

Outline your understanding of the concept of global civil society, and its potential influence in international politics.

‘The state is a condition...We destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently towards one another.’¹

The state dominated twentieth century international politics.² State relations and state institutions provided the basis for governance and order within the world. In a realist world, the state legitimates itself through self-preservation. Unitary sovereignty creates an internal authority against external anarchy. The binary nature of the bipolar world during the Cold War epitomises this condition. State sovereignty and realism occlude polyphony.³ Globalisation and global civil society represent a multiplicity of new voices within world politics. These new voices provide an opportunity to re-think, if not re-order, the world.

Globalisation generally infers the spread of global capitalism. The concept also highlights a growing interconnectedness and consciousness within the global community.⁴ Consequently, globalisation indicates a proliferation of ideas and issues challenging the state-centric system from above and below. These ideas provide the foundation for global civil society. Hence, there is a nexus between globalisation and global civil society.

Four broad categories describe this nexus. These are supporters, rejectionists, reformists, and alternatives.⁵ Each category defines the position of global civil society in relation to globalisation. Each position recognises different actors with different global agendas. Turner discounts the homogeneity pre-supposed by each position. He highlights the diverse discourses within global civil society are not always consistent or compatible.⁶ Individual human rights, for example, may clash with traditional indigenous practices. Yet, global civil society is more than a debate about the future direction of globalisation for it contains a fundamental social reality.

This social reality manifests itself in the network of relationships among people and organisations not associated with the state per se. These organisations operate above and beyond the territorial notions and limitations of states. Of course, such supranational elements, such as the Catholic Church or Red Cross, have existed for

¹ Gustav Landauer in Scott Turner, ‘Global Civil Society, Anarchy and Governance: Assessing an Emerging Paradigm’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol 35, Issue 1, London, 1998, p. 37.

² Mary Kaldor, Governance, Legitimacy, and Security: Three Scenarios for the Twenty- First Century in Wapner, P. & Ruiz, L. (eds), *Principled World Politics: The Challenge of Normative Relations*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, New York, 2000, p.284. This ‘realist’ state is unitary, rational, and calculates its interests in terms of power.

³ Polyphony marks a plurality of independent voices and consciousness.

⁴ Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, Mary Kaldor, Chapter 1 Introducing Global Civil Society in *Global Civil Society 2001*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.7.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.16.

⁶ Turner, *op.cit.*, p.34.

years. The growth of individual contributions, and increasing linkages between International Non-Government Organisations (INGO) further fosters the density of the global civil society.⁷ However, there are limitations to this reality.

Leadership, membership and control of INGOs primarily resides in northwestern Europe. There is a distinct North-South divide within INGOs. This means Northern issues such as universal human rights dominate the agenda at the expense of Southern issues. Consequently, global civil society is sometimes seen as a metaphor for Western Liberalism, and a form of US cultural dominance. Despite these misgivings, Non-Government Organisations (NGO) still represent ‘the conscience of governments’ and provide access to global decision-making.⁸ Sakamoto argues the relativisation of ideology and promotion of Asian values is a response to this threat.⁹

INGO power equates to their capacity to influence public values and norms on a global scale. Testament to this power is the greater global awareness of environmental issues, the success of campaigns to stop the Multilateral Agreement on Investment or ban landmines. The increased participation of INGOs at international conferences, from the Rio Earth Summit (1992) to the Beijing Conference on Women (1995), highlights their escalating influence within international politics. An influence extending to the United Nations (UN), where INGOs press for greater access to the General Assembly and Kofi Annan acknowledges ‘a true partnership between NGOs and the UN is not an option; it is a necessity.’¹⁰

This partnership between states and global civil society portends an emancipatory global anarchy - a partnership where human community seeks to end poverty, oppression, and collective violence.¹¹ Falk believes ‘geogovernance’ is possible when political legitimacy is rebuilt around universal human rights and world peace.¹² Such a project requires the acceptance of broad and shared values. Such a project requires a new set of behaviours and relationships – especially in relation to security and justice issues. Maybe the challenge for global civil society is to influence US acceptance of the International Criminal Court or empower the UN to resolve the Iraqi nuclear weapons dilemma. Maybe, the challenge, to paraphrase Theodore Roosevelt, is to ensure ‘No state is above the law and no man is below it.’¹³

⁷ David Callahan, ‘What is “global civil society”?’’, *Journal*, Vol 3, No. 1, Jan-Feb 1999, p.2. Anheier, op.cit, pp.4-5 highlights the explosion in INGO numbers and membership growth especially in Europe.

⁸ United Nations, *The United Nations and Civil Society: The Role of NGO*, 1999, p.78.

⁹ Yoshikazu Sakamoto, *The Age of Relativisation: Toward a Twenty-First Century of Active Civil Service* in Wapner, P. & Ruiz, L. (eds), *Principled World Politics: The Challenge of Normative Relations*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, New York, 2000, pp.304-305.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.3.

¹¹ Richard Falk in Greg Fry, & Jacinta O’Hagan, *Contending Images of World Politics*, Macmillan, London, 2000, p.93.

¹² Kaldor, op.cit., p.296. Governance refers to the process of managing human affairs see *ibid.*, p.284.

¹³ Theodore Roosevelt in Cameron Stewart, ‘Money Talks Uncle Sam Walks’, *The Weekend Australian*, Aug 31-Sep 1 2002, p. 19.

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