COALITION BUILDING IN WORLD POLITICS: DEFINITIONS, CONCEPTIONS, AND EXAMPLES

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Abstract

This article discusses the complex nature of world politics making a special reference to the growing roles of the flexible and loosely organized coalitions formed between NGOs from different backgrounds and with different mandates. Relying on the relevant literature, the study seeks to unveil the world of coalition building by defining the relevant terms and exploring the basic motives behind the individual NGOs' decision to join collaborative actions. The study further notes that despite some common features possibly used to identify the coalitions, these joint endeavors often display different tendencies depending on the case for which the individual actors gather together to exert the maximum possible influence.

Keywords

Coalition-building, Non-state Actors, NGOs in World Politics, Complex Global Governance, IR Theories.

Introduction

Coalition building in world politics is rarely discussed in the traditional IR literature. While world politics is becoming more complex because of the increased number of coalition formations, the roles played by these coalitions are not adequately identified in these theories.

Non-state entities, particularly the NGOs (non-governmental organizations), are now more inclined to develop loose alliances in an attempt to exert the maximum pressure over the states, further ensuring alignment with their positions on a particular issue under discussion. Their reliance on the synergy associated with coalition formation has been most visible in recent endeavors to launch the international campaign to ban landmines and ensure adoption of the Rome Statute establishing the first permanent international criminal court.

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The paper takes a critical approach towards the conventional IR theories to identify their inadequacy to explain the current tendency among the non-state actors. Conventional IR theories base their paradigms mostly on the role of the nation-state in international politics and the interactions between themselves as the only meaningful activities that should be taken into consideration for theoretical analyses. However, this tendency is largely being abandoned by the more radical theories prone to shift their focus from the state to other actors whose spheres of influence and power vary depending on their role in world politics.

In consideration of the growing role played by the non-state actors on the global stage, the contemporary analysts and theorists most frequently include these actors in their studies. However, even those who recognize the role of the non-state actors adopt a rather simplistic approach under which the actors of world politics are divided into two major sets of actors: the states and the non-state entities. Obviously, this division is inherently elusive and unable to adequately address the theoretical gap. The division still put a special emphasis on the state as the sole conductor of world politics, while the non-state actors are envisaged as supplemental actors that facilitate or impede the inter-state relations.

A much more progressive paradigm is needed to accurately identify the actors on the global stage. Most probably, this should begin with the recognition of the diverse world of the so-called non-state actors which may include a wide variety of entities ranging from non-governmental organizations to multinational enterprises. A brief inquiry into this world will reveal that the world politics is so complex that it cannot be fully understood through the lens of the paradigms solely based on the nation-state. Such an inquiry will not only show that there are a high number of diverse actors trying to be effective but also lead us to conclude that world politics is overwhelmingly complicated because of the almost unidentifiable interactions between these actors.

Definitions

While defining civil society organizations, including NGOs, is a very hard task, coalitions pose two more serious difficulties. One difficulty is essentially related to the very diverse characters of all human beings, and their reflections on the collective entities they create: "since nongovernmental organizations deal with the entire spectrum of human values, human aspirations, human needs and human antagonisms, it is natural that NGO coalitions similarly reflect the human condition through their complexities and defy simple definitions."[1]

The other one is associated with the terminology. Ritchie argues that terminology on coalitions and other similar collectivities is nothing helpful at all:

> Terminology is not of great help in the quest for organizational definitions. NGO coalitions use, seemingly interchangeably, a rainbow of titles: conference, association, federation, league, alliance, union, council, consortium and network. There are even such apparently limiting terms as 'committee' or 'working group'. The word `coalition' itself appears rather infrequently in the titles of international NGO groupings, but seems to have more favor at the national and regional levels.[2]

Ironically, despite the abundance of the terms that could be used, and in fact have been used, interchangeably, there are relatively a small number of scholarly works on the coalitions. While the fact that NGOs form networks received a great deal of attention during the last decade,[3] this interest has so far revealed itself through the abundant works done on transnational networks only, resulting in the substantial ignorance of the coalitions.[4]

Those difficulties cited above notwithstanding, some scholars made attempts to define the term coalition. For instance, Bobo, Kendall, and Max define the coalition as, "an organization of organizations working together for a goal."[5] Similarly, Himmelman describes a coalition as, "an organization

[1] Cyril Ritchie, "Coordinate? Cooperate? Harmonise? NGO Policy and Operational Coalitions," *Third World Quarterly,* Vol. 16, No. 3 (1995), p. 514.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 514. It should be noted that some coalitions do not prefer any of those terms, and remain as NGO, as it is the only way to gain consultative status under the UN System.

[3] Helen Yanacopulos, "The Strategies that Bind: NGO Coalitions and Their Influence," *Global Networks,* Vol. 5, No. 1 (2005), p. 94.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 94. Yanacopulos believes that "while there have been numerous studies on networks, more work needs to be done on coalitions."

[5] Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall and Steve Max, *Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990s*, Washington: Seven Locks Press, 1991, p. 70.

of organizations working together for a common purpose.[6] Both definitions have one thing in common: that coalitions are essentially outcomes of a pragmatic approach. In other words, "coalitions are not built because it is good, moral, or nice to get everyone working together. The only reason to spend the time and energy building a coalition is to amass the power necessary to do something you cannot do through one organization."[7]

Yanacopulos refers to a coalition as "a particular type of network." While this is not a clear definition, it provides a distinctive feature of a coalition: that unlike a network, a coalition "involves more value and commitment."[8] Departing from this base, she further argues that a coalition is more formal and institutionalized than a transnational network:

> NGO coalitions form more permanent links than single-issue thematic transnational advocacy networks. They generally have permanent staff members, a more permanent membership base, a headquarters or secretariat, and are organizations in and of themselves. Most importantly, they have broader strategic aims than single-issue thematically focused networks. Not surprisingly, while these NGO coalitions are organizational entities in and of themselves, they and their members also frequently belong to single-issue transnational advocacy networks… Coalitions create a greater value and commitment together. While networking is an important part of coalition building, networks can exist without coalitions.[9]

However, the above quotation does not help either. There is no reason to believe that coalitions are stronger than networks. Moreover, given that the two could be –and are- used interchangeably, one cannot easily make a distinction between a network and a coalition. And more importantly, while there might be coalitions formed around a single-issue, there could also be networks with multiple objectives.

Basic Features

Like definitional attempts, setting a generally acceptable set of basic features of coalitions is inherently elusive. Yet a few scholars have made efforts to clarify the nature of NGO groupings, and other similar collectivities.

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[6] Arthur T. Himmelman, "On Coalitions and the Transformation of Power Relations: Collaborative Betterment and Collaborative Empowerment," *American Journal of Community Psychology*. Vol. 29, No. 2 (2001), p.277

[7] Bobo, Kendall and Max, *Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990s*, p. 70.

[8] Yanacopulos, "The Strategies that Bind: NGO Coalitions and Their Influence," p. 93.

[9] Ibid., p. 95.

Probably the most uncontroversial feature is diversity; one should expect that a coalition would be very diverse, as it would involve civil society organizations having different mandates, missions, and objectives, and even organizational structures, membership compositions and so on.[10] The diversity is so severe that "the question of what constitutes a coalition"[11] is a very legitimate one.

Diversity is not prevalent only within the coalitions, but also among the coalitions. That is to say, not every coalition resembles with another. In fact, we can speak of a plural world of coalitions. Some are purely national, while some others truly global. While some coalitions are mainly built on civil society actors, some others have maintained strong ties with governments, and even with groupings of governments. Some are funded by their own constituents, whereas a good segment of them seek external funding.[12]

The diverse nature of a coalition could be a liability, or an asset, depending on how the coalition itself addresses its diversity.[13] In order to overcome the challenges that could emerge out of its diverse character, a coalition needs to set commonly accepted values and principles.[14] In that case, it "can manage their own diversity in changing political circumstances." However, if coalitions "merely work on common issues and do not recognize the diversity of values and principles which exists within them," they will simply become ineffective, and eventually are destined to dissolution.[15] Similarly, Ritchie holds that the success of a coalition is not associated with its organizational strength, but to its members' commitment to the commonly agreed values, beliefs and objectives.[16]

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[10] Of course, that does not necessarily mean every coalition needs to be of very diverse character. While "NGO coalitions may bring together like-minded persons or organizations with deeply-shared goals (International Board on Books for young people, International Union against Cancer, for example)," they may also involve "persons and organizations with sharply contrasting views (the Inter-Parliamentary Union, for example," and "sometimes both approaches may occur within one organization." Ritchie, "Coordinate? Cooperate? Harmonise? NGO Policy and Operational Coalitions," p. 514.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 514.

[12] *Ibid*., p. 515. Ritchie notes that "NGO coalitions rely for their financing mainly on fees paid by their members, but there are examples of substantial funds sometimes being raised from foundations and government agencies." He also stresses that the fundamental reason for seeking external funding is the unwillingness –or reluctance, at best- of NGOs to 'invest' too much to cooperation and alliance with other entities.

[13] Win notes that "we must understand coalitions as political institutions which face internal and external challenges. How well a coalition navigates this political terrain influences its survival." Everjoice J. Win, "When Sharing Female Identity is not Enough: Coalition Building in the Midst of Political Polarisation in Zimbabwe," *Gender and Development,* Vol. 12, No. 1 (2004),

[14] *Ibid*., p. 19, noting that "diversity of values and core beliefs must be acknowledged if coalitions are to operate effectively."

[15] *Ibid*., p. 26.

[16] Ritchie, "Coordinate? Cooperate? Harmonise? NGO Policy and Operational Coalitions," p. 524. Referring to a coalition as "a particular form of collective action," Ritchie asserts that "determination, inspiration and imagination are the essential glue holding its members together."

The above analysis suggests that the level of diversity of a coalition is critical to its success and future achievements. Some even argue that "the survival and longevity of an NGO coalition depends on its ability to manage its conflicts and maintain a degree of consensus between its unlikely yet influential allies."[17]

The second important feature of a coalition is flexibility. It is in fact the natural outcome of the very diverse character of a coalition. For this reason, some scholars hold that as an organizational type, coalition building connotes a loose and flexible structure.[18] The flexibility ensures a high level of mobility of the coalition, and of its members. Moreover, flexible organization allows member organizations to act partially independent of the coalitional structure, and optimally benefit from this structure. The member organizations preserve their identity, and perfectly continue pursuing their objectives unrelated to the subject matter of the coalition. In other words, member organizations do not lose anything when they enter into alliance with other ones, while they might be able to achieve at least some of their objectives thanks to such an alliance.

Another major feature of a coalition is issue-orientedness. Most coalitions are formed out of a need for focusing a colossal problem that requires a large scale of cooperation, resources, and efforts. In most of the cases, this problem, or issue is a global problem for which a large segment of the world shares the same view. In other words, controversial issues are not very appropriate for coalition building, as they might cause serious clashes, and conflicts, and eventually result in serious failures, such as the dissolution of the coalition. For a successful coalition building, the issue should also be publicized; however, of course, it is not a strong necessity. In addition, major successful coalitions so far suggest that focusing on a single issue is more likely to create the desired outcomes. That way, it would be possible to achieve better results; as it would ensure simplicity in comprehending the issue, and easiness in allocating the resources. In addition, it would also alleviate the impact of the diversity between the member organizations.[19]

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[17] Pauline P. Cullen, "Coalitions Working for Social Justice: Transnational Non-Governmental Organizations and International Governance," *Contemporary Justice Review,* Vol. 2, No. 2 (1999), p. 173.

[18] See, for instance, Ritchie, "Coordinate? Cooperate? Harmonise? NGO Policy and Operational Coalitions," and Cullen, "Coalitions Working for Social Justice: Transnational Non-Governmental Organizations and International Governance."

[19] See, for instance, Fen Osler Hampson and Holly Reid, "Coalition Diversity and Normative Legitimacy in Human Security Negotiations," *International Negotiation*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2003), pp. 7–42.

In most cases, a coalition is the product of a strategy, or a strategic plan. In essence, the existence of an issue that needs to be resolved, and the substantial differences among the actors committed to the resolution of this issue, requires the development of a well-defined and crafted strategy to be implemented throughout the campaigns and other relevant activities that the Coalition would organize.[20] Developing an operational strategy is so essential for the survival of a coalition that it is cited as one of the most important drivers of coalition formation.[21] The primary reason for the strong attachment to strategy-building is that without effective strategizing, the future and influence of a coalition might be jeopardized, as the diversity between the member organizations would dictate its dissolution. However, in the presence of a clearly defined strategy, members of the coalition will have the opportunity to "negotiate and renegotiate the terms of coalition," and to discuss "how far they will go with one another."[22]

And finally, probably the most important and indicative feature of a coalition is the high level of ambiguity[23] involved in their membership structures, scopes of activities and so on. In fact, this ambiguity is the natural outcome of the very diverse and flexible character of the coalitions.

One could cite many ambiguities. However, even only a few of them would be sufficient to show the level of ambiguity associated with the coalitions. The first one is on the membership structure: while there is a general tendency to believe that coalitions are essentially formed between NGOs, there are in fact some coalitions admitting *non*-NGO members.[24] It has also been observed that some Coalitions whose stated status are NGO Coalitions "had or have government ministries or departments as voting members alongside national NGO voting members, but their international status was and is that of an NGO coalition."[25] Furthermore, we must recall

[20] It should be noted that in fact NGOs themselves are strategic organizations; and they frequently adopt such strategic actions as coalition building, lobbying, and campaigning. Yanacopulos, "The Strategies that Bind: NGO Coalitions and Their Influence," p. 94.

[21] *Ibid*., p. 96.

[22] Win, "When Sharing Female Identity is not Enough: Coalition Building in the Midst of Political Polarisation in Zimbabwe," p. 26.

[23] It has been asserted that "coalitions are not always clear in their goals and are often unsure about how to obtain them. Ambiguity, therefore, naturally accompanies coalitions." Christophe Dupont, "History and Coalitions: The Vienna Congress (1814–1815)," *International Negotiation,* Vol. 8, No. 1 (2003), p. 169.

[24] For instance, Hampson and Reid make a useful distinction between purely governmental coalitions and mixed ones that are formed in collaboration between state units and civil society actors. They call state-to-state coalitions as *horizontal,* and state-to-civil society as *vertical* coalitions. Hampson and Reid, "Coalition Diversity and Normative Legitimacy in Human Security Negotiations," p. 35.

[25] Ritchie, "Coordinate? Cooperate? Harmonise? NGO Policy and Operational Coalitions," p. 514. Ritchie also refers to an interesting point: that while "National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are both NGOs and government auxiliaries," "their International Federation places itself unambiguously among the world's leading NGOs." P. 514.

that coalition formation is not peculiar to the world of civil society. There are many examples that could be called as inter-state coalitions.[26]

What complicates the picture more is the frequency of "coalitions" among coalitions, and the diversity among the "coalitions." For instance, the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines, and the NGO Coalition for an International Criminal Court, two very successful examples of coalition formation, opted to establish a coalition with the coalitions of states formed in the respective conference venues. It could be argued that the cooperation maintained between the civil society coalitions and the coalitions of states was temporary, and informal. However, that would not necessarily mean this cooperation was not an example of coalition formation.

Another ambiguity is the institutional strength of a coalition. While some argue that a coalition refers to a stronger type of organizing, some others hold that a coalition is inherently loose and thus fragile.[27] For instance, unlike many others, Yanocopulos asserts that NGO coalitions are stronger alliances than issue-networks:

> Single-issue networks are conducive to setting up powerful campaigns, such as debt cancellation campaigns, landmine banning campaigns and dam campaigns. The reason for this is that they focus on one issue that is easily understood while coalitions aim to deal with broader issues that are complex and have many causes.[28]

Motives Behind Coalition Building

It is quite possible to cite numerous reasons and motives behind the willingness, and even desire and eagerness of civil society actors to enter into alliance with their counterparts, governments, and even with their opposites in terms of objectives pursued, and the dominant ideology that drives the organization. For this reason, it should be noted that the following depicts only the most frequent and important ones.

Some NGOs have shown interest towards forming coalitions simply because that way they would be able to have access to the UN. Because

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[26] This is especially the case in state-to-state coalitions. For instance, Dupont "describes and analyzes the coalition patterns that developed during the 1814–1815 Congress of Vienna negotiations." *Ibid*., pp. 169-178.

[27] For instance Dupont notes that "Coalitions are often unstable and cohesiveness among their members may decrease over time. It is not uncommon to witness coalition members shift to different coalitions." *Ibid*., p. 169.

[28] Yanacopulos, "The Strategies that Bind: NGO Coalitions and Their Influence," p. 106.

"conferences of NGOs have consultative or similar status with one or another UN body," "contact with and influence on the United Nations system is the *raison d'être* of many NGO coalitions and a substantial part of the activity of many others."[29] However, in general, the coalitions built for the purpose stated above do not last long. Most of the coalitions "created to relate to UN years or conferences have usually expired shortly after the specified time frame."[30]

Of course, as might be easily predicted, the primary motive behind the coalition building is the possibility that the impact of the combined forces and influences of individual organizations would be greater. In this regard, most NGOs believe that they together "would make a bigger difference," as the coalition they would create would be "based on notions of solidarity, mutual support, and information sharing."[31] By bringing the strengths and resources of diverse, yet numerous and single-minded groups, coalitions generally manage to create a determinative impact towards change.[32]

Of course, the assertion that individual NGOs would create a greater impact when they combine their resources and strengths under a coalition whose terms, values, and principles are agreed in a collective manner is not a tautology. However, most of the experiences of coalitions in the past would suggest that it is a great possibility that the combination of forces and resources would create the outcomes desired by the civil society sector.[33] In addition to the accomplishments of the coalitional collectivities examined below, there are numerous other successful campaigns carried out by NGO groupings. For example, the alliance established between developing countries and such influential NGOs as the Consumer Project on Technology, *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) and Oxfam had a determinative impact on the adoption of The Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health at the ministerial meeting of World Trade Organization in Doha.[34]

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[29] Ritchie, "Coordinate? Cooperate? Harmonise? NGO Policy and Operational Coalitions," p. 516.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 523.

[31] Win, "When Sharing Female Identity is not Enough: Coalition Building in the Midst of Political Polarisation in Zimbabwe," p. 22.

[32] In general, see, Lisa Veneklasen and Valerie Miller, *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: the Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*, Oklahoma, World Neighbors, 2002.

[33] For instance, Paul Wapner notes that "although there is no way to measure the combined effects of NGO coordination, it is probably fair to say that the environmental NGO community as a whole is larger than the sum of its parts." Paul Wapner, "The Transnational Politics of Environmental NGOs," Paper prepared for the United Nations University Symposium on The United Nations and the Global Environment, November 14-15, 1997, New York City, p. 5.

[34] For further details, see, Ruth Mayne, "The Global NGO Campaign on Patents and Access to Medicines: An Oxfam perspective," in Peter Drahos and Ruth Mayne (eds.), *Global Intellectual Property Rights: Knowledge Access and Development*, New York, NY, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 244–258; and Susan K. Sell, "TRIPS and the Access to Medicines Campaign," *Wisconsin International Law Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2002), pp. 481–522.

Another fine example is the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) that was established in 1998 in order to provide "concrete criteria against which corporations can strive to improve their environmental record and against which activist groups and citizens can evaluate corporate environmental performance."[35] Subsequently, the Coalition developed a code to be observed by global firms.[36] To date, a number of multinational corporations have undertaken to comply with the principles set out by this code.[37] It should also be noted that the civil society organizations represented under the aforesaid Coalition monitor the compliance of the companies with their undertakings.

Cost reduction by sharing information and expertise could be another important motive behind coalition building. Especially the advance in Internet technologies made the cost of information sharing virtually insignificant; so by entering into alliances with their counterparts, NGOs could benefit from the pool of information for free. More importantly, by combining their forces, NGOs could save a large sum of funds to be allocated to research.[38]

Major Examples of NGO Coalitions and Campaigns

The history of NGO Coalitions is so long that some organizations have a history of over a century. Cyril Ritchie names some of the early coalitions: World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations (founded in 1855), the International Veterinary Congress (1863), the International Federation of Metal Workers Organizations (1893), and the International Council of Nurses (1899). In this century, the list would include the World Middle Class Block (1922), the *Unio Internationalis Catholica Foederationum Caritatis* (1924), the Federation of International Institutions in Geneva (1929), the Conference of NGOs interested in Migration (1950), or the International Society for Labour Law and Social Legislation (1958).[39]

However, it should be noted that as the technological advances have facilitated the communication between the remote parts of the world; coalition

[35] Wapner, "The Transnational Politics of Environmental NGOs," p. 12.

[36] "The code calls on companies to, among other things, minimize pollution, conserve nonrenewable resources through efficient use and planning, and consider demonstrated environmental commitment as a factor in appointing members to the company's board of directors." *Ibid*., p. 12.

[37] For instance, Sun Company, General Motors and Polaroid. *Ibid*., p. 12.

[38] Yanacopulos notes that "an additional benefit of coalitions is that they harness expertise through pooling resources. It is extremely costly to employ experts, be they researchers or lobbyists." Yanacopulos, "The Strategies that Bind: NGO Coalitions and Their Influence," p. 102.

[39] Ritchie, "Coordinate? Cooperate? Harmonise? NGO Policy and Operational Coalitions," p. 513.

formation has become more attractive to individual NGOs.[40] Therefore, as might be easily predicted, with the introduction of the internet, and the ease of organization it provides, the number of NGO Coalitions has dramatically increased in 1990s.[41] Today, the number of alliances between NGOs, and other entities, is so high that it is not possible to make an estimate: "Just as NGOs exist, even thrive, at every level of society, so do their coalitions. Almost every country, certainly every continent, has many NGOs and consequently constellations of NGO coalitions."[42]

Two major reasons could be cited for this dramatic increase in the number of the coalitions: first, the representatives of NGOs have come to the conclusion that establishing ties with other actors, no matter how different and diverse they are, is for the most part beneficial for their own cause and agenda. Second is closely related to the first one. Because of the success rate involved in the coalition formation, NGOs have rarely attempted to dissolve their coalitional ties. As a consequence, only a small number of international NGO coalitions have died so far.[43]

But it should also be noted that some coalitions have to now deal with some serious difficulties peculiar to coalition building.[44] Moreover, while "until the 1970s or 1980s, most coalitions seemed to have been created as permanent coordinating mechanisms or federations,"[45] today, it is possible to speak of such a tendency.

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[40] Peter Willetts, "What is a Non-Governmental Organization?" IHRN Human Rights NGO Capacity-Building Programme – Iraq, p. 7. For instance, "since the 1972 Stockholm Conference, and much more pronounced since the 1992 Earth Summit, NGOs have established networks among themselves to exchange information, share offices and coordinate strategies." Wapner, "The Transnational Politics of Environmental NGOs," p. 5.

[41] To name a few, El Taller, the ReÂseau International d' ONG sur la deÂsertication, the Climate Action Network, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, and the Peoples Alliance for Social Development. Ritchie, "Coordinate? Cooperate? Harmonise? NGO Policy and Operational Coalitions," p. 513. Also, The Antarctic and Southern Oceans Coalition, which coordinates activities among 200 NGOs in forty countries, The Fifty Years is Enough Campaign (FYE) formed with the cooperation of dozens of NGOs to reform the World Bank. Wapner, "The Transnational Politics of Environmental NGOs," p. 5, and The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM), a coalition endeavoring to reform exploitative labor relations in Mexico's export processing sector." It "is a tri-national coalition of Mexican, Canadian, and U.S. organizations that has its origins in the late 1980s, a period of rapid economic restructuring for North America due in part to the development of export-processing in Mexico and deindustrialization in the United States." See, Joe Bandy, "Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Society under Neoliberalism: The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras," *Social Problems,* Vol. 51, No.3 (2004), pp.410-431.

[42] *Ibid*., p. 513.

[43] *Ibid*., p. 513.

[44] For instance, Ritchie notes that some coalitions "have experienced, or are today experiencing, a period of quiescence for policy or financial reasons, or because one or more competing coalitions have come into existence and have eaten into the market." *Ibid*., p. 523.

[45] *Ibid*., p. 523.

The International Campaign to Ban Land Mines (ICBL)

ICBL is a global response by the civil society sector of the world community to a global crisis that is becoming more serious: the insurmountable and irreparable damage caused by millions of land mines. It should be noted that the label should not be taken as it refers to a mere movement without an institutional structure. Quite the opposite; it is in fact an umbrella group of NGOs formed in October 1992 to address the issue of land mines around the world. It made a strong call to governments to get together for the purpose of discussing this global issue, and possibly ensuring the codification of a comprehensive international treaty that would openly ban the use, production, stockpiling, and transfer of anti-personnel land mines. The NGOs were then joined by the "like-minded states" that have been showing eagerness in spending efforts to effectively address the issue. Eventually, the extensive collaboration between the group of NGOs and the group of like-minded states resulted in a truly global treaty that has in a very short time entered into force upon the large number of ratifications.

One of the most influential campaigns, the ICBL[46] has in many respects inspired the formation of the ICC Coalition, another successful global campaign staged to promote establishment of a permanent international criminal court. Its success has frequently been cited as the sign and indication for the power of the masses organized under a strong leadership, and around principles determining the boundaries and content of the activism.

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[46] For more information on the Campaign, see, among others, Maxwell A. Cameron, "Global Civil Society and the Ottawa Process: Lessons from the Movement to Ban Anti-personnel Mines," *Canadian Foreign Policy,* Vol. 7, No. 1 (1999), pp. 85-102; Richard Price, "Reversing the Gun Sights: Transnational Civil Society Targets Land Mines," *International Organization,* Vol. 52, No. 4 (1999), pp. 613-644; S. Roberts and Jodie Williams, *After the Guns Fall Silent: The Enduring Legacy of Landmines*, Washington, D.C., Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, 1995, B. Owsley, "Landmines and Human Rights: Holding Producers Accountable," *Syracuse Journal of International Law & Commerce,* Vol. 21, No. 2 (1995), pp. 203-228,Kenneth R. Rutherford, "Internet activism: NGOs and the Mine Ban Treaty," *International Journal on Grey Literature,* Vol. 1, No. 3 (2000), pp. 99-106, Noel Stott and Alex Vines, *The Non-aligned Movement (NAM) and Global Campaign Against Anti-Personnel Landmines,* London, The South African Campaign to Ban Landmines and Human Rights Watch, 1998, Jodie Williams and Stephen, "The International Campaign to Ban Landmines," in M. Cameron, R. J. Lawson and B. W. Tomlin (eds.), *To Walk Without Fear: The Global Movement to Ban Landmines,* Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 20-48, Robert J. Lawson, Mark Gwozdecky, Jill Sinclair, and Ralph Lysyshyn, "The Ottawa Process and the International Movement to Ban Anti-Personnel Mines," in Maxwell A. Cameron, Robert J. Lawson, and Brian W. Tomlin (eds.), *To Walk Without Fear: The Global Movement to Ban Landmines*, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1998, and Louis Maresca and Stuart Maslen, *The Banning of Anti-Personnel Landmines: The Legal Contribution of the International Committee of the Red Cross*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

The International Campaign to End Genocide[47]

The Campaign was agreed to in 1999 at The Hague, and has been led by Genocide Watch since then. In general terms, it aims to draw the interest and attention of the international community to the crime of genocide; and to create institutions that would be competent to prevent and stop genocide, and punish its perpetrators. The accomplishments of previously organized similar campaigns, most notably the global campaign to ban land mines, and the coalition formed to establish a permanent international criminal court (ICC), inspired the creators of the ICEG. However, to date, its influence and success has been very modest in comparison to its predecessors. While the prior ones have involved thousands of organizations, only thirty NGOs have participated in the campaign led by Genocide Watch.

Several reasons could be referred to for this failure. First of all, there is no guarantee that coalition building will always create the desired outcome. Second, unlike the campaigns on the banning of land mines, and establishment of the ICC, the ICEG has a central organization, a fact that could have caused disinterest in the Campaign by the NGOs. Third, the previous campaigns have engaged in solid and clear issues, whose boundaries and contexts were certain; however, the genocide issue is not an acute one that could be resolved in a specified period of time. Therefore, given that coalition building is an issue-oriented endeavor whose survival and efficiency very much depends on the issue itself, the ambiguities and uncertainties involved in the ICEG could be seen as one of the reasons for the low level of participation.

Health Action International (HAI)

HAI is, "an independent, global network working to increase access to essential medicines and improve their rational use."[48] To this end, HAI works at the global level to promote the essential medicine concept, to increase access to the essential medicines (350 in total), to maintain greater transparency with regard to the decision making in the field of pharmaceutical industry, to promote rational use of medicines, and to establish better controls on drug

[47] For more information on the prevention of genocide, see, H. Fein, (ed.), *Genocide Watch,* New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1992; J. G. Heidenrich, *How to Prevent Genocide: A Guide for Policymakers, Scholars, and the Concerned Citizen,* Westport, CT, Praeger, 2001, and B. A. Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century,* Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2004.

[48] "Mission Statement," Health Action International website, http://www.haiweb.org/missionStatement.html. It is also stated on the website that "HAI is working towards a world where all people, especially the poor and disadvantaged are able to exercise their human right to health, which requires equitable access to affordable quality health care and essential medicines."

promotion.[49] Headquartered in the Netherlands, HAI has also organized in Africa,[50] Asia Pacific,[51] and Latin America.[52]

Its most remarkable and striking activity is the campaign it initiated for the purpose of removing the barriers to accessing to some certain medicines. The organizations and activists represented in this alliance organized a meeting in 1996 in Bielefeld, Germany, where they formed a coalition, and subsequently started a global campaign against the restrictions on access to medicines in the forms of patents and trade rules. Such prominent NGOs like Oxfam later joined the campaign.[53]

The fundamental features of the campaign were good technical analysis closely associated with public policy recommendations and "a highly effective media campaign." However, the most important factor affecting the success of the campaign was the commitment of the NGOs to the issue, and their subsequent willingness to do whatever is required with regard to the resolution of the issue. For example, NGOs raised a strong public pressure against the 39 pharmaceutical companies that filed a lawsuit against South Africa in 2001, resulting in the withdrawal of the lawsuit.[54]

It should be noted that the campaign did not involve civil society actors only. NGOs have been very careful in establishing a strong alliance with governmental actors, especially during the multilateral negotiation phase, where the international dimension of access to medicine was discussed:

> The alliance that lay behind the access to medicines campaign was a complex, composite alliance made up of NGO actors, developing countries that eventually came to include the support of international organizations (for example, the World Health Organization) and some developed countries (most importantly, the European Commission expressed qualified support).[55]

However, despite the complexity involved, and the fragile composition of the alliance, its constituents managed to remain united at least during the

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[49] "HAI Global Network," HAI website, http://www.haiweb.org/01_about_a.htm
[50] HAI Africa, http://www.haiafrica.org
[51] HAI Asia Pacific, www.haiap.org
[52] HAI Latin America, www.aislac.org
[53] Peter Drahos, "When the Weak Bargain with the Strong: Negotiations in the World Trade Organization," *International Negotiation*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2003), p. 94.
[54] *Ibid*., p. 95.
[55] *Ibid*., p. 96.

negotiation phase, simply because "they were focused on a specific goal that they believed was winnable – improving access to treatment for AIDS."[56] The presence of a single issue whose framework was clearly defined beforehand has been one of the primary factors behind the success of the campaign. Therefore, it would be fair to claim that "this fragile group structure would find it…. harder to unite around a broader set of goals."[57]

Implications for World Politics

For centuries, the nation-state has been considered the most significant –if not the only- major actor of world politics. Particularly the conventional IR theories have been careful to depart from the so-called Westphalian system based on the recognition of nation-states as players. For this reason, not only Realist theory which can be cited as the most state-centric paradigm, but also more non-state-actors-oriented theories have remained reluctant to accept the influence and exertion of actors other than nation-states.

It should be recalled that this way of thinking is understandable simply because a theory is made workable through generalizations. Inquirers may even sometimes be required to consider ignoring some details for the sake of achieving a sound and well-grounded theory. For this reason, James Rosenau argues that theoretical inquiries might make it necessary to abandon some exceptions for scholarly purposes.[58]

But reliance on simplistic explanations to achieve sound theories may not be considered reasonable anymore. Above all, we may not need a theory that would hold the ability to explain world politics; or, it may be simply impossible to develop such a theory. As Yale Ferguson and Richard Mansbach demonstrate, theoretical inquiry into the global politics is elusive.[59] Most importantly, even though theoretical endeavors are still considered necessary, theoreticians have to embrace a new approach to include the sheer number of actors in world politics and consider the complex nature of global politics where these actors have greater influence.

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[56] *Ibid*., p. 96.
[57] *Ibid*., p. 96.
[58] James N. Rosenau and Mary Durfee, *Thinking Theory Thoroughly: Coherent Approaches to an Incoherent World,* Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 2000, p. 233.
[59] Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, *The Elusive Quest: Theory and International Politics,* Columbia, SC, University of South Carolina Press, 1988 and by the same authors, *The Elusive Quest Continues: Theory and Global Politics,* Upper Saddle River, NJ, Prentice Hall, 2003.

In consideration of the growing salience of non-state actors, most IR scholars changed their approach to world politics. However, it should be noted that even those who contend that non-state actors are playing important roles in the conduct of global politics –explicitly, or implicitly- sometimes refer to the supremacy of the nation-state. Even though their works underlie the significance of non-state actors, the distinction between the actors of world politics seems to be problematic: when referring to the salience of non-state actors, those works in general employ such terms as non-state actors, non-governmental organizations, transnational networks, or organizations, and so on. The problem here is that each label has a reference to the nation-state.

Scholars aware of the complexity and actor diversity in world politics seek to develop even more comprehensive and complicated way of thinking in an attempt to grasp the nature of inter-actor relations. Two particular examples are worth mentioning. First is *The Emergence of Private Authority in Global Governance*.[60] The title implies that there are two types of authority: public authority, that is nation-state, and private authority, that is, all other actors, including, transnational networks, organizations, corporations, criminal networks. However, even this approach is not appropriate for describing the non-state actors: one could ask why we need to believe that state is the public authority.

The second exception, *Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization*[61] seems to remove this deficit. Rosenau, one of the most prolific scholars of global politics, examines the nation-state as a center of authority. In his opinion, in contemporary globalized world, states are not the only authorities governing the peoples of world and the interactions at all levels. Therefore, states are not enjoying their dominant position, they once used to, in global politics.

The reason for this assertion is that many new entities, in his conceptualization spheres of authorities (SOAs), have emerged, and are still emerging. There are countless SOAs in amount and in kind. Considering the large number and variety of actors playing their own roles in global politics, Rosenau contends that global politics is so complex and sophisticated that states cannot be regarded as the sole authorities and conductor of all kinds

[60] R. B. Hall and T. J. Biersteker (eds.), *The Emergence of Private Authority in Global Governance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.
[61] James Rosenau, *Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2003.

of global or local activities anymore. Unlike his many arguments, he is very clear on that matter: "the central institution of modern society [which is the nation-state] may no longer be suitable as the organizing focus of inquiry."[62]

An SOA, which is expected to perform at least a supplemental role to the one performed by states in Rosenau's formulation, can be "an issue regime, a professional society, an epistemic community, a neighborhood, a network of like-minded, a truth commission, a corporation, business subscribers to codes of conduct,…a social movement, a local or provincial government, a diaspora, a regional association, a loose confederation of NGOs, a transnational advocacy group,…a terrorist organization,…and so on across all the diverse collectivities."[63]

In Rosenau's view, those SOAs came up with their legitimacies; having reduced the number of states that once had extensive authority the same as their counterparts had long enjoyed in the past. Rosenau argues that the view that stability in global system cannot be maintained without strong and effective states' dominance is a misperception, thus, is not true.[64] To put it differently, stability does not require limited number of authorities, some of which are assumed to ensure the continuity of established system. With SOAs actively and effectively involved in global matters, which have long been addressed by mainly states, it is quite possible to maintain a long-standing stability.

Therefore, for Rosenau, the issues of whether states are losing control and new authorities –either as supplement to or substitute of states- are emerging is not controversial. What is debatable, however, is how the new social contracts between SOAs and public, and states and the rest of authorities will be interacting and arranging the relationships between themselves.[65] It is worth recalling that "social contract" is a renowned notion developed by Rousseau to explain the relationship between "state" and "society." Hence, Rosenau would indirectly suggest that this notion needs to be reformulated so as to embrace SOAs.

This approach appears to hold the ability to explain the presence of extremely diverse actors like coalitions, campaigns, issue regimes, alliances

[62] *Ibid*., p. 294.
[63] *Ibid*., p. 295.
[64] *Ibid*., p. 296.
[65] *Ibid*., pp. 302-307.

and global social movements in world politics. But it should also be admitted that this paradigm will fall short to identify any regularities or continuities in the actions by these actors and their interplays. This will eventually lead us to be pessimistic on developing a solid theoretical explanation on world politics and relying on basic parameters to make inquiry into the world of different players.

Conclusion

Theorists of global politics have been long reluctant to pay much attention to transnational activism. The discipline of International Relations still lacks a comprehensive theoretical framework and analysis on transnational activities pertinent to such global issues as human rights and environmental degradation, women's rights, and poverty. Notwithstanding the fact that the last two or so decades have witnessed that the scholars of global politics have made significant attempts to extend the limits of the discipline and to enlarge its scope, almost no substantial and noteworthy academic study that would have the capacity to adequately cover and explain transnational activism has emerged up until recently. Even though a substantial number of academic studies that have focused on NGOs, civil activities and social movements could be found, those studies have rarely addressed the actorship capacity, capability and quality of transnational human rights advocacy networks as single units in global politics.

It is interesting to note that while there are numerous works focusing on the salience, influence, and efficiency of civil society actors, none of them –or a few, at best- could be regarded as theoretical accounts.[66] Mainstream theories, while acknowledging the importance of non-state entities as actors of international politics, do not make strong references to their theoretical value.

However, it should be noted that this state of indifference is quite understandable, given the challenges posed by the complexities, and ambiguities involved with civil society actors. Those include definitional difficulties, lack of features common to all civil society actors, and the very diverse nature of the realm of civil society. Therefore, it is not an easy task to

[66] Gordenker and Weiss note on this matter that "much remains to be done to approach a comprehensive theory of NGOs, either along social lines or from some other direction." Leon Gordenker and Thomas G. Weiss, "NGO Participation in the International Policy Process," *Third World Quarterly,* Vol. 16, No. 3 (1995), p. 544.

develop a paradigm that would ensure full comprehension and understanding of the complex domain of global civil society.

The coalitions formed with the participation of NGOs and other civil society actors from diverse backgrounds and with different mandates make the already complicated nature of world politics even more incomprehensible. For instance, the case of the NGO Coalition for an International Criminal Court (CICC) is far more complex than the sketch briefly drawn here. It involves over 2,000 organizations, each having different missions and mandates. It is a truly global entity, with strong regional and local ties. Separate coalitions exist within the CICC; so, it is the coalition of individual NGOs, but also the coalition of coalitions, some regional, some national, and some sectoral, i.e. Women's Caucus. At the inception, it was designed as a temporary movement; however, over time, it has become more institutionalized. Therefore, it now differs from transnational movements, and campaigns in traditional sense. Moreover, contrary to conventional civil society actors, the CICC has established links with governmental authorities; for instance, it accepts funding from various governments.

The NGO coalition is an actor with no visible and clearly defined boundaries, but with unprecedented potential to affect the interactions between global actors. With no virtual geographical limits, the coalition proved to be a good example –and a successful one- for transnational activism of enormous participation.

It should be recalled that the world of coalition building is also very complex, as almost none of the NGO coalitions are identical. For instance, while it resembles past coalition cases in some respects, the CICC has relied on drastically different methods and activities to achieve its preset goals. There were also structural differences. For instance, the CICC has evolved to a more institutionalized movement which later gained a permanent character, whereas most past examples were provisional and less official.

What does this leave with us? Most IR scholars promote adherence to a theory or a paradigm when conducting research on world politics. Adherence to, and reliance on, a theory is particularly appealing because of its guidance prior to the inquiry and its direction to a specifiable conclusion beforehand. Yet, complexity and diversity in the world of players active in global politics

makes it difficult to draw easily acceptable conclusions compatible with the premises of a certain IR theory.

For this reason, it could also be said that we should abandon the quest to explain events of global politics within the framework of a theory, as the dynamics of transformations are always at work, and likely to prevent the formation of a universal set of ideas that would be able to explain politics, which is inherently human-made and thus subject to the wills and actions of human beings. In short, is it wise to inquiry a comprehensive theory, while the quest for such a theory proved to be elusive?