Social Movements beyond Borders: Organization, Communication, and Political Capacity in Two Eras of Transnational Activism

Article · January 2002

CITATIONS
33

READS
1,560

1 author:

Lance Bennett
University of Washington Seattle
127 PUBLICATIONS **9,419** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

9

Social Movements beyond Borders: Organization, Communication, and Political Capacity in Two Eras of Transnational Activism

W. LANCE BENNETT

As I write these words, the now-familiar stream of protests around the world continues. Three stories from the recent period illustrate three properties of emerging transnational protest that I would like to put in theoretical context here: *inclusive organization models* that favor diversity and issue-linking through distributed network designs; *social technologies* that facilitate these relatively decentralized, ''leaderless'' networks and help explain shifts in the scale of coordinated transnational activism; and the *political capacities* of members of these technology-rich networks to communicate their issues and form effective political relationships with targets of protest. These theoretical formulations rest on observations about an emerging global social justice movement (as it is increasingly termed by activists) and its intersection with protests against the U.S. war and occupation of Iraq. Following the introduction of these defining elements of recent-generation transnational activism, I offer a framework for understanding the tensions between these so-called direct action networks and the more centralized nongovernmental organizations (NGO) and social movement coalitions that continue to hold sway from the earlier era of transnational activism described by Keck and Sikkink (1998) and Smith (1997), among others.

AN ANTIWAR DEMONSTRATION IN WASHINGTON, D.C.: INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATION

The first story introduces a theoretical discussion of protest organization in inclusive, distributed networks, which I will later contrast with a more familiar (and still evident) model of organizationally brokered, ideological, and issue-driven coalitions. The scene is a demonstration against the war in Iraq on October 25, 2003, in Washington, D.C. Organizers estimated the crowd at one hundred thousand people and disputed the police figures of twenty thousand.[1] A reporter who went into the crowd discovered a great diversity of positions among demonstrators, many of which seemed to contradict the messages on the signs they waved. According to the report, the signs were provided by ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism), one of the cosponsoring organizations of the ''End the Occupation'' rally. ANSWER is described by the reporter as a front organization for the Stalinist Workers Party and as advocating immediate U.S. troop withdrawal and public support for the Iraqi popular resistance.

Whether or not ANSWER is a Stalinist front, its positions do seem at odds with more popular alternatives present in the anti-Iraq War movement, such as bringing in the United Nations to coordinate a more gradual transition. This discrepancy raises questions about how ANSWER built such a diverse list of endorsers and how it mobilized such a large demonstration.[2] Evidently unperturbed by these questions, the reporter hinted at confusion in the ranks by doubting that many members of the crowd shared the organization's position of immediate withdrawal from Iraq. The reporter asked a demonstrator carrying a ''US Troops Out'' sign provided by ANSWER if he agreed with its sentiments. He replied, ''I didn't even look at it. I was just waving it,'' and then offered fairly sophisticated ideas about a more gradual transition. With members of military families, the global social justice movement, and ANSWER sharing the same stage, the reporter concluded that ''It was a day full of purposeful misunderstandings'' (Goldberg, 2003:2).

Although the reporter's framing may be questioned, the idea of *purposeful misunderstandings* gets at what I detect as a trend toward relaxing the ideological framing commitments for common participation in many transnational protest activities. In their introduction to this volume, della Porta and Tarrow refer to this tendency as a redefinition of political involvement in an era in which progressive politics emphasize diversity and subjectivity over ideology and conformity. The problem of achieving common framing (frame bridging) has been a common source of tensions and fragmentation in social movements. Studies of protest movements in

the past suggested that coordination was difficult, in part because core positions were not shared. For example, as Tarrow and McAdam point out in their chapter, efforts to join antinuclear movements across the Atlantic failed in the 1980s because the U.S. movement generally settled on the common position of a nuclear *freeze*, while European counterparts generally advocated nuclear *disarmament*.

This problem appears to be eased among many contemporary antiwar and global social justice activists through diffusion of an organizing code (often termed ''relationship-building'') based on metaframes such as diversity, inclusiveness, and social justice. This ''relaxed framing'' (part of what della Porta's chapter describes as ''flexible identities'') enables people with diverse positions to join in impressively large actions, often bringing multiple issues into the same protest event. A reasonable question here is whether such protest activities display enough organizational coherence to be sustainable, much less to qualify as social movements.

ANTIWAR DEMONSTRATIONS ON A GLOBAL SCALE: SOCIAL TECHNOLOGY, ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS, AND SCALE SHIFT

My second story circles back to matters of sustainability, coherence, and definitions of social movements by starting with a far simpler question: What made the antiwar demonstration above more than just an isolated domestic protest event? In particular, what qualifies it as an example of transnational activism? Exploring this question takes us to the second set of factors underlying my claim that there are some things new and worth paying attention to in the current generation of transnational activism: *applications of communication technology* that generally favor the kinds of organizational structure alluded to in the first story, loosely linked ''distributed'' networks that are minimally dependent on central coordination, leaders, or ideological commitment.[3] These social technologies generally combine online and offline relationship-building aimed at achieving trust, credibility, and commitment as defined at the individual rather than the collective level. The relationship between technology and social organization is crucial to understanding the scale of recent antiwar and social justice protests.

The technology story behind the Washington demonstration is thus a *social* technology story. This point cannot be overemphasized: it is not the technology alone that creates rapidly expanding action networks—it is the capacity to move easily between on- and offline relationships that makes the scale shift to transnational activism possible. The innovative

design and diffusion of communication and information technologies increasingly embeds those technologies in face-to-face experiences such as organizing, meeting, talking with friends, scheduling future protests, remembering and learning from past events, coordinating local protest actions in real time as they happen, and reporting them back through digital media channels so they can be recognized by activists themselves, as part of larger-scale developments.

The lesson here is that technologies contribute various mechanisms that help explain the scale shift in transnational activism discussed by Tarrow and McAdam in this volume: *virtual brokerage* (e.g., information archives, automated affiliation and membership, and automated, affinity-based choices of action repertoires), *hyperlinked diffusion* (e.g., news, icons, messages, and protest calendars that become densely linked across multiple activist sites and can be retrieved quickly through searches defined by individuals), and *virtual emulation* (e.g., the personal forwarding of pleasing stories, images, and artifacts).

The story begins by stepping back from what may seem to be just a routine national protest event, and finding that both ANSWER and United for Peace and Justice, the other primary organizing coalition of the Washington demonstration, were involved in coordinating the internationalization of the war protests. Social justice activists from dozens of countries built relationships at meetings of the European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence, Italy, in November 2002, and of the World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January of 2003. According to the account of Walgrave and Verhulst (2003) and our own documentation, the call for an international protest on February 15 was issued in Florence and punctuated by the first large antiwar demonstration that drew hundreds of thousands of people into the streets, including most global social justice activists at the forum (indicating once again, the relaxation of issue and ideological divides in these protests). Representatives of some seventy U.S. peace and social justice groups operating under the name of United for Peace and Justice met with ESF organizers in Copenhagen shortly after the Florence meeting and made plans to coordinate the European and North American protests scheduled for February 15, 2003. Planning for the full internationalization of the February 15 demonstrations continued at the WSF meetings attended by some five thousand groups and one hundred thousand individuals from countries around the world, including members of ANSWER, United for Peace and Justice, and other U.S. groups involved with coordinating North American activities.

Beyond agreeing to simultaneous protests, deeper levels of coordination involved sharing open-source communication technologies, establishing web links, and agreeing on common messages that would encourage inclusiveness and maximize turnout. One of the symbols that

could be downloaded from nearly every transnational coalition website for further diffusion through e-mail and printed posters was the image of a missile crossed out by the words ''Stop the War.''[4] Demonstrators the world over used much the same set of slogans translated into dozens of languages: ''No War in Iraq,'' ''Not in My Name,'' and ''No Blood for Oil,'' among others (Walgrave and Verhulst, 2003:12). The technological links and social software common to many sites facilitated the diffusion of posters, banners, slogans, information about gathering points, transportation, computer matching of socially comfortable (affinity) groups for different types of people to join, guides to protest tactics, and information and Internet news reports on the war and the pending protests. The result of this combination of on- and offline networking may well stand as the largest simultaneous multinational demonstration in recorded history. Depending on the sources of estimates, somewhere between seven and thirty million people took to the streets, in three hundred to six hundred cities and countless small towns. BBC (2003a) reports based on conservative police estimates put the figure as high as ten million.

The campaign did not end with protests; it was followed by a number of commitment-building exercises, one of which occurred shortly after the February 15 events, when MoveOn (www.moveon.org) in the United States drew on its virtual membership to send hundreds of thousands of messages to Congress. The organization then helped its members find each other offline to hold local candlelight vigils aimed at building social capital for future actions. Another impressive display of the capacity of digitally mediated networks to continue to mobilize protest occurred in London, some eight months after the February 15 turnout. The Stop the War UK network (not really an organization, but a network of thousands of organizations and individuals) facilitated what the BBC described as the largest weekday demonstration in the history of London to mark a visit by George W. Bush (BBC, 2003b). Unity at this demonstration was enhanced by such technological features as distributed digital swarms (see Rheingold, 2002). In one example, downloadable street posters with tear-off instructions and e-mail lists alerted demonstrators with cell phones and other communication platforms to spread the word when they spotted Bush motorcades in London, drawing swarms of people to those locations, ''Chasing Bush.''[5]

By some measures, these transnational antiwar protests seem to fall under Tilly's definition of a social movement:

> We are looking for times and places in which people making collective claims on authorities frequently form special-purpose associations or named coalitions, hold public meetings, communicate their programs to available media, stage processions, rallies, or demonstrations, and through all these

> activities offer concerted displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment. If the complex occurs together regularly outside of electoral campaigns and management-labor struggles, we become more confident that the social movement has arrived on its own terms (Tilly, 2004:29).

And yet, both the antiwar and the globalization protests seem alien in other social movement terms. The proclivities of activists to switch easily among issues, targets, and messages seem to raise questions about the stability of membership and the terms of unity. Tilly (in a personal communication) raises important questions about whether such loose, multi-issue networks are likely to generate the commitment and focus required for movements to develop credible political positions and forge the kinds of political relationships with their targets that might actually produce change. These questions get to our final concern about the current generation of transnational activism: the *political capacity* of these distributed, loosely linked, technologically constituted networks that, Coopman argues, are distinctive enough to be given their own name: *dissentworks* (2003). Are these networks limited—by their shifting composition, leaderless tendencies, and ''opt-in/opt-out'' memberships—in their capacities to influence larger publics and establish effective political relationships with the targets of their protest?

POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS IN A TRADE PROTEST: HOW STRENGTHS AND VULNERABILITIES OF WEAK TIES AFFECT POLITICAL CAPACITY

Our third story illustrates why the organizational and technological features of contemporary transnational activist networks cannot easily be separated from questions about their political capacity, which I define along two dimensions: being able to shape public debate about the issues in contention, and developing effective political relations with protest targets to influence political change on those issues. (A third aspect of political capacity—the exclusion of potential members due to restrictive technologies—will be addressed later).

On the same day in November 2003, as record numbers of Londoners took to the streets to protest against an American president, U.S. activists across the Atlantic gathered in Miami to register their opposition to an expanded Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). One indicator of their commitment was the advance notice that they would face a formidable police response with enhanced paramilitary and surveillance operations, funded through the Bush administration's domestication of the war on

terror. The FTAA had been a target of past contention, as is well documented in activist web archives that offer a historical record of the global social justice movement as it has evolved through the chain of G8, WTO, European Union, World Economic Forum (WEF), or World Bank protests from Genoa to Prague to Montreal to Davos to Washington to Seattle.[6]

Our first question about public influence illustrates the ties between organizational structure, technological infrastructure, and capacity. Beyond their capacity to consistently turn out large numbers of demonstrators, were these so-called direct action networks able to generate enough internal dialogue to achieve the message unity required to focus broader public discussion? Or do weak ties also produce a weakness of core ideas? The latter view appears in the accounts of many mainstream journalists, who seem to dismiss the multi-issue, leaderless, direct action networks as largely chaotic and hard to summarize. Consider this (*New York Times*) journalist's attempt to describe the activists on their own terms:

> There are no leaders or spokesmen or women, just clusters of voices acting in coordination, though not necessarily in concert. The politics of the global social justice movement are as fragmented and postmodern as the technologies that helped give it life. ''That's the nice thing about being a hydra,'' one eco-activist told me. ''They can't assassinate our leaders'' (Bunn, 2003:61).

The reporter went on to dispute the claim about ''no leaders'' by focusing on an organizer named Lisa Fithian who spends most of each year traveling from one demonstration to the next, renting meeting facilities, coordinating affinity groups, and offering training in march tactics and police responses. Yet the reporter acknowledged that she was a different kind of leader—less a spokesperson for a movement than a stylist of abstracted confrontation rituals, nicely orchestrated, but removed from meaningful messages or much dialogue with the targets of protest on the other side of the police barricades. As for Fithian, she admitted that there were leaders in this movement, but their goal was to be anonymous, to facilitate others, and to ''create an organization that is nonauthoritarian and nonhierarchical'' (Bunn, 2003:62). Both the familiar journalistic dismissal of the public message capacity of these demonstrations, and Fithian's (possibly edited) notion of building distributed activist networks as an end in itself, seem to leave open the question of where ideas and coherent public messages come from.

Yet, ideas do seem to distill and diffuse, as endless meetings are reported and echoed through the dense information flows over thousands of electronic nodes in these networks (Polletta, 2002). Notice, for example, that the movement adopted a name—global social justice (GSJ), or simply

global justice (GJ)—within a few years after the Seattle demonstrations. That name is now fairly well recognized among activists; a Google web search on ''GSJ'' produced over one million hits, including a broad mix of NGOs (e.g., Oxfam) and direct action networks (e.g., Indymedia) and various culture creators from Radiohead to Princeton University. A web search on ''GJ'' produced nearly two million hits, but the mix seemed less coherent than the first search. These movement names may also be filtering into mainstream journalism, as indicated in the *New York Times* passage above. Yet the linkages among groups and the convergence in their messages may not be crossing the media divide, as suggested in this activist news account:

> Anti-war groups such as United for Peace and Justice joined with the more de-centralized, affinity group-based wing of the global justice movement to organize direct action. Powerful labor groups like the AFL-CIO and the United Steelworkers made clear that despite tactical differences, there was solidarity among resistance movements. To emphasize this point, AFL-CIO president John Sweeney visited the mobilization convergence center where art-making, training, and planning was underway for un-permitted street actions. Yet this powerful display of successful solidarity is not what Americans saw on their television or read in their newspapers (Hogue and Reinsborough, 2003).

If the jury is still out on the public opinion-shaping capacity of these activist networks, what about their capacity to create effective power and influence relations with targets of their protest? Demonstrators often claim victories, from shutting down the 1999 WTO meetings in Seattle (which it seems they did), to helping small nations scuttle the 2003 Cancun meetings, which requires a bit more of a leap to comprehend.[7] As for the FTAA, the Miami talks fell far short of U.S. expectations, and, more importantly, solidified the formation of a group of southern nations that had blocked the WTO proposals earlier in Cancun. Now dubbed the G-20, the group held its first formal meeting in Brasilia shortly after the Miami FTAA. But what can we say in this case about accountability relationships between the protest movement and the FTAA results? The FTAA case illustrates the complex linkages involved in such relationships.

The short story here is that Brazil cohosted the Miami FTAA, represented by the newly elected regime of Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva, whose backing by labor and social movements at home put him in a delicate position between domestic forces aimed at killing the free trade initiative and the United States with its corporate, investment, World Bank, and IMF partners, who could punish Brazilian defection rather painfully. Brazil proposed a compromise agreement involving a national opt-out provi-

sion on key trade rules that so weakened the U.S. proposal that many in the G-20 bloc felt (and apparently hoped) it would be rejected by the United States. However, the United States provisionally endorsed it as a means of continuing the talks at a future date. Being party to this awkward result kept Brazil from further straining relations with the United States, but put the newly elected regime of Lula at odds with social movement supporters in Brazil and demonstrators in the streets.

Assessing the political capacity of the protest network in this case involves first establishing whether there are communication and brokerage relationships among the demonstrators, domestic Brazilian social movements, and Lula's government. One such linkage point is through the WSF network, which offers an ongoing transnational dialogue among government-linked social movements (e.g., labor, environment, land reform, women's rights), issue-advocacy NGOs, and direct action networks. Next, it is important to recognize that capacity runs in two directions: the upward capacity of protest networks to introduce social movement values and positions into the strategic thinking and choices of policymakers (e.g., the Brazilian delegation at the FTAA), and the downward capacity of such policymakers to induce more radical protest networks to accept pragmatic political compromises such as weakening and delaying the FTAA rather than killing it. This second flow is as crucial to building and sustaining political capacity as the first. This give-and-take essential to movement capacity could be affected by the move of some factions of the WSF network to hold a counter-forum at the 2004 Mumbai meeting, partly aimed at driving NGOs out of the protest network (Waterman, 2003). Such dynamics illustrate the tensions between earlier-generation NGO-centered transnational activism and newer, loosely structured direct activist networks that focus my more formal theoretical discussion below.

For now, here is how Tom Hayden's widely circulated *Alternet* report described some of these delicate linkages in this inside–outside political game (see Sikkink's chapter in this volume) involving social justice movement networks and policymakers:

> A huge but empty trade agreement—widely described as ''FTAA Lite''—was all the US could achieve after being buffeted for weeks by rising fair trade winds. But the jolly ship of neo-liberalism was salvaged in Miami rather than torpedoed, receiving life support from its most formidable critic, Brazil, and causing confusing challenges for the global justice movement in its wake. . . .
>
> One unofficial Brazilian insider explained that, ''We were counting on resistance from the US to the Brazilian proposal, but they decided to accept it. This puts our social movements in a difficult position, because Brazil will

> accept the FTAA 'model' even if it does not include all the issues, and the FTAA official schedule also. So our campaign will have to make difficult decisions soon'' (Hayden, 2003).

This story illustrates the complex linkages between the global justice movement and related domestic and transnational players. As a piece of journalism, the story also embodies the properties of the social justice networks through which it circulated. First, Hayden implicitly recognizes the *inclusive organizational model* of the transnational social justice movement, in the context of a larger political policy process with which the movement is engaged. Second, this piece of activist/journalism offered a useful model of the political relationships intersecting the movement, which helped it diffuse rapidly through social justice networks via the *communication technologies* of hyperlinking and blogging (creating online public dialogues that speed the diffusion of ideas and deliberation about them). A Google web search on *Hayden Miami FTAA* conducted on December 15, 2003, produced 427 hits, linking this report across a broad range of organizations and discussion networks. Third, Hayden's analysis highlights important concerns about the *political capacity* of the movement. The remainder of this discussion provides theoretical perspective on how direct activist networks fit with the NGO advocacy networks, which, until recently, defined transnational social movements.

THEORIZING ABOUT TWO GENERATIONS OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM

How does this broad and diverse movement compare with the transnational activism described by Keck and Sikkink (1998) and Smith (1997), among others, as largely issue-specific (e.g., labor, environment, human rights), and constituted around NGOs and coalition campaigns aimed at national or international political institutions to achieve specific policy goals? The current era of social justice activism still includes NGO policy networks, of course, but they now operate in a more emergent movement environment of large-scale direct activism, multi-issue networks, and untidy ''permanent'' campaigns with less clear goals and political relationships with targets. Those targets range over combinations of trade organizations, G7 summits, European Union meetings, WEF gatherings, and major corporations and industrial sectors (apparel, forest products, food, and media, among others). The first step toward theory here is to clarify the intersection of emerging global social justice networks with more established NGO-centered issue networks of earlier transnational activism.

An Organizational Hybrid: Embedded Networks

Second-generation direct activism embeds established NGO-centered networks in sprawling, loosely interconnected network webs populated by organizations and individuals who are more resistant to conventional social movement practices of coalition-formation, brokerage, framing, and establishing straightforward institutional relationships to influence policy. The players identified in the FTAA Miami protests—from unions, to anarchists, to antiwar networks—illustrate this embedding process, along with the upside potential for scale shifts and the downside of disruptive tensions and outright disjuncture inherent in such networks. The intersections of conventional NGOs with growing networks of informal, voluntary associations and direct activists call for reformulating earlier accounts of transnational activism cast largely in terms of: a) NGO-centered, single issue policy networks, b) that run centrally organized campaigns, c) based on brokered coalitions, d) aimed mainly at extracting policy reforms from institutional targets (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

The scale shift in the globalization protest era reveals many points of tension between first- and second-generation transnational activism. These include:

- less NGO dominance of campaign and policy networks;
- the evolution of multi-issue organizations (ATTAC in Europe, Global Exchange in the United States);
- more direct individual involvement aimed at setting the agenda from below;
- and the proliferation of permanent campaigns that are not centrally controlled by NGOs or coalitions of organizations (Bennett, 2003).

At the risk of oversimplifying Keck and Sikkink's (1998) now-standard account of the original transnational activist networks, table 9.1 offers a contrast between their account of what I term an NGO-led transnational activist order, and the more recent emergence of direct action social justice networks identified in the first half of this chapter.

Loose activist networks adopting self-organizing communication technologies (see below) and advocating multiple issues, multiple goals, and flexible identities not only challenge previous organizational forms of transnational activism. These networks also challenge social movement theories that focus on brokered coalitions, ideological framing, and collective movement identities fashioned around national politics. As noted in the chapters by della Porta and Sikkink in this volume, most social movement theory has emerged from national cases, with mobilization often keyed to national political opportunities, framed in terms of familiar cul-

TABLE 9.1
Defining Differences in Two Eras of Transnational Activism

	NGO Advocacy Order	*Direct Activism*
Scope	policy—issue—advocacy	diverse social justice agenda
Organization	NGO-centered issue networks	mass activism—multi-issue
Scale	limited by brokered coalitions	expanded by technology networks
Targets	government (all levels) some corporations	corporations, industrial sectors econ blocs (G7, WEF, IMF, WTO)
Tactics	strategic campaigns —limited political goals —turned on & off by lead orgs	permanent campaigns —diverse political goals —difficult to turn on & off
Goals	gov't (nat. & int'l) regulation establish information regimes maintain organizational identity	personal involvement in direct action establish communication networks hyper-orgs to empower individuals
Capacity	reform & crisis intervention	mass protest, value change

tural symbols, and aimed at national policy institutions. By contrast, as noted by Guidry, Kennedy, and Zald (2000a) and in the introductory chapter by della Porta and Tarrow in this volume, many contemporary transnational activists believe that national governments are part of the problem of global economic injustice—either because they have ideologically joined, or have been coerced by, the neoliberal economic trade and development regimes. This perception of the problem leaves many activists despairing of national-level policy solutions.

The recent era of transnational activism suggests an evolution to a different social movement organizational form in several respects: the diffusion of supranational targets and rallying symbols; the regular, cross-national occurrence of parallel demonstrations with similar targets and protest repertoires; and experiments, albeit fragile ones, with new kinds of political relationships involving nonnational mechanisms of political accountability and community, from standards monitoring and certification regimes, to demands for direct popular inclusion in supranational decision processes. Perhaps most important, as noted by della Porta in this volume, individuals in direct activist networks seem to move fairly easily across issues and targets of protest (recall the co-organization of

TABLE 9.2
Two Models of Transnational Social Movement Network Organization

Network	*NGO Advocacy Networks*	*Global Social Justice*
structure	centralized w/lead organizations	polycentric ~ distributed
formation	brokered strategic coalitions	affinity ties & permanent campaigns
stability	issue/goal framing & organization identity create fracture lines	organizational code of inclusive diversity—creates dense networks of weak ties
membership	sign up/pay up limited agenda control	opt-in/opt-out collective agenda-setting
mobilization	strategic campaigns, member alerts	technological infrastructure generates continuous protest calendar
bridging	high brokerage costs	low brokerage costs
diffusion	within homogeneous networks	across diverse networks

antiwar and global social justice actions from our earlier stories), without experiencing the kinds of ideological, membership, or identity stress that most social movement theories would suggest. Hence, transnational social movement organization differs from conventionally defined national social movement organization in various ways, with the scale of transnational protest accounted for by these organizational differences. Table 9.2 identifies points of comparison between traditional, issue-centered social movements, and global social justice activism.

The contrasting mix of first- and second-generation activism outlined in table 9.1, and the organizational differences between national and transnational social justice movements identified in table 9.2, enable us to think theoretically about both the potential and the problems of transnational activism. For example, these differences do not always permit the levels of convergence in protest repertoires indicated in the Miami FTAA story. Indeed, some of these tensions are serious enough that many prominent NGOs simply do not identify with the global social justice movement at all, and many direct activists see NGOs, at best, as plodding too narrowly to make a difference, and, at worst, as agents of imperialism helping to institutionalize the problems they are trying to solve. A Social Science Research Council report on technology and international civil society described this disjuncture as:

> the chasm that exists between formalized institutional NGOs and less formally structured social movements. The ''real'' NGOs aim to stand for credible social change—gathering the resources and membership necessary to pressure governments on a particular set of issues or policies. In contrast, more informal movements and loose groups of activists tend to see themselves as the emerging vanguard, developing flexible, creative and responsive approaches to the fact that we are more often than not all but shut out of formal political decision making. Both sides see the other as ineffective at best and clueless at worst, with international NGOs being portrayed as lumbering dinosaur elites, often based in the North and unaware of realities on the ground, while activists are seen as an ineffective rabble that sometimes misrepresents the truth to make political gains (Surman and Reilly, 2003:7–8).

The authors of this report put the best face on this tension by arguing that many synergies exist across the two types of networks, and that in any event, different kinds of organizations are required for a healthy world civil society to emerge. Yet, the potential exists for NGOs to continue to take their seats at elite decision-making sessions without opening doors for the direct activists to come along. For example, a study of the inside–outside game at the 2002 WEF meetings in New York indicated increasing NGO representation over previous years, and a shift in the organization's agenda toward addressing many of the issues raised by critics at WSF meetings and elsewhere. However, the systematic exclusion of demonstrators in the streets, both through the words of official WEF spokespeople and in reports by the mainstream press, also served to exclude those activists from legitimate ownership of their own ideas, not to mention from seats at the panels and dinner tables where they were being discussed (Bennett et al., 2004). On the other side, the move by more radical (i.e., ideologically inclined) direct action factions to create a counter-forum at the 2004 WSF seems intended to define NGOs as part of the problem with globalization (Waterman, 2003). If this initiative gains support, the organizational code of inclusive diversity that has enabled the scale shift in protest may well be undermined.

Viewed in traditional social movement terms, these rifts may appear to be classic examples of ideological divisions between moderate NGOs and more radical factions. This is not entirely wrong, but it misses the theoretical mark if we are looking for what is new in transnational activism. If we see these tensions less in terms of ideological frame struggles or collective identity problems, we can focus instead on the organization-based ethos of inclusiveness and diversity (i.e., on what della Porta, in her chapter, calls ''multiple belonging and flexible identities'') employed by so many direct activists. In that model, it seems to me, we see something that might be termed ''organization as ideology'': a movement design code

that is attempting to confront the failures of past movement eras—the fragmentation of the Left, the slowness and fragility of coalition building, the frequent inability to bridge collective identities meaningfully, and the leadership disputes and failures that led to factionalism, co-optation, and limited goal achievement. The so-called *heterarchical* emphasis on polycentric, leaderless, inclusive organization is aimed at avoiding these problems, while sustaining large numbers of individual-level relationships that enable people to move relatively freely across different issue concerns and to see problems in their localities as related to those in more distant regions. As I understand it, this organizational code has emerged from at least three sources: reflection about past movement organization problems; resistance on the part of many younger generation activists to ideologies and collective identity requirements; and necessity born of the desire to form sustainable relationships with distant others. These origins of the organizational code of this movement help us understand the importance of the development and application of technologies.

Social Technology: It's Not the Internet, It's the Code

Are communication technologies in and of themselves organizing movements? No. Plenty of face-to-face coalition building goes into the production of large-scale protest (Levi and Murphy, 2002). But when direct action networks are added to the mix, the idea of coalition building needs to be augmented to accommodate the density of individual level technologically assisted interactions. Dense interpersonal networks flow around protest events, building new relationships while creating agendas for future action. Such personal relationships are at the core of most social movements (Polletta, 2002). However, the scale and diversity of transnational global justice networks are not likely to be maintained without the remarkable integration of on- and offline interaction facilitated by innovative information and communication technologies.

Thus, the most important theoretical move we can make in trying to understand the transnational social justice movement is to move beyond the distinction between on- and offline relationships. Technology is often aimed at getting people together offline, and one purpose of offline associations is often to clarify and motivate online relations.[8] As Surman and Reilly put it, ''When we speak of 'online mobilization' we are talking primarily of online efforts to move people to action—to protest, intervene, advocate, support. Such efforts are much more about relationships and community than information'' (2003:39).

The synergy between the organizational code of inclusive diversity and the technology codes that link and structure network interactions may account for the heightened levels of diffusion and emulation that Tarrow

and McAdam associate with scale shift (this volume). Consider, for example, the broad diffusion of simultaneous demonstrations around the world during the time of the Seattle WTO protests in November 1999. A simple social technology sequence involved (1) e-mail that (2) directed people to websites that (3) offered protocols for coordinating simultaneous demonstrations based on inclusion rather than conventionally brokered differences:

> Under the code N30 (November 30) a series of actions were organized using the Internet. Organizing included both web sites and e-mail. The web site, ''A Global Day of Action'' (http://www.seattlewto.org/N30/) called for action in ten different languages and provided a directory of local contacts all over the world. It included slogans like: ''Resistance, and Carnival against Global Capitalist System'' or ''May our resistance be as transnational as capital'' (Baldi, 1999). The organizing was broad based, inclusive and heavily online. ''It is evident that the whole appeal was based on an extensive use of IT. It is also interesting to note that the aim was to gather as many groups as possible in the protest. Even the wide range of local initiatives suggested is a clear sign of the wish to enlarge and diffuse the protest as much as possible'' (Baldi, 1999) (Surman and Reilly, 2003:43).

It goes without saying that various technologies greatly magnify the capacity of organizers to reach people and to continue to reach them for future actions. But more than amplifying the mobilizing capacities of organizations, applications of social technologies are beginning to transform organizational forms. For example, the transnational protest network that produced and coordinated dozens of demonstrations around the world at the time of the Seattle WTO event was not an organization at all, in any conventional sense of the term. It was more a meta-organization, or, better, a *hyper-organization* that existed mainly in the form of the website, e-mail traffic, and linked sites noted above. Such hyper-organizations have now become familiar in transnational and other protest networks.

An early example of the hyper-organizational form was the Jubilee 2000 debt relief network. As described by Surman and Reilly, Jubilee was not the sort of network typically assembled by NGOs for campaigns (2003:21–22). It emerged remarkably quickly, with a remarkable absence of central organization. Its approximately three hundred members included an unprecedented North/South balance in terms of organizational inclusion and information flows. Jubilee even rejected the formation of an international secretariat at a crucial stage in its evolution, in favor of continued horizontal diffusion of e-mail lists that reached large numbers of Southern organizations with computers, who passed along

issues and inputs to their offline constituencies through various local channels.

Critics argue that the technology was also something of a burden for the network in that Jubilee was dominated by the superior technology of Northern members, but my point here is more fundamental: for better or worse, the organization did not exist apart from the technology. In other words, Jubilee was not just an organization enhanced or magnified by the simple application of e-mail lists—it was constituted by that technology as well as by the offline meetings through which its members also interacted. Current technological innovations to correct the North/South imbalance in such organizations involve experiments with community information technology kiosks around the globe (Badash, Khan, and Garrido, 2003).

If e-mail remains the ''killer application'' that enabled Jubilee and thousands of other networks to grow, the development and layering of more sophisticated social technologies has produced phenomenal organizational capacities (if still limited to those with technological access). The mix of practitioners and programmers at work on these network design technologies is most impressive, and their visions for complex organizational forms constituted through technological code offer the potential of a virtual infrastructure for a global civil society (Jordan, Hauser, and Foster, 2003).

An ongoing project at the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement at the University of Washington is an inventory of social technology applications that have implications for democratic organization in these on/offline networks (Center for Communication and Civic Engagement, 2004).[9] We have catalogued technological code applications in the areas of democratic decision making; open publishing and automated editing; trust, social capital, and reputation; grassroots mobilizing; and self-organizing networks, among other areas relevant to understanding whether inclusiveness, diversity, and individual affinity can be sustainable network organizing principles.

Two things are now becoming clear from this project. First, the capacity to identify social codes and values inscribed in applications of technology is crucial for assessing the sustainability, coherence, and quality of democratic process in large-scale transnational protest organizations—a point made more generally by Feenberg (1995) about the social values inscribed in all technologies and their uses. Second, and more crucial to understanding the embedded, disjointed networks described above, the most innovative applications for organizing sustainable, low brokerage, large-scale movement networks are coming from the hyper-organizations and not from the NGO sector. This point is explored in some detail by Surman and Reilly (2003).

The general failure of traditional NGO networks to push applications of open source social network technology—even though they have the resources to do so—may signal their general commitment to centralized organization and selective coalition formation aimed at advancing organizational goals within a government-centered institutional order. The technology disjuncture thus mirrors the organizational codes of the different networks that are mutually embedded, but not always well connected within the transnational global justice order. Consider, for example, the remarkable network map created to show the links among various groups attending the Ruckus society summer camp of 2002. Some fifty organizations offered their URLs to Govcom.org (www.govcom.org), a technology development organization building communication among movement groups and between movements and governments. The resulting map revealed hundreds of direct action groups linked in dense patterns to form a complex network structure that contained few traditional NGOs either linking in or out of the network.[10]

Identifying the technological isolation of NGOs as an obstacle to better integrating the transnational social justice movement led to an impressive international gathering of open source social software developers and activists with connections to the NGO world. The 2003 Summer Source meeting in Croatia drew participants from over thirty countries, who shared the aim of better integrating nerds and activists to improve social software solutions and to help the diffusion of open source applications through NGO networks. The Govcom.org map of this Summer Source camp again reveals few links between direct action organizations and conventional NGOs, and something of a general network disjuncture between the developers and the activists (Surman and Reilly, 2003:26). The technological divide between the hyper-networks and the traditional NGO coalitions may ultimately limit the political capacity of the global social justice movement even more than the technology access issues confronting Southern activists.

Political Capacity: Be the Media, Create New Political Relationships

Until the disjuncture between NGO and direct activist networks can be addressed both socially and technologically, the voice of the movement that reaches general publics is likely to remain disproportionately the voice of established NGOs that have long cultivated relations with governments and journalists. The marginalization of radical voices in conventional news accounts is a familiar issue in social movements (Gitlin, 1980). In some ways, the global justice movement has failed to overcome this problem, generally attracting negative press, from being associated with

soccer hooliganism in mainstream German papers, to images of lawlessness and violence in American news. Protest actions can attract news frames of violence and disruption even when demonstrations are generally peaceful, as occurred at the 2002 New York meetings of the WEF. As mentioned above, activists watched in frustration as the WEF successfully launched a publicity campaign claiming ownership of many of their issues, legitimized by inviting selected NGOs into the meetings and dismissing the crowds in the streets as bent on pointless disruption (Bennett et al., 2004). Kolb (in this volume) suggests that particular organizations such as ATTAC can cultivate better press relations, but this strategy may result in isolation from other wings of the movement in order to maintain press access.

State authorities have contributed their own divide-and-conquer tactics to undermine the political capacities of the social justice networks. It seems clear that the actions of police—from the Seattle WTO in 1999, to the Genoa G7 demonstrations in 2001, to the 2003 Miami FTAA conflict—reflect transnational governmental strategies of criminalizing direct action networks, both for purposes of disrupting them and for discrediting them in the eyes of publics. The Miami police even borrowed a page from the U.S. military book by embedding journalists inside police formations, creating an even stronger media definition of direct activists as the enemy. The War on Terror has provided police and other local authorities in the U.S. with added incentives to split the movement; nearly nine million dollars in police funding from the War on Terror budget was made available in Miami just by declaring particular groups as subversive (Klein, 2003).

Despite the many frustrations, the capacity to join in public discussion on their own terms remains a serious goal for many activists. Media strategies have generated considerable attention in protest networks, giving rise to a growing media reform movement (www.mediareform.org), a diffusion of culture jamming and hacktivism, and campaigns against corporations such as Monsanto, Nike, and Coca-Cola that have taken messages from desktops to newscasts around the world (Bennett, 2004). The activist-journalists who wrote one of the accounts of the FTAA demonstrations above identified themselves as cofounders of The smartMeme Project (www.smartmeme.com), ''a strategy and training collective dedicated to combining grassroots movement-building with tools to inject new ideas into the culture.'' Their mission is to experiment with ways of sending messages through the mainstream media filters to reach publics on the other side. They called for an integrated media strategy when social justice networks descend on the 2004 Republican Party Convention:

> One power of mass mobilization is the creation of conflict and drama as any good story demands. Some mass mobilization organizations are calling for a

> million people to descend on NY to protest the Republican agenda. This type of momentum is certain to attract a lot of sensational coverage. We need to use this opportunity to weave an alternative narrative to the Bush story of fear and dominance, in order to become more than just tabloid television coverage and background noise. We need to continue to use our alternative media outlets to document the real stories that compel change (Hogue and Reinsborough, 2003).

This reference to alternative media is an important factor that distinguishes this movement from others in its potential capacity to reach mass publics. As noted above, the very activists least likely to have voice in conventional media channels are those most responsible for innovative technologies with the potential for large-scale diffusion of information through the channels of micro (e-mail, lists, personal blogs, pagers, text messaging) and middle media (activist webzines, hyper-organization sites, community blogs). Whether or not their messages reach larger publics through mass media, the capacity to communicate and share rich information across social and temporal divides may in itself be counted as a political asset. Dozens of sites (Indymedia, Oneworld, Alternet, Znet, Infoshop) form an activist web sphere that is routinely harvested and archived on protest sites such as StoptheFTAA.org, which routinely posted links to high-quality reporting and commentary by such writers as Naomi Klein, Noam Chomsky, Derek Sheer, Jim Hightower, Bob McChesney, Tom Hayden, and thousands of activist journalists such as the authors of the FTAA story above.

The scale of this communication network may be unprecedented in the history of social protest movements. Most importantly, the network is broadly accessible to general publics, creating a public interface that may also be unparalleled in the history of radical politics. For all these reasons, this may be the first modern movement for which failure to communicate through mass media is not a fatal limit. Indeed, international polls on globalization and the protest movement reveal more favorable public attitudes toward the movement—particularly in the South—than one might suspect given the tone of press coverage (Pew Research Center, 2003). One implication here—and it is consistent with a great deal of research on publics and media audiences—is that mass publics are beginning to fragment in most modern societies, while media channels are proliferating, with the result that publics must be assembled through multimedia strategies. This is good news for activists who can now publish high-quality media content of their own. Activists can ''Be the Media,'' as the well-traveled slogan of Indymedia puts it.

But what are the political aims of this movement, and how is it going about achieving them? Here again, we encounter the disjuncture between

NGOs who primarily seek relations with governmental entities, and direct action networks involved in all manner of political relationship building from simply trying to shut down trade meetings, to experimenting with stand-alone regulatory systems to monitor and discipline manufacturers and entire industrial sectors. It is impossible to evaluate all of these initiatives in this short space. I am tempted to adopt Coopman's generalization that these ''dissentworks'' primarily accomplish what he calls ''resource burn''—distracting and wearing down larger opponents who have trouble fighting such nimble distributed networks (2003). His classic case is file swapping on the Internet, which seems to be changing the business model of the music industry.

If disrupting the business of the status quo can be included in assessing the capacity of a movement, the global justice protests have been fairly effective at several levels. For example, the trade protests have shut down meetings (Seattle WTO) and derailed agreements (Montreal Multilateral Agreement on Investments) with varying degrees of coordination between direct activist networks, hyper-organizations such as Jubilee, and traditional NGO coalitions (Surman and Reilly, 2003:43). Indeed, my preliminary impression of the success stories is that they typically involve overcoming network disjunctions—at least for purposes of short-term actions.

Another area in which the political capacity of this movement can be assessed involves the proliferation of corporate campaigns against multinationals from Monsanto to McDonald's. In many of these campaigns, activists have won compliance with demands for new industry practices and social responsibility standards.[11] Some of these campaigns are conventional NGO-style strategic coalitions that are turned on and off following the model of the now classic Nestlé infant formula boycott. A recent example involving a partnership between direct activists and an NGO was the culture jamming campaign of Greenpeace and Adbusters to force Coca-Cola to change its coolants.[12] However, many recent generation campaigns are what I call permanent campaigns, that have no center and little coordinated strategy—yet they also can drain resources and exact changes from their targets despite their hit and miss quality (Bennett, 2004).

CONCLUSION: THE VIRTUAL LIGHTNESS OF BEING NETWORKED

Large-scale transnational activism, framed loosely around social justice issues, has displayed remarkable organizational capabilities in recent years to wage sustained protests against corporations and transnational

organizations at the core of global economic trade and development regimes. The Iraq War provided another view of transnational organizational capabilities, as peace and social justice activists joined in what may have been the largest simultaneous political demonstrations in the history of the world. And as noted above, peace and antiwar groups joined protests against the FTAA hemispheric trade regime. Both the scale and the organizational fluidity of this activism raise interesting questions for conceptions of transnational activism and for social movement theories.

The three core theoretical issues identified here involve: (1) how traditional NGO advocacy networks are embedded with, and relate to networks of direct activists; (2) how social technologies may create new organizational dynamics in coordinating and expanding protest; and (3) whether these mutually embedded networks can use their technological resources effectively to extend their political capacities to communicate with larger publics and develop accountability relations with corporations and transnational policy agencies. The picture in all three areas is not fully developed, because the patterns are still emerging as I write. For example, there have been enough examples of NGOs and direct activists acting together to suggest that bridging the divides between generational networks is possible; yet there are enough tensions (such as the specter of a counter-forum developing outside the WSF meetings) to suggest that clashing organizational forms have become obstacles in the present era similar to movement ideology and collective identity conflicts in the past. While the social technologies that facilitate dense online networking are clearly enabling the inclusive organization model to work among direct activists, the slow transfer of these technologies to NGOs indicates that conventional models of organizations and political relationships continue to define many NGOs, even as their potential next generation of supporters may be shifting allegiances toward direct action forms.

As for the political capacities of these networks of hyper-organizations, the problems of sustaining relationships and mobilizing action in diffuse ''opt-in'' networks seem to be addressed with some success by technologies that put individuals at the center of multiple networks, thus shifting the brokerage process in many cases from organizational leadership to dense interpersonal relationships. The importance of technologies that integrate on- and offline relationships in these networks is illustrated by a collaborative study of antiwar demonstrators in eight countries, in which I participated as leader of the U.S. research team. The overall results from the eight countries (Germany, United Kingdom [England and Scotland], Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, Italy, Netherlands, United States) showed that personal networks were overwhelmingly the main source through which participants learned about the February 15, 2003, antiwar demonstrations (Walgrave and Verhulst, 2003), followed by mass

media, e-media (Internet and web), and flyers in different orders in different countries.

Some researchers in the February 15 study interpreted this as a sign that electronic communication channels are not as important as many of us think they are.[13] However, my own analysis of the U.S. data (705 cases from San Francisco, Seattle, and New York) shows that the participants who rely most on the Internet and other e-media (and least on mass media) for their general political information and communication were disproportionately more likely to have strong identifications with the global social justice movement. They were also more likely to have participated in the greatest number and thematic diversity of other protest activities, including globalization demonstrations. Conversely, those who were least e-media and more mass media- (TV, newspapers, radio) oriented were more likely to be single issue protesters (peace), to be first-timers to a demonstration, and to identify least with the global social justice movement, and least likely to have participated in a global justice demonstration. (Preliminary analysis suggests that these trends appear to hold for all of the other national data sets as well.) This issue-and-identity bridging facility of social technologies may explain the organizational capacity of what appears to be a movement with weak collective identity and a relatively weak core political agenda. At the same time, these defining features of the movement raise questions about other aspects of movement political capacity, from communicating clear messages to larger publics, to developing effective relationships with political targets.

As for the political change-producing capacity of this movement, my sense is that we should pay more careful attention to the proliferating experiments involving direct relationships with corporations, including labor standards monitoring in the apparel industry, forest certification regimes, and fair-trade campaigns in the coffee sector, among others.[14] Whether or not particular initiatives prove sustainable, they represent early ventures into citizen-driven transnational democratic institution building. Whether or not these direct action initiatives become better integrated with ongoing NGO efforts to pressure states and transnational agencies for particular reforms is perhaps the largest unanswered question of all. The eventual resolution of these linkage issues may hinge on the work done at social fora, at both world and regional levels, along with other world governance and civil society conferences.[15] These gatherings tend to attract the different players required to forge the linkages on which effective political capacity depends. Beyond their potential for changing how NGOs and direct activists mutually define and pursue goals, these gatherings of the social justice tribes also represent the first steps toward a global civil society populated not just by NGOs, but by citizens who seem to be making direct democratic claims beyond borders.

NOTES

1. See www.votenowar.org.
2. See www.internationalanswer.org/endorsers.html.
3. An inventory of these social technologies is located in the Democracy and Internet Technology section of the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement, www.engagedcitizen.org.
4. See www.stopwar.org.uk/.
5. See www.interwebnet.org/chasing_bush.
6. See www.infoshop.org/inews/ftaa_miami.html.
7. See www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/cancun/.
8. This is precisely the model developed by the U.S. activism organization MoveOn. See www.moveon.org.
9. www.engagedcitizen.org.
10. www.govcom.org/publications/drafts/ruckus.html#1.
11. See the archives of campaigns and standards monitoring regimes at the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement (www.engagedcitizen.org) and the Global Citizen Project (www.globalcitizenproject.org).
12. See www.cokespotlight.org. Also, www.adbusters.org.
13. Dieter Rucht (in a personal communication) has noted the disproportionate reliance on interpersonal networks over Internet and web sources for learning about the demonstrations in the German survey. From WZB survey of German antiwar demonstrators.
14. See www.globalcitizenproject.org.
15. Consider the number of lists that went out in just one call to participate in the Global Governance Conference in Montreal, Oct. 13–16, 2002:

50 Years is Enough list on World Bank and IMF; Ad-Hoc List on the MAI; ATTAC's newsletter; BRIDGES Weekly Trade News Digest; Campaign for Labor Rights Action Alerts; Change-IMF, Bread for the World Debt and Development Project; Corporate Europe Observatory newsletter; Corpwatch action alerts; Corpwatch news; Drillbits and Tailings, on oil/gas/mining from Project Underground; Export Credit Agencies Watch; Eye on SAPs from Globalization Challenge Initiative; Focus on the Global South newsletter; Global economy network, Campaign for America's Future; Global environmental list with news updates; Global environmental news updates; Global Trade Watch list; Globalization Challenge Initiative list; International List on Challenges to the FTAA; Jubilee South updates and info; Jubilee USA Network news and information; List on WTO, MAI, and trade issues; News on the IMF, Essential Action; NGO forum on Asian Development Bank; Plan Puebla Panama Social Movements Organizing List; PRS-Watch (Eurodad), monitors World Bank PRSPS and civil society responses; Rights Action information list, commentary/analysis on globalization and Central America; Working group on International Finance Corporation; World Bank Bonds Boycott. Source: www.dasbistro.com/pipermail/nvgreen/2002-June/002437.html.