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978-0-521-19156-2 - Building Transnational Networks: Civil Society and the Politics of Trade in the Americas
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PART ONE

Civil Society Organizations and Their Pathways to Transnationality

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Introduction

When civil society organizations (CSOs) enter the realm of international relations, they make a decision that is fraught with uncertainty. Not only is there no blueprint for going global, but doing so requires skills and resources that are scarce for most actors. Different choices are available, and which is the best may not be obvious. The results often are ambiguous because actors become neither local nor global, and sometimes are both. This book is about the uncertainty and ambiguity that permeate collective action across different scales. It offers an analysis about when, and how, actors choose among multiple possible pathways to transnationality.

In 1969, James Rosenau called for the development of a *linkage theory*, supported by a research agenda on national–international flows of influence. The absence of such a theory was, according to the author, due both to the lack of communication between those who specialize in national politics and those who specialize in international relations, and to the radical revision of the standard conception of politics that this theoretical approach would entail (Rosenau 1969a: 8–10). Twenty-five years later, another prominent international relations scholar, Robert B. J. Walker, made a similar appeal to understand the *politics of connection* across spatial boundaries and the *politics of movement*, which should consider the changing contexts of political action through time (Walker 1994).

A key premise of this book is that we have not yet been able to answer these calls for a dynamic, multiscale, and multidisciplinary approach in studies about transnational collective action. Doing so remains a relevant task. It is true that, since the publication of the pioneering analyses on transnationalism (Kaiser 1969, 1971; Keohane and Nye 1971), this research field has gained increased relevance and sophistication. What began as

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an attempt to incorporate the roles of nonstate actors – mainly, at the time, multinational corporations – in studies of international relations has become a vast literature that considers an increasingly diverse set of actors, strategies, and processes. The contributions of the last four decades have been truly welcome innovations in a traditionally state-centric literature on international relations.

However, most analyses have focused on trying to understand why nonstate actors have become so important – the problem of origin – and what kinds of impacts they have had – the problem of outcome. By emphasizing either the relevance of structural factors to explain the emergence of transnational collective action or its short-term results, scholars have paid insufficient attention to understanding how these actors decide with whom to build ties, the sustainability or fragility of these ties through time, and the dilemmas they have to face when engaging in action across scales.

This book contributes to fill these gaps. Its main goal is to provide a better understanding of the variety and dynamics of transnational collective action. It presents the results of a study on the ways in which CSOs that have challenged free trade negotiations in the Americas linked the national and international scales of activism. The book covers two decades of collective action, which allows me to analyze the formation, development, and, in some cases, demise of the ties created among CSOs within and across national borders. This period goes from the incipient transnationalization of actors' strategies, networks, and discourses, during the debates about the constitution of the Common Market of the South (Mercado Común del Sur – MERCOSUR) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), to the more institutionalized and diverse repertoire of action that characterized the mobilizations around the hemispheric negotiations of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

How and why did a wide variety of actors, ranging from tiny nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to million-member unions and social movements, from countries with very different levels of economic development and cultural backgrounds, find a common agenda and mobilize together? Are these agreements sustainable through time? In what instances do actors fail to collaborate? The book adopts a theoretical and methodological framework that is especially sensitive to two characteristics of transnational collective action: its potential mutations through time and its variation across scales.

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What Is Transnational Collective Action?

When CSOs want to influence international negotiations, some reach out to allies beyond national boundaries, launch joint campaigns, and create common agendas, whereas others prioritize lobbying domestic institutions. Some CSOs focus on influencing states' behavior, and others target public opinion, officials of international organizations, or other CSOs. More often than not, actors do not choose between a national versus a global level of collective action, but are present intermittently on both scales.

I propose to define transnational collective action as *the process through which individuals, nonstate groups, and/or organizations mobilize jointly around issues, goals, and targets that link the domestic and international arenas.* This mobilization is not necessarily continuous through time. On the contrary, most instances of transnational collective action will not breed institutionalized or stable relationships, but will instead be made up of contingent and temporary connections among actors. As much as domestic collective action, transnational collective action is a *dynamic process of configuration and reconfiguration of interactions.*[1]

This understanding of transnational collective action does not subsume it in the broader process of internationalization that CSOs have undergone since the 1970s. Activities such as the exchange of information among actors located in different countries, sign-ons, international seminars, visits of foreign delegations, and contact with foreign donors and agencies all have become part of the daily tasks of an increasing number of NGOs, trade unions, and business associations. However, these activities, by themselves, do not imply a commitment to joint mobilization.

At the same time, this definition of transnational collective action purposefully implies a larger universe than other scholars would allow. For example, it differs from that proposed by Donatella della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, who use the definition "to indicate coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions" (della Porta and Tarrow 2005a: 7), thus inadvertently excluding action oriented toward changing domestic institutions and policies. It also differs from the definition

[1] Similarly, Ludger Pries has proposed defining transnationalization as a process that consists "of relations and interactions that in some cases strengthen for a while and then dilute again" (Pries 2005: 180).

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of transnationalism proposed by Alejandro Portes, Luis Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt, who see it in terms of regular and sustained cross-border activities (Portes et al. 1999), thereby ignoring less structured forms of interaction.

The range of actors that engage in transnational collective action is extremely diverse. The analysis offered in this book focuses on a specific subset: CSOs from Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and the United States, which have challenged free trade negotiations in the Americas. As will be made clear throughout the book, the notion of civil society that I use does not imply the emergence of a new or homogenous actor. It is an internally heterogeneous category, which includes social movements, NGOs of various types, faith-based initiatives, professional organizations, and business associations. Civil society is best understood as "a space of contested power relations where clashing interests play themselves out through analogous but unequal modes of collective agency" (Colás 2002: 23). Thus, CSOs are not inherently benign (or malicious) forces in the international arena. I see them broadly as institutionalized political actors that seek, from outside political parties and the state, to shape the rules that govern social and political life.[2]

Through time, CSOs may change goals, strategies, and discourses significantly, and they may use a variety of paths that criss-cross scales to carry their messages and organize common action. I analyze this variety through the idea of *pathways to transnationality*, understood here as the routes built by CSOs to link debates and actions across scales. These routes may be temporary or sustained, and, contrary to more enthusiastic accounts, I argue that they are not unidirectional: CSOs have not grown steadily from being domestic to becoming global.

What is new, then, is not the emergence of a global civil society, but the increased internationalization of organizations that, for the most part, remain rooted at the local or national scale. The result is not the creation of a unified front, but an increasingly relevant process of articulation of differences across scales. The boundaries between action in the domestic and international arenas are still relevant for CSOs, but not in the same ways as in the past.

This book proposes to explain the pathways to transnationality taken by CSOs by studying actors' positions in social networks and the specific political contexts in which action takes place, both of which have changed

[2] This definition is similar to the one offered by Scholte (2003: 11).

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significantly throughout the last two decades. The *double embeddedness of actors in social networks and political systems* is the analytical key used to understand the strategies, goals, and frames adopted by challengers of trade agreements at different points in time. By emphasizing both the network and the political embeddedness of CSOs, I bridge the literatures on social networks and social movements.

The focus on social networks relies on a tradition of thought that argues that how actors interact with one another may influence the ways in which they see their roles and their self-interest. Thus, social network analysts agree that there is no way of knowing in advance how social positions come about, and overall relations must be analyzed in an inductive attempt to identify behavior patterns (Wasserman and Faust 1994; Degenne and Forsé 1999). The "argument of embeddedness," as presented by Mark Granovetter, sustains that action is neither the result of atomized actors outside of a social context nor the consequence of adhering to previous scripts determined by the social categories that actors occupy (Granovetter 1985).

However, much social network analysis has focused on the consequences of network structures for collective action, rather than on the process of creation and rupture of social ties, and has not given sufficient attention to specific contexts in which ties are constructed.[3] This bias often has led networks to "take on a substantial, reified quality, removed from the actual dynamics of interaction" (Mische 2003: 262; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994). The approach advocated here builds upon these sympathetic critiques and proposes to define social networks both as a precondition of collective action – because action is affected by actors' preexisting networks – and as an outcome of collective action – because actors create new linkages that in turn constrain (or enable) future action.[4]

By considering the capacity of actors to create ties, this book also promotes a bridge between the constructivist approach in social and political theory and social network analysis. In order to explain collaborative ties among actors, it is not enough simply to reveal their common interests, but it is also necessary to identify the mechanisms by which they

[3] According to Borgatti and Foster, this has been changing, as more network analysts have tried to understand networks' causes, not only their consequences, and as scholars have developed new approaches to consider change. See the discussions in Borgatti and Foster (2003: esp. 1000), Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994), and Friedman and McAdam (1992).

[4] For a defense of such a dual understanding of networks, see, for example, Diani (2003a) and Mische (2003).

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are able (or unable) to overcome their differences and construct common purpose.[5] Such a perspective moves toward an agency-centered view of networks as the product of choices of their members and as processes of meaning attribution.[6]

Furthermore, the creation and demise of social networks cannot be understood apart from the specific political contexts in which actors live. By emphasizing the relevance of the *political embeddedness* of actors, I am borrowing from the political process tradition in social movement theory, which has demonstrated that the emergence of social movements is impacted by the relationship between actors and the political environment (Tilly 1978; Kriese et al. 1995; McAdam 1999). A great deal of attention has been given in this literature to the concept of "political opportunities," defined as "consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people's expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow 1998: 76–77). The analysis of the impacts of political opportunities in this book pays special attention to how actors may differ in their interpretations of these opportunities, in agreement with the critique of the overly structural and static use of the concept in part of the literature.[7] Actors do react to changes in the political environment, but often not in the same way.

The relationship between actors and the political environment assumes a clearer importance if we consider that challengers of trade negotiations are not necessarily challengers of governments, political parties, or legislatures, either in their own country or elsewhere. Quite the contrary, in fact. Most of the CSOs studied in this book had some kind of collaborative tie or participation in the institutional arena, domestically and – increasingly – also abroad. As the political context changes, for example, through the election of a new president or the launching of another trade agreement negotiation, actors change their perceptions of opportunities and threats to collective action. In the last decade, debates

[5] For a call to shift from the search of general models to the study of mechanisms, processes, and episodes, see McAdam et al. (2001). These authors define mechanisms as "a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations" (24).

[6] Harrison White made an important contribution to social network analysis by defining social ties as processes of meaning attribution and shared discourse (White 1992).

[7] For this debate, see Goodwin and Jasper (1999a, 1999b), Tilly (1999), and Tarrow (1999). Sidney Tarrow (2005) has argued also in favor of a more dynamic treatment of the concept.

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about trade agreements became linked to discussions among CSOs about how to deal with the increasing electoral power of the Democratic Party in the United States and the new center-to-left governments that many of them helped elect in Latin America. In various countries, individuals who led campaigns against trade agreements became a part of the new administrations, somewhat muddling the line between government and challengers of trade negotiations.

As suggested above, these interactions with political allies and foes are not only domestic. In part, tensions among challengers of trade agreements arose because activists in various countries had an opinion about everyone else's governments, and often a direct relationship with them. For example, during the FTAA negotiations, the Venezuelan government established close ties with U.S. challengers of trade agreements. Organizations such as the California-based NGO Global Exchange participated in meetings with Venezuelan negotiators and received information from them that was not available through the U.S. delegation.[8]

Social movement scholars have tended overwhelmingly to study political opportunities domestically, whereas international relations scholars have focused on the international scale (Klotz 2002: 54–55; Tarrow 2005: 24; Sikkink 2005: 156). The analysis of the political embeddedness of actors in this book considers the interplay of changing political opportunities at both scales and their impacts on actors' pathways to transnationality.

By considering the double embeddedness of actors in social networks and political environments domestically and beyond national borders, this study assumes not only that theories of social movements, comparative politics, and international relations are all useful for understanding transnational activism, but also that the boundaries among these fields are increasingly porous. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach provides the best way to enhance our understanding of transnational collective action.

Why Trade?

Many CSOs have moved from working on single to multiple issues, progressively broadening their goals and alliances (Pianta 2001: 191; Smith

[8] This was true, for example, during the Free Trade Area of the Americas Ministerial Meeting, held in Miami in 2003, when I attended a meeting between Venezuelan negotiators and U.S. CSOs.

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2005: 234). That being true, it has become more relevant to understand how actors with various policy interests may (or not) come together in collective action. Perhaps more than any other negotiating arena, trade offers the possibility of studying the dynamics of interaction among differently situated actors. In the process of creation of a global trade regime, the agendas of negotiations have expanded greatly, and new actors have become interested in challenging or supporting these efforts. In fact, international trade negotiations have become increasingly prominent stages for the battle of ideas over the future of globalization and global governance, going much beyond traditional discussions about quotas and tariffs.

These changes require a new approach to the study of trade-related collective action. Because of the distributive impacts of trade policies, traditionally scholars have emphasized the tendency toward domestic polarization between those that expect to gain and those that expect to lose from negotiations. Thus, the political economy literature on trade coalition building argues that productive forces gather around their particularistic demands and agendas at the national scale (see, for example, Rogowski 1989; Hiscox 2002).

However, the usual polarization between "protectionists" and "free traders" or between "winners" and "losers" that lobby domestic negotiators is not as useful anymore, for two main reasons. First, civil society participation in trade debates has gone far beyond productive forces (such as labor and business). These forces now compete for seats at the table with environmental organizations, human rights NGOs, consumer rights movements, and development organizations, which do not necessarily orient their actions according to protectionist or liberal positions on trade. Second, a purely economic and static interest-based account does not explain the collaborative linkages created between actors in developed and developing countries, nor does it allow us to understand how organizations that compete for similar pools of jobs, such as the different national labor federations, sometimes can collaborate. A domestic approach to trade coalition building based on actors' fixed short-term interests tells us only a small part of the story, and not the most interesting one.

Why the Americas?

The process of politicization of trade negotiations happened first in the Americas, diffusing from there to the rest of the world. The street

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protests during the Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO), held in Seattle in 1999, are mentioned often as a defining moment in the history of transnational collective action. However, what happened in Seattle should be analyzed in light of the previous decade of contention around free trade agreements in the Americas.

CSOs in the Americas began to pay greater attention to trade negotiations in the mid-1980s, but they did not really engage in the transnational collaboration efforts that characterized the following decade. A few of them became interested in the negotiations within the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the precursor of the World Trade Organization. However, the earliest precedent of the mobilizations that characterized the 1990s were the actions of Canadian CSOs that challenged the Canada–United States Free Trade Agreement (CUSFTA) negotiations. The Canadians were the pioneers in organizing a broad coalition, which brought together NGOs of various types, labor unions, gender organizations, and family farmers to criticize a free trade agreement. This initial period was one of raising awareness about the potential impacts of trade agreements and, as will be shown in this book, was characterized by a few largely unsuccessful attempts at transnational collaboration.

A second period was initiated with the launching of two key subregional negotiations at the beginning of the 1990s: the NAFTA and the MERCOSUR. As CSOs began to pay greater attention to trade negotiations, they realized how ill-prepared they were to deal with this new issue. First, many actors in the region did not speak to each other because of political grievances inherited from the Cold War era. Furthermore, there were few hemispheric or even subregional spaces in which to exchange ideas and information. This period was one of learning about how to build transnational collaboration and of diffusion of organizational repertoires and frames across national borders.

From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, a third period began, as the mobilizations shifted to the hemispheric scale, prompted by the negotiation of the FTAA. Challengers of trade agreements created new coalitions, launched campaigns, lobbied negotiators and legislatures, held multitudinous protests, and built common critiques and demands across countries. Never before had so many different CSOs from the region come together to debate and mobilize transnationally around a hemispheric agenda.

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