenced in these works. Evangelista marshals path-

<sup>2</sup> See the following in Higgott, Underhill, and Bieler: David Levy and Daniel Egan, "Corporate Political Action in the Global Polity: National and Transnational Strategies in the Climate Change Negotiations"; Andrew Walter, "Globalisation and Policy Convergence: The Case of Direct Investment Rules"; Elisabeth Smythe, "State Authority and Investment Security: Non-State Actors and the Negotiation of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment at the OECD"; and Jochen Lorentzen, "Foreign Capital, Host-Country-Firm Mandates and the Terms of Globalisation."

breaking research to advance no less than the claim that transnational scientists prepared the ground for the peaceful end of the cold war through their peace activism on behalf of arms control issues including missile defense, nuclear testing, and conventional forces. His relentless attention to detail provides solid basis for his profoundly important claims that the “long-term education project” (p. 38) of scientists eventually paid off, given that the goal was to prevent global nuclear war between the U.S. and the USSR. As he states, “The transnational networks that have sought since the 1950s to tame the Russian bear by promoting disarmament and respect for human rights were ultimately successful” (p. 390). While it may be difficult to top the assertion that private citizens saved the world, the collective significance of the other case studies is that they tackle some of the most important and most visible goings-on in world politics and show that it is private citizens acting across borders who are front and center in the evidence accounting for outcomes. These include the end of state repression and atrocities in El Salvador and Guatemala (Burgerman), the halt to individual dam projects affecting millions around the world (Khagram, in Florini) or “little” victories such as the simple “realization that the man or woman concerned is not forgotten has often resulted in the prisoner receiving better treatment and an improvement in his conditions” (Clark, 6).

Nonetheless, it is no small puzzle that TCS has managed to achieve important effects, since civil society actors typically do not have at their disposal the military or economic power associated with governments and corporations (Sikkink, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 303; Florini, 10); nor do they deploy the violence that has been used to devastating effect by transnational terrorists. This by now well-worn truism—routinely invoked to set up the puzzling nature of activist influence—does have its limits and can now usefully be explored. For one, activists themselves can wield substantial financial power through tactics such as consumer boycotts.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, some private groups—whether the National Rifle Association or organizations advocating acceptance of the International Criminal Court—are well financed by governments or corporations or by international organizations, private groups, or foundations that are important TCS actors in their own right. All of this warrants further research, which may well undercut any claims of the autonomous power of civil society, since the grassroots fi-

<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Johnson, “Advocates and Activists: Conflicting Approaches on Nonproliferation and the Test Ban Treaty,” in Florini, 66; Elizabeth Donnelly, “Proclaiming Jubilee: The Debt and Structural Adjustment Network,” in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 162.

nancial support of groups like Amnesty International seems to face stiff competition from groups funded by a plethora of other sources.

In the course of establishing that TCS actors do matter, scholars have produced a large menu of what such activists do and how do they do it. Keck and Sikkink usefully summarize the range of goals such actors seek: to get an issue on the international agenda, to get international actors to change their discursive positions and institutional procedures, and to influence policy change and actor behavior (p. 25). Put theoretically, TCS actors seek to change not just the interests and identities (and thus practices) of actors but also the environments within which those actors operate—that is, the structures of power and meaning. Given the typical disadvantage at which such actors operate in terms of material power, much of the research examines how activists develop and promote ideas and international norms to change the policies and practices of governments, intergovernmental organizations, corporations, and civil society (Florini, 10–11). There is thus often considerable overlap or complementarity of this work with recent research on international norms. Constructivist work on the origins and importance of norms, particularly the first wave that sought to establish that norms matter, often focused (though not exclusively) upon the structural effects of norms. This led to the criticism that not enough attention was being paid to agency,<sup>4</sup> a gap that is directly addressed by this current work on transnational activists. In that sense a great value of the recent research on TCS is the way it complements the constructivist research program on norms, as well as the work of the world polity school of sociology, which similarly has been criticized for omitting agency from its structural accounts of global cultural scripts. In doing so, much of the current generation of research on TCS downplays the alleged constructivist-rationalist theoretical divide, and for good reason, in that most of the case studies demonstrate an eclectic mix of persuasive and instrumentalist tactics. Finally, among numerous other relevant research programs, research on transnational activism also has drawn upon and contributed to the social movements literature in comparative politics (Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, chap. 1). In short, this work, in applying different theoretical approaches to a subject domain, is evidence of healthy disciplinary and interdisciplinary progress and fertile complementarity.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey T. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," *World Politics* 50 (January 1998), 340–42.

The diversity of findings in the research testify to the difficulty of conceptually mapping *everything* such actors do and seek, though several major kinds of activities emerge: (1) agenda setting—identifying a problem of international concern and producing information; (2) developing solutions—creating norms or recommending policy change; (3) building networks and coalitions of allies; and (4) implementing solutions—employing tactics of persuasion and pressure to change practices and/or encourage compliance with norms. These books amplify the significance of TCS actors for world politics today in simply identifying and putting on the public agenda issues ignored by governments and corporations, while also offering the very conceptualization of phenomena such as “disappearances,” which had no name prior to their being addressed by Amnesty International as a category in their own right (Clark, chap. 4). Further, these books underscore the importance of well-organized and relatively dense networks to carry out their typical repertoires of disseminating information, engaging in persuasion, and exerting pressure.

Beyond supporting these more well established findings of the niche occupied by TCS, the case studies in these volumes are also suggestive of a number of other important conclusions. Regarding the development and implementation of new norms, one of the most powerful of these is the finding that such efforts are more likely to be successful to the extent they can be grafted on to previously accepted norms.<sup>5</sup> Thus, new international norms on extrajudicial killings quickly emerged once the issue was put on the international agenda, as there was no need to debate the already established human rights standards upon which this norm easily piggybacked (Clark, 113, 134–35).

There has long been an implicit debate about the value of producing treaties of international law that initially are very weak. What is the point, for example, of human rights treaties that have little or no provision for enforcement and that clearly have not eliminated human rights violations in regimes around the world? The argument for such treaties is that they sow the seeds of new norms that over time may become stronger; the argument against them is that they encourage an understanding among states that international law is not to be taken seriously. The tactic of initially creating weak framework treaties on environmental issues so that they can serve as the basis for more strin-

<sup>5</sup> The term “grafting” avoids the overly static connotations of “fit” or “resonance” while capturing the genealogical heritage of such normative branching that is glossed over by overly volunteeristic terms such as “framing”; see Richard Price, “Reversing the Gun Sights: Transnational Civil Society Targets Landmines,” *International Organization* 52 (Summer 1998), 628.

gent protocols has often proved successful, but we do not really know how often and to what extent such tactics work, particularly in other areas. To be sure, much of the research under review here demonstrates that, as weak as many treaties are, the conclusion that they have no effect at all is not warranted. Clark traces Amnesty International's efforts to achieve more ambitious political and legal objectives by building on smaller steps such as UN resolutions, which in turn provided openings for more specific norms on reaffirmed principles. Thus, she notes how Amnesty successfully invoked principles already accepted in the Universal Declaration for later campaigns; in this way even what are weak initial expressions can eventually become important rallying points (p. 69). Implied in this and other case studies (Burgerman; and Hawkins, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink) is the benefit of institutionalizing even initially weak norms.<sup>6</sup> To be validated, however, this finding would have to be balanced by case studies of initially weak efforts to establish new norms that were stillborn, languished, and/or faded away. It is in this sense that there is some merit to the oft-heard criticism that research on TCS or norms does not examine failures.

Confirming that weak new norms are better than no new norms would be no small finding, since it would weigh heavily in the ever-present debates between pragmatic and purist activists. But what exactly is one to conclude from these case studies on the virtues of compromise versus principle? Clark contends that Amnesty's success results from the organization's preference for principle over expedient compromises (p. 135), but Galtung's case study of Transparency International chronicles the success of a pragmatic insider strategy versus the principled outsider strategy. He describes how activists against corruption appealed to both principle and self-interest (pp. 25, 31) and steadfastly hewed to a policy of building coalitions to reform corrupt systems rather than to one of muckraking to expose corruption (pp. 24–25, 42–43). Nonetheless, the tactical choice detailed by Galtung ended in failure for some human rights campaigns (Clark). Rebecca Johnson provides an interesting possible path through this thicket, arguing that efforts of grassroots and direct actionists are likely to have greater value added when political conditions are unfavorable, whereas the strength of elite NGOs is in providing practical proposals. "In what can look like a good cop–bad cop routine, the grassroots and public movement

<sup>6</sup> For similar findings on the importance of norms initially perceived as very weak, see Daniel Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Thomas Risse, Stephen Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, *The Power of Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

campaigns target their messages and raise expectations; the resulting demands and pressure make the political decision makers insecure, which encourages them to turn to the incrementalists for 'reasonable' solutions and reassurance" (in Florini, 76). According to Johnson then, purists and pragmatists are both deemed to be right—Johnson contends that "growing numbers of abolition advocates now accept that incremental steps do not necessarily entail abandoning radical objectives" (in Florini, 78). The case studies are rife with such tensions. While these accounts are suggestive, we cannot really know whether we can substantiate such claims as a general proposition unless we systematically compare successes with failures along this dimension. Moreover, activists cannot always have it both ways, for as the case studies here chronicle, hard choices must often be made—with some of them ending in success, some in failure, and some in that large middle ground of compromise that pleases neither activists nor obstructionists. This question of the relative effectiveness of principle and pragmatism offers a rich avenue for further systematic research. It is one that necessitates engagement with normative international relations theory as will be seen below, since often what is at stake is what constitutes success—progress—or failure.

### III. WHEN AND WHY DO TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISTS SUCCEED OR FAIL?

We now have a long menu describing what transnational activists do and how they do it, though further variations on the themes will develop as campaigners continue to create new tactics, as new issues arise, as new political opportunity structures emerge, and as targets of activism develop innovative forms of resistance as a backlash. The contributions on this score as identified above are mostly descriptions and typologies of *how* TCS actors operate. But, as with the initial wave of constructivist research on norms, to answer the next generation of criticism this work must address the explanatory question of variation: *why* do some campaigns succeed sometimes in some places but fail in others? Individually, numerous authors address this question, both here and elsewhere in the literature. In doing so their work demonstrates fruitful progress in our understanding of TCS influence in world politics, especially since the earlier work in the genre typically did not attend to such questions.

Burgerman proposes "an interacting set of necessary conditions" for the success of human rights groups in forging peace agreements: the existence of relevant international norms and transnational activism;

the existence of elites in the target state that have control over the armed forces and that have concern about their (country's) international reputation; and the existence of organized domestic groups linking up with transnational activists. Added to these propositions is the sensible if unremarkable condition that "if a major power maintains overriding security or economic interests in the target state, it can inhibit the enforcement of human rights principles and agreements" (pp. 4-5). Burgerman's generic template is a useful first cut of determinants of success, particularly for her specific issue of respect for human rights during civil conflict. To fully understand the conditions for success more generally, however, one needs to push some of the explananda back another level and expand the template. Thus, we would want to know how it is that decision makers can be made to care about reputation, since this variable is so much of a factor in the explanations not just of Burgerman but of many other authors as well. How do decision makers come to be persuaded that the costs of violating norms are unacceptably high or that such actions are intolerably wrong? To expand this menu more generically, we can draw upon Keck and Sikkink and usefully group the principal factors that condition success according to the characteristics of the activists, targets, and issues.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF TRANSNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY: AUTHORITY AND LEGITIMACY

The books under review all focus on authority as the key source of influence of transnational activists. Indeed, the very title of the Higgott, Underhill, and Bieler volume promises much in this regard. Unfortunately, however, the volume does not address the issue systematically within the case studies; nor is there a synthetic concluding chapter. But individual case studies in these various books further establish empirically that transnational activists derive their authority from three principal sources: expertise, moral influence, and a claim to political legitimacy. The former has been well established in the literature, at the very least since Peter Haas's project on epistemic communities, which showed how scientist-activists gain access and a hearing by virtue of the authority wielded by science in the modern world.<sup>7</sup> Similar is Evangelista's account of how scientist-activists gained their access and had their voices heard seriously by leaders in the highest of political offices of the chief cold war adversaries, and how civil society experts came to

<sup>7</sup> Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization* 46 (Winter 1992).

be included in the World Commission on Dams (Khagram, in Florini, 105). To disarm the rival rationalist explanation that scientists are merely used by politicians for their preferred policies, Evangelista skillfully reports occasions of scientists telling decision makers *the opposite* of what they wanted to hear yet still having profound influence on security policy. This source of influence relies upon the status of experts as providers of objective knowledge; where such objectivity is compromised, often so is their influence.<sup>8</sup>

The cases in these books suggest that the influence of activists deriving from expertise is often most pronounced in the prenegotiation phase of an emergent norm. This can be at the time of the initial drafting of a treaty, but more often it revolves around the genesis and circulation of new ideas that later become embodied in policy or institutional change. Clark, for example, shows that as negotiations entered crucial phases, civil society actors were increasingly squeezed out of the formal process (p. 62). Exceptions do occur, however, and this research documents the occasional participation of civil society experts in government negotiation delegations (Risse, in Florini, 185)—even in negotiations on security issues, which are usually believed to be an arena particularly impervious to direct civil society influence (Johnson, in Florini; Evangelista). There is a need for systematic research on the practice of including civil society actors in government negotiation delegations. To what extent have such activists joined government negotiating teams at the international negotiation table? For how long? How often? On what issues? And in what capacities? Such research should include systematic comparison of the role activists play depending on whether they are let in or shut out of the formal treaty process. This would enhance our understanding of the utility of insider versus outsider tactics. To the extent that further research finds that formal state negotiators pay heed to articulated or even anticipated demands of activists even when they are formally shut out, a more structural (as opposed to purely agentic) influence for transnational civil society would be suggested. Research could also examine the possibility that the security arena has become somewhat less impervious to the more direct influence of civil society actors in the post-cold war era, or whether such practice was in fact more pervasive in other periods in history. Finally, more systematic research could examine the origins of the decision-making rules and procedures of conferences and treaty negotiations: are these largely set

<sup>8</sup> Diane Stone, "Private Authority, Scholarly Legitimacy and Political Credibility: Think Tanks and Informal Diplomacy," in Higgott, Underhill, and Bieler, 211.

by statist or corporate imperatives, or has civil society had an important impact? Why are some decisions made by consensus (Clark, 61) while others are made by simple majority or two-thirds majority votes? Khagram contends that the World Commission on Dams (composed of leading members from social movements and NGOs, academia, the private sector, and government) is arguably “the most innovative international institutional experiment in the area of democratic governance for sustainable development today” and that it “could pave the way for a wave of novel multi-stakeholder global public policy processes in the twenty-first century” (in Florini, 105). The feasibility of emulating such multistakeholder models identified in this research is worth further consideration, but before doing so we would want to know: who selects the commissioners and how?

As evidenced throughout the other books under review, it is not just scientists and technical experts but also human rights activists who depend for their legitimacy upon their reputation as providers of objective expertise, as neutral third parties whose information and claims can be trusted. Clark argues that Amnesty International’s legitimacy and thus its influence depend upon its reputation as a “disinterested” “third party” actor (p. 11) with expertise, one that “has refused to play politics” (p. 19). She makes much of Amnesty’s “conscious effort to remain politically impartial by, first, taking no stand on political questions and, second, working for the rights of individuals living under any type of government” (p. 12).

This moral authority (Sikkink, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 312–13) is a prime factor in the influence of transnational activists. That is, decision makers and/or citizens often believe that activists are not only (objectively) right in the sense of providing accurate information but also morally right in the purposes for which such knowledge is harnessed. One must be careful, however, to distinguish the relationship between morality and expertise and between principle and power, lest analysis lead the conclusions astray. Clark’s analysis threatens to cross this line in claiming that Amnesty’s activities are neutral and not political, concluding that a “less politicized atmosphere” is therefore more conducive to the origination of norms (p. 122). Demanding respect for individual human rights is of course anything but neutral. Indeed, it is quite the opposite, as Thompson points out in her analysis of campaigns for women’s rights that are routinely depicted in some parts of the world as tools of Western cultural imperialism (in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink). Similarly, the formulation that civil society relies on “principles rather than power” (Clark, 126) should be avoided inso-

far as it encourages the unhelpful dichotomy between ideas and power. The other volumes demonstrate abundantly that moral principles are a form of power (Florini, 10; Sikkink, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 303–4). Their enactment empowers some actors and not others, and while many techniques of TCS are persuasive as opposed to coercive, some of them are not: shaming and boycotts are clearly forms of coercion designed less to persuade than to change the cost calculus of targets, for example, the recent anti-WTO demonstrations. Civil society is usually handicapped in its access to brute material power. But that does not mean that it is powerless. The important question is the extent to which civil society influences even the coercive mechanisms of power usually assumed to be monopolized by the state.

A final issue concerning the authority of transnational civil society actors is the acceptance of their role in bringing information and moral concerns to light. As noted by Paul Nelson (in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink), this legitimacy can derive from claims to represent affected communities (for example, of the global poor, the South), to represent a domestic constituency, or to be official participants in institutionalized political processes (p. 141). This basis of authority has proved to be the lightning rod for those critics of increased TCS influence who have voiced concerns about the accountability of transnational activists.<sup>9</sup> These concerns contain several elements: the internal concern that NGOs are not democratic or accountable (transparent) organizations (Sikkink, in Khagram, 306, 314); that they are not representative and may reflect global disparities of influence, particularly a North-South divide (Sikkink, in Khagram, 307–8); and that their activities may subvert legitimate avenues of politics. These studies signal the potential of these issues to detract from the power of TCS actors, since so much of their power hinges on their legitimacy as agents addressing (not producing their own) democratic deficits. As such, activists ignore this concern at their peril. Sikkink (in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink) offers the interest-group model or professionalization model as useful suggestions for NGOs to consider in enhancing their representativeness and accountability (p. 315).

Still, the analyses in these volumes suggest that the third concern at least verges on disingenuousness, for a number of reasons. First, the criticism makes no sense unless we ask: compared to what are TCS actors deemed to be less accountable? To the influence of multinational corporations over domestic and international political processes (as if

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., David Rief, "The False Dawn of Civil Society," *Nation* 268 (February 1999).

they are democratically accountable)? The very fact that civil society activism is needed is often testimony that these actors are responding to democratic deficits in existing institutions. This is not to say that they cannot manifest their own problems of representation, but Thomas Risse puts the matter succinctly in pinpointing the source of TCS moral authority discussed above: "Moral authority is directly related to the claim by transnational civil society that it somehow represents the 'public interest' or the 'common good' rather than private interests" (Risse, in Florini, 186). The criticism that civil society activists are unrepresentative deflects hard questions away from the legitimacy of existing political institutions as if they are unquestionably representative, when it is the very unresponsiveness of such institutions that creates the conditions for TCS activism in the first place. Should TCS not be having even this influence then, when governments or international organizations like the IMF are failing to respond to what many perceive as the broader public interest, such that private citizens feel the need to jump start existing political processes?

Finally, there seems implicit in this criticism a view that transnational activists are to be seen as a serious rival to the power and processes of the state (otherwise the criticism would be gratuitous). Such actors would warrant concern of unrepresentativeness in the second sense to the extent they usurp legitimate political authority through undemocratic means. In cases of efforts by civil society to move authoritarian regimes toward greater democracy and transparency, TCS efforts may indeed challenge existing political authority,<sup>10</sup> but it is an authority that critics of the democratic credentials of NGOs must agree is not legitimate. Moreover, while the goals of TCS actors may include revolutionary goals such as "transforming the dominant processes of policymaking" and "structures of corporate capitalism,"<sup>11</sup> the close empirical work examined here—seeking as it does to document the full power and successes of TCS—falls short of substantiating worries of the impending usurpation of the state. Indeed, none of the authors here suggests that the state is about to disappear: the point is simply that we cannot understand some key outcomes in world politics without taking account of the influence of TCS actors. Given the power

<sup>10</sup> As chronicled in particular by Chetan Kumar, "Transnational Networks and Campaigns for Democracy," in Florini; and James Riker, "NGOs, Transnational Networks, International Donor Agencies, and the Prospects for Democratic Governance in Indonesia," in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink.

<sup>11</sup> See, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, Smitu Kothari, "Globalization, Global Alliances, and the Narmada Movement," 238, 232; and August Nimtz, "Marx and Engels: The Prototypical Transnational Actors."

of the state, the objective of TCS is overwhelmingly “not to replace governments or usurp their decision-making authority but to inform and persuade governments and businesses to adopt or abandon certain policies or positions” (Johnson, in Florini, 77).

Research on TCS thus demonstrates that posing the issue of globalization in terms of whether TCS (among other actors) is replacing the state is far too simplistic. Often what occurs is a reconfiguring of state-society relations, and as numerous authors note, this can simultaneously empower the state in some respects while empowering civil society in others.<sup>12</sup> The same holds for international institutions. Nelson and Donnelly find that while activism directed at the IMF and World Bank have had some successes, it has come at the price of enhancing IMF and World Bank influence over the debt-reduction process and through making financial assistance conditional on domestic policy change (Nelson, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 149; and Donnelly, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 166). Thus, this research demonstrates that posing the issue in terms of whether TCS is displacing the state—as a metric to determine whether TCS is worth taking seriously—misconstrues the issue.<sup>13</sup> Scholars must now turn to more refined questions about the trade-offs involved in TCS dealing with the state and their implications, some of which are taken up below.

#### TARGET CHARACTERISTICS: POLITICAL (OPPORTUNITY) STRUCTURES AND CULTURE

Research on the success or failure of transnational activism often turns to domestic structures and culture to explain variations in success when the targets are states.<sup>14</sup> A key finding is that transnational activism may be insufficient to produce change without the opportunity provided by government leaders who are sensitive to their state’s reputation (Evangelista, 166). As Burgerman argues: “A violator state will comply with human rights norms only if a key element of its domestic political elite, one capable of exerting its authority over armed elements, perceives itself to be vulnerable to human rights condemnation or has concern for its country’s international reputation as a violator state” (pp. 5, also 50–54, 80, 125). A similar claim is made of corporations: campaigns are more likely to succeed against firms with products vulnerable to the

<sup>12</sup> See, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, Karen Brown Thompson, “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights,” 118; see also Price (fn. 5), 641–42.

<sup>13</sup> Christian Reus-Smit, “Imagining Society: Constructivism and the English School,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 4 (October 2002), 504.

<sup>14</sup> Less systematic attention has been devoted to variation in the success of activism directed at different kinds of intergovernmental organizations.

costs of a damaged reputation (Keck and Sikkink, 209). Concern for reputation may mean sensitivity to costs as per the expectations of rational choice theory or a more internalized sensitivity to identity as per the constructivist account (such as Japan's concern over its international reputation in banning land mines; see Mekata, in Florini).

This important claim that successful transnational activism requires elites and key decision makers concerned about international reputation raises some interesting issues. Does this key finding suggest that transnational advocacy is likely to work best where it is needed the least (Sikkink, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 312)? And does this suggest that the prescription to be taken from this finding is that activists, given limited time and resources, would be wise to aim at the targets most likely to produce results? Following the important work of Risse, which in turn drew upon the domestic structural analysis of Katzenstein, Evangelista in his "hard case" of the USSR dispels this notion by finding confirmation for the argument that activist influence in a "strong state"—with powerful centralized political institutions—is unlikely but can be very powerful once access is gained (p. 8). Conversely, "decentralized, fragmented states provide multiple points of access to policy entrepreneurs and their innovative ideas, but they have difficulty implementing the new policies" (p. 19).

Numerous accounts of the successes or failures of activism interestingly point to the important role of conjunctions of changes in domestic governments as facilitators of or insurmountable obstacles to change. Numerous case studies chronicling campaigns in the 1990s note the effect of a conjunction of left-of-center governments coming to power throughout the Western democracies (Florini, 214; Elizabeth Smythe, in Higgott, 86). Did this period represent an anomaly, a unique international political opportunity structure<sup>15</sup> in the balance of power that underpinned some dramatic apparent successes such as agreement on the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Landmines Convention? Was this just a happy coincidence for advocacy campaigns, or related to some more fundamental political processes already under way? Is rollback possible with a contrary conjunction of "like-minded" "regressive" states or likely with a unilateralist hegemon such as the United States administration of George W. Bush? These issues become crucial when considering developments

<sup>15</sup> Political opportunity structure is a key concept explaining success or failure in the social movements literature; see, among others, Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For applications to transnational activism, see Keck and Sikkink, chap. 1; Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, chap. 1.

such as the rise in Europe of anti-immigrant parties or the future of support for initiatives such as the International Criminal Court: do such conjunctions feed upon one another, and what role does civil society play in how they are forged or broken?

Evangelista's analysis provides some intriguing evidence that conjunctions of reformist or hard-line governments may not be mere accidents. He shows how a tacit axis of hard-liners often produced a powerful force legitimizing the policies of both sides during the cold war. Reformists are particularly vulnerable in such situations, for if their accommodations do not yield reciprocal responses, their efforts at change may be discredited and even ultimately precipitate their fall from power. What he also shows, however, is that the engagement strategy pursued by private citizens advocating reform in the face of cold official government relations ultimately proved powerful in undermining such tacit alliances of hard-liners. In that sense, Evangelista provides evidence challenging the contrary prescriptions of isolation, boycotts, sanctions, and the like to prod change. The issue points to the need for more systematic research to determine the relative success of the contrary advocacy approaches of engagement and isolation, especially since this research indicates that in different subject domains divergent approaches are preferred by activists.

Another way in which such tacit alliances of ideologically compatible governments occur can be attributed to the role of transnational civil society itself. A major conclusion of this research is that TCS is much more likely to be effective where there are organized domestic groups in the target states that can "keep their issues on the international agenda and to provide information to international allies" (Burgerman, 5, 60; Clark, 95; Galtung, in Florini, 35; Khagram, in Florini, 86–87; Risse, in Florini, 186). Sometimes these groups are established relatively independent of transnational linkages (Khagram, in Florini), and sometimes transnational linkages can even discredit domestic groups accused of being dupes of imperialistic outsiders (Thompson, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink). However, domestic activists often draw powerful support from such linkages that not only strengthens the particular organization in question but may also have a broader impact in invigorating the civil society sector more generally in a particular state. As Karen Brown Thompson argues: "The processes themselves, and not simply the resultant norm, are socially consequential in that they construct particular kinds of state-citizen relations" (Thompson, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 96). In her case of women's rights, this often meant "bringing women into public life and bringing state authority into

family relations" (p. 97). Similarly, Clark traces how Amnesty International's emphasis on using its members to lobby their own governments fostered the growth of Amnesty organizations within countries (p. 47), while Mekata notes that the powerful transnational civil society movements such as the International Campaign to Ban Landmines can empower a domestic civil society as in the case of Japan (Mekata, in Florini, 171). Thomas (in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 78) provides an interesting twist on the theme by documenting how the Helsinki Accords eventually led to the establishment of a new human rights bureaucracy within the U.S. government. In short, domestic structural analyses are valuable in accounting for different experiences in the reception of transnational activism: domestic civil society allies are typically crucial for the success of transnational activist campaigns; in their absence the only avenue is elites who care about their country's reputation. At the same time, however, a number of scholars are sensitive to the warning from critical international relations theory about employing such structural accounts too statically; instead these scholars often show how civil society groups not only depend upon but also foster the very growth of participatory politics upon which their success in turn often depends. That is, activists not only try to make use of the political opportunity structures they are presented with but they also try to make those opportunity structures themselves. In that sense, democratization can be seen as both a contributing cause and an effect of the expanding role of TCS.

This holds as well for the structure of transnational campaigns. The existence of domestic groups in target states linking up with transnational activists can also contribute to the broadening of the activist network or coalition, which in turn enhances its legitimacy and broadens its power. This research shows how transnational activism has often been dominated by members of Western/Northern NGOs, a feature that can inhibit its ready reception in the South (Nelson and Donnelly, both in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink). The active participation of voices from the South in a campaign helps ensure that the campaign's content and its message are more broadly compatible with Southern interests and sensibilities; such participation also translates into greater authority since it broadens the claim to representativeness.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Sanjeev Khagram, "Toward Democratic Governance for Sustainable Development: Transnational Civil Society Organizing around Big Dams," in Florini, 86. This was crucial to the success of the land mines campaign; see Max Cameron, Brian Tomlin, and Robert Lawson, eds., *To Walk without Fear* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998).

This points to a second major argument explaining variations in success in the reception of norms pushed by TCS, namely, that such efforts are more likely to be successful to the extent they fit, or can be made to fit, the cultural context of the target. All other things being equal, this thesis of the importance of “fit,” “issue resonance,” “framing,” or “cultural match” has strong support in the literature—with the proviso that it not be employed too statically.<sup>17</sup> After all, the strong version of the proposition overlooks the central point of the TCS literature—that cultural contexts are not simply found but are made through the politics of activism of the sort analyzed here. Thus, what is posited as an exogenous independent variable is in this respect also a dependent variable. As such, this explanation is most effective when employed comparatively to account for variations in outcomes under otherwise similar conditions, such as differences in success across different issues within a single country.<sup>18</sup> The cultural match thesis has its limits as a predictive tool, since in its most static applications it simply posits resistance to significant changes, the likes of which sometimes do occur.<sup>19</sup> Still, the insight carries utility in two respects. It is of analytical use since, even when employed with due concern for the dangers of an overly static and essentialist conception of culture, cultural rejections of transnational activist activity will still be found. Practically, the insight is ignored by would-be activists at their own peril, since crassly ignoring domestic cultural sensitivities will almost assuredly doom many a campaign to failure. In the battle between rational choice and area-studies specialists in comparative politics, this finding suggests a crucial need for the latter, since it is difficult to understand how a successful grafting of an issue can be achieved without a profound understanding of subtle cultural and linguistic markers of a given community. Completing this agenda would be consideration of nonstate actors not just as the producers of norms but also as their recipients: under what conditions do nonstate actors like rebel groups agree to conform to initiatives of TCS, and are they different from those for other actors?<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See Petrice Flowers, “International Norms and Domestic Policies in Japan: Identity, Legitimacy and Civilization” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2002); Keck and Sikkink, 204; Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom, “When Strangers’ Help Is Not Welcome: Foreign Assistance and Domestic Norms in Russian Civil Society” (Manuscript, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, September 2002).

<sup>18</sup> See Flowers (fn. 17); and Sundstrom (fn. 17).

<sup>19</sup> Compare, e.g., Checkel’s prediction in a March 1999 article that Germany’s culture would make that state highly resistant to meaningful changes in immigrant citizenship policy with the changes that did take place in May of that year; Jeffrey Checkel, “Norms, Institutions, and National Identity in Contemporary Europe,” *International Studies Quarterly* 43 (March 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Thus, research could examine questions such as why some rebel groups have agreed to stop using land mines whereas others have not. See David Capie and Pablo Policzer, The Armed Groups Project (2003) (<http://www.armedgroups.org/home.htm>).

In terms of international structure, a striking finding is that a number of advocacy campaigns have had some successes despite the lack of support of the great power states in the system. Particularly noteworthy were the coalitions of like-minded countries crucial to the successful negotiation of the Landmines Convention and International Criminal Court statute. While much has often been suggested concerning the novelty and power of what may be an era of “new diplomacy,” the analyses in this recent research suggest that such developments may not be entirely unique to the post-cold war period (Clark, 66).<sup>21</sup> An interesting study might examine the relative historical degrees of success of efforts to establish new norms and practices without the support of key powers. This could provide some guidance as to likely parameters of success of post-cold war initiatives taken without the superpowers, such as the ICC or the Landmines Convention. Are they hollow victories of TCS?

Finally, Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink have made a persuasive case that political opportunity structures should be thought of not just in domestic terms but also in international terms. They posit the existence of established international norms, institutions, and organizations as an important variable affecting the chances of activist success; and numerous case studies in their volume support this proposition (pp. 18–20). We could also consider recent technological developments in such terms, since it is often claimed that they have played to the advantage of transnational campaigners. Very conspicuous by its absence in these volumes, however, is sustained attention to a decisive impact of the internet and world wide web. While public lore of their revolutionary impact has been built around reference to cases such as the Landmines Campaign, the WTO protests in Seattle, or opposition to the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), the importance attributed to such factors in many close empirical studies is, by contrast, decidedly unremarkable. Indeed, it is striking that mention is rarely made of the role of the internet in these volumes with but a few passing references to its facilitative role (Donnelly, in Florini, 220–24).<sup>22</sup> As such, the empirical jury is still out on claims such as Ronald Diebert’s that the “hypermedia” environment disadvantages the centralized and hierarchical security arrangements characteristic of states and favors transnational civil

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the question about whether TCS activity per se is new or not can now be laid to rest, since historical antecedents are legion and more will no doubt be found; see Keck and Sikkink, chap. 2; Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 20–21.

<sup>22</sup> Craig Warkentin offers a descriptive and typological exercise without explanatory purchase; Warkentin, *Reshaping World Politics: NGOs, the Internet, and Global Civil Society* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

society networks.<sup>23</sup> Further detailed empirical work needs to be done to substantiate these propositions and to examine the ways in which states, intergovernmental organizations, and corporate actors have been able to utilize new communications technologies to their own advantage and/or have been changed themselves in the process.

#### ISSUE CHARACTERISTICS

Is transnational civil society activism likely to be more successful on some issues than on others? Over the years a number of propositions have been put forward that focus on the intrinsic nature of an issue for the success of efforts to build new norms.<sup>24</sup> More recently, Keck and Sikkink have argued that “issues involving bodily harm to vulnerable individuals, and legal equality of opportunity—speak to aspects of belief systems or life experiences that transcend a specific cultural or political context” (p. 204) and thus appear most prominently in successful campaigns.

It has long been suspected that activists’ efforts are apt to be most effective on issues like the environment and least likely to have a serious impact on issues of state security. Recent TCS research, however, shows the influence of transnational activists even on the “hard case” (Evangelista, 6) of the state monopoly on coercion, where we would least expect to find change induced by civil society. As such, this research provides a collective empirical response to a puzzle that follows from broader claims in historical sociology and international relations about the development of the coercive capacity of the state and its relationship to civil society. There is a striking consensus among prominent scholars that in return for the sacrifices of the populace required by the state for the organization of mass mobilization warfare, the state increasingly had to grant societies’ demands for citizenship and its benefits—the franchise—and for welfare benefits. As Charles Tilly argued: “Reliance on mass conscription, confiscatory taxation, and conversion of production to the ends of war made any state vulnerable to popular resistance, and answerable to popular demands, as never before.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, “popular resistance to coercive exploitation forced would-be power holders to concede protection and constraints on their own ac-

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Diebert, *Parchment, Printing and Hypermedia: Communication in World Order Transformation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 174.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Ethan Nadelmann, “Global Prohibition Regimes: The Evolution of Norms in International Society,” *International Organization* 44 (Autumn 1990).

<sup>25</sup> Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990–1992* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992) 83, also 63.

tion,"<sup>26</sup> a thesis echoed by Michael Mann and Andrew Linklater,<sup>27</sup> as well as by Anthony Giddens, who argued that "all strategies of control employed by superordinate individuals or groups call forth counter-strategies on the part of subordinates,"<sup>28</sup> a form of agency Giddens called the "dialectic of control."<sup>29</sup>

Giddens suggests that critics of Marx have been right in arguing his kind of dialectic of control has happened with capitalism, that labor fostered the welfare state organized more according to human needs than was nineteenth-century capitalism.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, even though Higgott, Underhill, and Bieler seem to explore with some sympathy the plausibility of a Gramscian account emphasizing the structural power of capitalism and the neoliberal discourse of globalization, important case studies find that such power has been exaggerated on issues such as direct investment rules and policy convergence,<sup>31</sup> the Multilateral Agreement on Investment,<sup>32</sup> and global warming.<sup>33</sup> Of course, the apparent successes in this small number of case studies hardly means the power of capitalism is to be discounted, as a number of case studies on the power of the IMF, the World Bank, and its allies testify.<sup>34</sup>

Still, these analyses of the state leave a crucial question unanswered: what is the nature of the bargain now in an era of globalization? Can a similar argument be made with institutionalized violence, that without transnational civil society (substituted for labor) the practice of violence (substituted for capitalism) would have looked very different? Giddens himself is decidedly unhopeful, arguing: "Protest movements and peace movements there are, but even in the most optimistic portrayal of the near future it is scarcely conceivable these could parallel the world-historical role Marx foresaw for the working class" (326 n). The specific contribution of the TCS case studies, from torture to land mines to nuclear testing, then, is that they empirically document the *transnational*

<sup>26</sup> Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169–70.

<sup>27</sup> Mann, *States, War and Capitalism: Studies in Political Sociology* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1988), 158; Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 218.

<sup>28</sup> Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 10–11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 325. For case studies on labor, see Nimtz and Kidder, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink.

<sup>31</sup> Walter (fn. 2).

<sup>32</sup> Smythe (fn. 2).

<sup>33</sup> Levy and Egan (fn. 2).

<sup>34</sup> Jan Aart Scholte, "In the Foothills': Relations between the IMF and Civil Society," in Higgott, Underhill, and Bieler; Nelson, Khagram, and Donnelly, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink.

dimensions of civic influence even on the alleged state monopoly over coercion, an element that may compensate for the decrease in previous sources of structural leverage.

#### IV. THEORY AND METHOD

To raise the point bluntly: what is lost in an entire volume on transnational civil society when such IR staples as realism, constructivism, or rational choice are not even mentioned (Florini, Burgerman)? One answer is the rigorous vetting of research against alternative accounts, which has become a methodological hallmark of persuasive scholarly work. This technique can be used in the first instance to establish a compelling puzzle, namely, by showing that important outcomes do not conform with the expectations of explanations from material power and self-interest (Khagram, in Florini, 84). Beyond that, Evangelista's explanations of Soviet policy in missile defense, nuclear testing, and conventional forces are exemplary in assessing the relative power of his account (scientific networks) against alternatives that would account for changes in Soviet policy due to military dictates, U.S. behavior (the peace-through-strength thesis), or economic factors. That Evangelista's book is the most convincing of those examined here—and likely to have the longest shelf life—is no accident, since he is the most conscientious in weighing his own explanation against alternative accounts, a technique also effectively employed by Andrew Walter, Sanjeev Khagram, and Daniel Thomas in their chapter-length studies. While the Florini volume provides substantial evidence of TCS influence, the eschewing of theory means the case studies do not consider possible alternative accounts and thus have no built-in line of initial defense against the first objections that will emerge from alternative perspectives.

Does the assessment of one's own account relative to alternatives unduly tilt the playing field by forcing alternative theoretical approaches to play on the terrain of dominant theories, thereby distorting theoretical challengers while ensuring the continued primacy of the dominant as a primary point of reference? While this may indeed provide artificial life support to otherwise moribund research programs, the comparison with alternatives may be to point out that there are different questions being addressed for which different methods and standards of evaluation are required. Indeed, this exercise should stimulate increased clarity and precision of alternative approaches to their benefit, as well as promoting intellectual diversity in appreciating the importance of the full range of questions not monopolized by one or two dominant ap-

proaches. Indeed, the hubris of designation as a “dominant” theory invites the pitfall of failing to engage in such honest consideration of alternatives, whereas theoretical challengers must of necessity make more convincing demonstrations of their claims to gain a hearing. This has played to the advantage of liberal TCS research and to the disadvantage of realism over the last decade.

While there are diverse streams within the literature on transnational civil society, the dominant one examined here amounts to a distinctive liberal theoretical statement on contemporary world politics that establishes that TCS can effect positive or progressive moral change. At one level, this research privileges the role of agency, namely, transnational civil society activists. As such, TCS scholarship offers a broad theoretical challenge to approaches that privilege other agents or structures, namely, the statism of realism, neoliberalism, or Wendtian constructivism;<sup>35</sup> rationalist versions of liberal theory which privilege preexisting domestic preferences;<sup>36</sup> neo-Marxist approaches with their focus on the structures or agents of capitalism; and even the more state-centered versions of the English school which insist on the distinctness and dominance of an international society of states.<sup>37</sup>

The liberal cast of much TCS research has drawn the frequent complaint that it analyzes “good” campaigns, but not “bad” campaigns or failed campaigns. As a methodological point this criticism is not damning, though it does usefully point to areas for further work; as a theoretical injunction the criticism is a red herring. The former is so since consideration of failures or noncampaigns is something that this recent literature has taken on as noted above (see especially Keck and Sikkink), though not in all the conceivable systematic methodologies. Moreover, the analysis of the role of transnational activists in the hardest of contemporary cases, particularly China, looms as an area in need of further work. As things stand, it is conspicuous for its absence in these volumes and in the field more generally and therefore is a significant lacuna in the research.

Many scholars examine successful or progressive moral entrepreneurship to demonstrate that skepticism that such efforts at do-goodism are doomed to failure is unwarranted. In this regard it is the job of crit-

<sup>35</sup> Wendt’s social theory of the state system leads him to neglect nonstate initiators of change and thus handicaps the ability of his social theory of international relations to account for many of the changes in contemporary world politics; see Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, “Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics,” *International Organization* 51 (Autumn 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Reus-Smit (fn. 13), 504.

ics, not scholars seeking to challenge those critics, to analyze hard cases for their theories that confirm their insistence that state or corporate power will predominate, or that moral activism merely cloaks self-interest, and so on. Thus the bulk of the research has legitimately focused on what even the critics often seem to regard as campaigns with admirable aspirations (calling them “good”) and that appear to have had some degree of success. These scholars need not do the skeptics’ job for them.

Still, in principle the analytical program of understanding transnational civil society activists is neutral concerning the content of that activism—the National Rifle Association or neo-Nazi hate groups are as much within the analytical gambit of this literature as are Greenpeace or the Quakers. But critics of the liberal cast of TCS have not yet marshaled their own analyses to support an alternative theoretical account. Just as the dominance of realism was challenged by a neoliberalism that also focused upon the state as actor but produced different theoretical accounts of the consequences, so too liberal TCS literature now occupies a dominant position awaiting a theoretically substantive competitor. The more that such actors are taken seriously, the more they will attract analyses put to nonliberal theoretical purposes. These include unit-level analyses such as organizational theory, which, like earlier challenges to statist theories, will chronicle how TCS actors produce outcomes against their (moral) interests due to organizational pressures or material incentives.<sup>38</sup>

## V. ETHICS

In the end, if scholars chronicling progressive moral change are to deal with the above charge of normative bias, they “must take seriously the need to match the rigor of their empirical analyses of normative politics with an equally rigorous defense of their implicit normative agenda, for ultimately only such a defense can legitimate the politics they observe and wish to encourage.”<sup>39</sup> Two rejoinders can be anticipated and preempted in order to advance the debate. First, scholars could respond with a division-of-labor argument that empirical researchers are not ethical theorists, and such work is best left to philosophers. Relatedly, empirical scholars could simply agree and footnote the relevant corpus of normative theory that would provide support for the view, for ex-

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Cooley and James Ron, “The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action,” *International Security* 27 (Summer 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Reus-Smit (fn. 13), 501.

ample, that torture or female genital cutting are abominations. Both responses are fine as far as they go, but they also both require that a far greater prominence be accorded normative international relations theory than is the current practice, at least in mainstream American international relations. Articles of normative international relations theory are a rare find indeed in the leading American journals of international relations and hardly reflect an earnest acknowledgment of the mutual interdependence of empirical and normative scholarly work in the field.

Florini makes one of the few attempts to situate the centrality of the normative question of the desirability of TCS influence; even in her volume, however, it is raised as a core concern but then not answered (see also Nelson, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink). Indeed, her contention that the question is “unanswerable in any objective manner” (p. 231) unfortunately suggests a perpetuation of the marginalization of ethical questions as mere subjective opinions. On the contrary, the TCS literature provides a powerful collective moral challenge to alternative theories and demonstrates important synergies between empirical research and normative and positive theory.

TCS research documenting the possibility of progressive moral change raises a profound challenge to skeptics: how does one argue ethically for a theoretical position that as a matter of presumption rejects such possibilities? To be blunt, how does one defend as a baseline prescription a theoretical position that, if it had had its way, would presumably still be justifying practices such as slavery or torture as natural, desirable, or regrettable but unavoidable tragedies in an imperfect world? The collective challenge laid down by the TCS literature to skeptical or conservative theories of international relations is far more profound than earlier liberal challenges, since it hitches its ethical challenge to careful empirical work that eviscerates the presumption that the default stance is one that holds moral change across borders as an anomaly to be discounted. Despite the very real cultural and moral differences that can and do exist (and that are used by TCS researchers to explain variations in success), TCS research shows that it is simply not plausible to maintain a priori that the international and domestic realms are ethically distinctive and that the former is devoid of moral content. Does not this research on TCS reverse the burden of proof for theories of world politics, such that the ball is now in the court of skeptical theories? Why, they must answer, should one begin from a position that presumes as unworthwhile and utopian initiatives to improve the lot of some in the world?

One might reject such a proposition by simply pointing out that different scholars may disagree on what is morally praiseworthy in the first place. This will indeed often be the case, but the point here is that for such objections to be convincing they must articulate the source of that difference, whether in moral or empirical objections.<sup>40</sup> In light of the successes documented by TCS, it is increasingly less tenable to resort to the gambit of appealing on empirical grounds to the inevitable futility of such initiatives. Rather, rigorous normative theorizing should be central for both critics and adherents of liberal TCS theory.

Interesting questions emerge from the TCS research that could animate debates in normative IR theory, including the democratic theory of transnational activism and international organizations raised earlier. In addition, scholars need to consider how to do an ethical evaluation of initiatives that may produce a morally praiseworthy outcome in its intended sense, but with foreseen or unintended harms. Many of the works under review are keenly attentive to the reality that progress comes with a price (Burgerman, 104; Evangelista, 85). Clark shows the counterproductive and horrifying effect created by the increased spotlight on torture and disappearances resulting from prisoner-adoption techniques: some governments shifted to more deniable abuses such as simply eliminating their victims so they could not tell the story (pp. 90, 104, 137). Similarly, Khagram (in Florini) points out that opponents of big dams have not been good at suggesting alternatives and at recognizing the costs entailed in halting dams (lack of water, use of polluting alternatives for electricity, and so on).

A deeper and related critique emerges from critical international relations theory, which could highlight the ways that moral initiatives produce the kinds of undesirable outcomes they are meant to address. For example, Bahar Rumelili shows that efforts to expand the security community of democracies comes at a significant price since “discourses on the promotion of democracy and human rights are inevitably productive of two identity categories, a morally superior identity of democratic juxtaposed to the inferior identity of non-(or less) democratic, thereby ‘constructing the very differences that transformation would ostensibly eliminate.’”<sup>41</sup> How can normative theory accommodate such moral entrepreneurship if its very possibility entails the production of

<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the criticism that TCS research only looks at “good” activist campaigns itself cannot ultimately be made in the absence of a normative defense.

<sup>41</sup> Bahar Rumelili, “Producing Collective Identity and Interacting with Difference: The Security Implications of Community-Building in Europe and Southeast Asia” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2002), chap. 2, 49, citing Roxane Doty, *Imperial Encounters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 136.

the very things that are supposed to be overcome? Can an ethical theory be coherent if it justifies practices according to standards that shift as the historical conjunction of developments evolves? If research shows moral improvement that then creates new moral dilemmas or deficits, is the original initiative to be judged by standards different from those to be applied to the new constellation of factors? What would such a contextual moral theory look like, and how could it balance the imperatives of principle and pragmatism?

## VI. CONCLUSION

This survey has identified a number of important claims from recent research on transnational activism. In conclusion we might ponder the use of such research, given Keck and Sikkink's observation that scholars "have come late to the party" (p. 4) in paying attention to networks that activists had been developing for some time. Is such research of use for practitioners themselves or destined to be read only by fellow academics? Has any knowledge been generated that practitioners themselves have not already learned through trial and error?

Evangelista's work indirectly provides an important statement of the value of the academic enterprise, since he traces how scholarly research on security issues eventually had a decisive impact on the worldviews of decision makers like Gorbachev. A fruitful complement to this powerful finding would be to determine the impact of that other key component of the scholarly enterprise—teaching—upon such important developments in world politics. Professors and teachers could reasonably be seen as important participants in a transnational civil society, given that many teach in countries other than those of their birth or citizenship and that an international group of students increasingly appears in any given classroom. And yet, for all the importance placed upon the role of TCS in educating publics and providing information, the teaching role of universities is not accorded a prominent place in this literature. Similarly, while much of the research on TCS documents how activists educate publics and teach states their interests,<sup>42</sup> little attention has been paid to how activists themselves learn, both substantively about the issues they become involved in and strategically or tactically across campaigns about how to get what they want. The greatest impact of scholarship such as that examined here may well be

<sup>42</sup> Following Martha Finnemore's influential statement in *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

in the classroom, where future activists and decision makers learn about issues to which they may dedicate themselves and where they may draw lessons about how they can make a difference. Interesting work could chronicle the educational origins of worldviews of important decision makers and TCS actors who had decisive impacts on given issues and the role of research therein. As a salutary effect for scholars, such research might provide evidence of the neglected importance of teaching, which typically pales in comparison to research in the incentive structures of the academy as a whole.