

An Emerging Global Civil Society? Implications for Learning and Work

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We begin with what is not news. Corporations and firms have not simply taken over the mechanisms of production and consumption. They have equally usurped our private selves and our public spaces
Mark Kingwell, The World We Want, 2000 A.D.

...He laughed at me, at my promise to bring him all the wealth in Egypt, which was folly to his heart
from Tale of a Shipwrecked Sailor, 1940 B.C.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the meanings, uses and utility of the concept global civil society. In doing so, I will explore the evolving forms of social and political discourse, address questions of why the concept has arisen now, look at networks and networking as key practices of global civil society, make the links with adult learning, present some challenges to both the practice and theory of global civil society. This paper is part of an on-going dialogue on the implications for adult learning of the times we are now living through.

Global civil society is a theme that attracts me because it seems to be an area of social and political theory that reflects much of my own experience working within international adult education and social movement circles. I first used the term myself in my opening remarks to the IV ICAE World Assembly of Adult Education in Bangkok, Thailand in January of 1990. As previously noted in the Introduction to the book, my work has been shaped by an extensive and profound sense of the world as an interconnected space where connections among women and men across national boundaries have been like a kind of electric current of change and transformation. My identification with the adult education movement dates from August, 1970 when I arrived in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to take up a job as Research Officer with the Institute of Adult Education of the University of Dar es Salaam. Upon leaving Tanzania, I took up a position with the International Council for Adult Education where I worked until 1991. I teach in an academic setting in a Department of Adult Education at the University of Toronto in Canada. I believe profoundly that theory follows life, and is one among many ways that we seek to explain what our senses tell us about what is happening and why. Social and political theorists who have taken up the concept of global civil society appear to be doing so as a way of explaining what they see as changes in ways in which global politics are taking place. In so many issues ranging from global

climate change to women's reproductive health, decision-making and policy development is accomplished outside the limits of state or inter-state structures. Global civil society is one of several ways to describe this space.

But while I believe that social and political theorizing describes, when it is done well, some of what is actually happening, I also profoundly believe that a clear explanation, a clear theory can be an engaging, transformative, and practical help to us as we grapple with questions about how to work, what things are worth doing, and how whatever we do fits into the work of others we admire, support or emulate. I wonder how many adult educators can remember the first time that they read Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed? The sheer delight in finding a complex explanation for what many of us already believed and were working towards gave us a burst of energy and a sense of connectedness to others which kept many going for years. Freire's theorizing of learning, power and dialogue was a creative, practical and political contribution. The exploration of the use and value of the civil society concept is drawn from a similar impulse.

What is Global Civil Society?

Global civil society is a space where things happen. It is not an actor itself. It is the place where social movement organizations, international research and advocacy networks, global policy bodies as well as a wide variety of non-governmental (NGO) and international non-governmental organizations (INGO) interact with states, United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies and the private sector itself. It is a political space which has grown in response to and in resistance to the globalizing forces of the day. It is of course the close conceptual cousin of 'civil society', which has re-emerged over the past 25 years as a useful concept to describe the autonomous space for citizen action, organization or theorization. In an earlier essay (1996) Michael Welton, has reviewed the historical origins and the contemporary renaissance of the concept of civil society in relation to adult education. Welton argues that "the idea of a third sphere of social action--separate from but in interplay with--the formal realms of economy and the state holds out the promise of providing us with a 'unifying project' towards the 21st Century". In Welton's formulation, civil society combines the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (voluntary, political parties, etc), the sphere of movements (women, ecology) and the sphere of 'publics' (communications). My own thinking about civil society owes the most to the work of Antonio Gramsci who noted that, "Between the economic structure and the state with its legislation and coercion stands civil society" And as we see in Welton's Chapter on "Civil Society and the Public Sphere: Habermas' Recent Thinking", the notion of civil society, even without the added complexity of the addition of the concept of global to its understanding, offers up one of the richest debates in late 20th century social and political thought.

This chapter argues that a set of global civil societies or a complex and elaborate global civil

society is emerging and has gained visibility in the context of global economic consolidation. I would argue, however, that just as the concept of civil society holds out some promise for a renewed understanding of transformative politics, the practice and concept of global civil society holds out promise for a global politics and a global transformation. I understand global civil society to refer to at least two related phenomena. The first phenomena can be understood as the sum-total of local, national or regional civil society structures. Within this form of evolving global civil society practice, the tasks are the identification of local, national and regional forms of civil society and the creation of ways to strengthen communication, coordination, reflection, capacities to act among the discreet organizational forms which already exist. Nurses, public health workers, social workers, veterinarian, teachers and thousands of groups have over the past 70 years been linking up with their respective colleagues in country after country. In addition an entire new generation of civil society organizations has been created in both the rich and the poor countries during the 1970s and 80s, the ubiquitous NGOs or non-governmental organizations. These newer forms of civil society organizations have been increasingly reaching out to those share common values in other parts of the world. The CIVICUS study of global civil society represents a strong first effort at articulating the role and vision of these hundreds and thousands of smaller and larger civil society structures.

A second form of global civil society formation is represented by the proliferation of specifically global forms of civil society. The Nestle Milk Boycott organizations, the various environmental organizations, women's organizations, peace groups and thousands of others have arisen within spaces of world citizen action. For these forms of global civil society, while composed of groups and individuals all located in particular localities, no national or local identity can be necessarily attributed to the whole. Leadership shifts according to functions, timing, locations of activities or cost effectiveness. Among the organisational form of these kinds of global civil society structures are the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOS). In the field of adult education, the International Council for Adult Education is one such INGO (in another section of this book I explore the structures and functions of the ICAE as a global civil society formation).

An International Non-Governmental Organization has its own international governing body composed of representatives or leadership from a number of different countries. While the address of the headquarters is most often in a single nation, an INGO is not an expression of any given national position. It reflects consensus from a variety of geographic and, most often, ideological locations. Each INGO has its own international constituency and distinct and varied ways of working. Each INGO looks after its own administration and its own funding. INGOs are responsible to their members not to any government. INGOs have their headquarters in many countries around the world, both North and South. Some of the older ones are located near United Nations agency headquarters, many newer ones have their homes in the South.

According to the Canadian International Development Agency,

INGOs are global networks of individuals, non-governmental organizations or professional associations. They generally focus on one specific issue and they are driven by accepted universal values. INGOs frequently play an important policy and coordinating role at the international level."

The large United Nations fora of the past 15 years have been a particularly important space for global civil society formation. There have been increasingly important gatherings of autonomous civil society organizations either as part of the intergovernmental meetings or as a separate NGO forum operating in parallel since the 1985 World Women's Conference in Nairobi and including Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995 and the Women's Conference in Beijing of the same year. 1996 has seen the Habitat conference in Istanbul, Turkey. In addition there have been a continual series of alternative summits organized each and every time that the governments of the G-7 get together, called The Other Economic Summit (TOES). Within the adult education movement, we have experienced our own form of global civil society which took place in Hamburg, Germany in July of 1997. The 5th UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education brought 1600 NGO, Government, and private sector persons together in the largest and most diverse event in our field ever. At each of these events the sophistication of the NGO or Global Civil Society organizations grows. In Copenhagen a call was floated for the organization of a "Civil Society Summit" that would be called independently of the UN system before the end of the decade to signal the full coming of age of global civil society. While that call may have been premature, it signaled a profoundly different mood in a global politics where citizens were imagining a new era and a renewed sense of energy.

Elaborations of the concept

Ronnie D. Lipschutz, based at the Stevenson Programme on Global Security of the University of California at Santa Cruz, and a theorist of environmental politics, has done some of the most thorough recent writing on the concept of global civil society. He has been looking for a way to characterize the political cultures and emergent forms of global politics within the environmental movement. He has chosen to use the global civil society concept for its practical usefulness. In his 1997 book, Global Civil Society and Global Environmental Governance, Lipschutz states:

I have chosen to use the term global civil society...for three reasons. First, the term provides a convenient kind of shorthand. Second, it underlines the grounding of this sector (environment) in societal processes as opposed to state-centered, institutionalized political ones. And, third, it suggests a form of social action, somewhat parallel to the holism that one finds in some ecological models.

Lipschutz notes that global civil society is not a unity, not a unifying notion. Rather it describes a space which is riven with divisions, more, Lipschutz believes, than found in state sectors. It is a space for

changing ideational frameworks. He argues that the environmental activists and their movements which he has studied in Indonesia, California and Hungary are all linked by, “globally-shared system of symbols, knowledge creation and transmission even though their practices are driven by the histories, politics and ecologies of the places in which they act”. Judith Mayer, author of the Indonesian case study in the Lipschutz-Mayer research, argues that, “the environmental movements’ ability to construct its position in global rather than local political frameworks has given it broader political space than other movements” As Lipschutz and Meyer later state, “the function of global civil society in global environmental governance is best understood in comparison with that of civil society within states”. In an earlier article (1992) Lipschutz provided what serves as a useful overview of how he understands global civil society, “Global civil society...is focused on the self-conscious construction of networks of knowledge and action, by de-centered, local actors, that cross the reified boundaries of space as though they were not there”.

Goren Hyden, Swedish-born veteran international development political theorist, also uses the term ‘global civil society’. He notes that transnational activist organizations are viewed not merely as agencies seeking change at the state level or within frameworks of inter-governmental regimes, but as shaping norms at the level of society across boundaries.

This concept increasingly makes sense not only at the national but also international level thanks to the interpenetrations, the intermeshing of symbolic meaning systems, and the proliferation of transnational collective endeavors.

Hyden observes that when transnational activists direct their efforts beyond the state they are politicizing global civil society. It is too limiting to think of these groups as mere transnational interest groups. Their efforts involve identifying and manipulating instruments of power for shaping collective life. They are engaged in the creation of new global alliances, reconceptualizing of public issues and empowering local communities. “They are”, claims Hyden, “building social capital through long-distance relations, thereby helping to promote what amounts to a ‘global civil society’”

In political theory circles, Stephen Gill, is credited with first using the term global civil society in 1991 in influential journal, Alternatives. Earlier that year however, Rajesh Tandon had conceptualized these same ideas in a paper written for the Institute for Development Research. He called, among other things, “For strengthening international linkages across civil societies--an *international civil society*(emphasis added).

Elise Boulding, long time activist on peace and other global issues, had studied the global civil society phenomenon much earlier however than Lipschutz and Hyden. While she did not use the words global civil society, this was precisely what she described in her 1989 study Building a Global Civic Culture. She noted that in 1909 there were about 176 INGOs, but that in 1988 there were 18,000. Of those 18,000, 1 per cent were federations of other INGOs, 8.5 per cent are universal, 17 per cent are

intercontinental and 74 per cent are regional.

Elise Boulding, outlined a number of roles which global civil society structures play:

1. Lobbying governments;
2. Educating for world citizenship;
3. New conceptual thinking and State-of-the-art experience;
4. A way for the North to learn from the South;
5. Creating and maintaining information channels;
6. Activity as an antidote to despair.

To these characteristics, Boulding adds the ideas of "new professionalism" and "staying power". She points out that the kind of new professionalism needed to build a global civic culture is found in the work of the INGOs. Skills, both technical and analytic, are being honed for our truly global age on a day-to-day basis. The lessons can be shared with other organizations and sectors. She also points out that these global civil society structures have staying power in that popular movements come and go, issues rise and fall in the fashion of international public opinion, but INGOs and similar networks and structures represent a means of providing continuity of purpose and attention to a vast area of sustainable development issues. She goes on to say that, "INGOs provide arenas where a common discourse can evolve that will be understood by individuals coming out of different cultures".

Why Global Civil Society Now?

It could be argued that what we now call global civil society is not entirely new. Within our own field of adult education, adult educators have been working across international boundaries for many years. In deed the role of travelling story-teller, a kind of peripatetic adult educationists wandering the world has been with us since stories themselves began. But the kind of travel which many people now take for granted in the late 20th century, was at one time exceedingly difficult and rare. The same technological factors such as relatively cheap air travel, telephone, fax and computer linkages which have made both production and financial globalization feasible are making it possible for citizens to work together in a variety of creative ways. For a variety of reasons associated with the various faces of globalization, both concepts and forms of global practice are felt to be needed now. Using the concept global civil society encourages us to think of this political space as something that actually exists-- a realm of possible strategic, imaginative or practical activity. But let us first turn to the notion of globalization itself. When we speak of globalization it is important not to limit the conversation to the obvious forms of centralizing finance, production and marketing...what I have called elsewhere a 'market utopia'. Globalization is being experienced in a very variety of forms and practices. Important dimensions of globalization also include: the state, communications, movements of people, sales of arms, violence and crime, and resistance including the rise of global forms of civil society.

Each day, according to the UNDP Human Development Report of 1995, over one Trillion dollars

changes hands for financial transactions totally apart from funds needed for global trade purposes. These transactions have to do with currency speculation by private and public banks, with investments of all kinds through the computerized stock markets of the world, with bond undertakings at both private and state levels. The political leadership in most parts of the world has joined the call for each of us to play our part in the competitive global market. Products are assembled everywhere, sold everywhere crossing borders sometimes scores of time before finding an ultimate place of rest or sale. And the movement of durable goods does not stop with sale. Within days, weeks or years most of the goods produced in the contemporary world will be discarded and our goods then rejoin the global search for another resting place. If we live in the cities, we send our waste to the rural areas. If our waste is poisonous or toxic, we will send it to the furthest reaches of our countries or failing that to the poorest parts of the world where countries fight over the right to become a dumping ground for the waste of the rich. Jobs, health and safety conditions, environmental regulations, human rights, and immigration policies are thrown out as deregulation on a global basis strips national legislation of its force.

The state itself has taken on global forms. The richest states of Europe now work together in a powerful economic union where the restrictions and limitations of individual governments are giving way to regional forms of state control. In Asia no serious economic decisions are taken by a single state government without direct or indirect talks with governments of trading partners such as Japan, China, Indonesia, Taiwan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and increasingly Thailand and Malaysia. The United Nations system and related regional banking and development agencies are a further layer of an internationalized state function. These multi-lateral bodies have more power and influence in the medium and smaller states with institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank taking on nearly full control of the economies of the least powerful states.

Crime and violence are also disturbing features of our globalizing world. The complex combination of rich country drug use and poor country weak economies create patterns of international activity which taking advantage of all the modern means of communications and money transfers. All of the world people are caught in vicious patterns of cruelty and violence which spills over into each and everyone of our homes. Entrenched poverty, the increased in the gap between the rich and the poor, the flight of people for economic and security reasons. These are a few features of the globalization of violence and crime.

The arms trade is another dimension of globalization. While the overall world expenditures on the military has declined since the 1989 accords between the former Soviet Union and the United States, the arms trade itself has taken on a new life. The United States in particular has accelerated its sales from roughly \$9 billion in 1987 to over \$22 billion in 1992. In that same period the former Soviet Union has decreased arms transfers from \$30 billion to \$2.8 billion. According to war historian John Keegan, those,

who have died in war since 1945 have, for the most part, been killed by cheap,

mass-produced weapons and small-calibre ammunition, costing little more than the transistor radios and batteries which flooded the world during the same period.

Among the low cost weapons which cross our borders each day are land-mines which can be produced for several dollars each and which can kill or maim a person with ease. There are an estimated 100 million land-mines distributed in roughly 60 countries around the globe. Indeed the global concern over the proliferation of land mines has given rise to another example of how global civil society has created increased awareness and provided suggestions for actions which eventually resulted in the landmark creation of the International Convention on Land Mines.

While money flows with the speed of light, goods and services at the speed of air and sea transport, people are also more mobile than ever before. The combination of economic destruction, civil conflict and positive inducements to move has created global movements of people. On global terms over 100 million people are refugees, living in countries that they were not born in against their choice. Of course people do not move as easily as either goods or finance capital. Much of the contemporary movement of peoples is involuntary movement as economic and political refugees are forced to shift from their homes elsewhere in search of security of a means to survive. This is in spite of the fact that formal obstacles to the movements of people from the poorer nations to the richer are exceedingly difficult. It would seem that at least one vision of the 'market utopia' is that people will stay in communities where low wages can be sustained which technology, tools and capital will move freely. In Canada, money can move in and out between Mexico, the United States and our financial institutions with ease, but people have much more difficulty. The open capital market has not produced an open labour market. In spite of the legal restrictions against movement between our three nations which are partners in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), there are very large movements of people from Mexico into the United States illegally, some illegal Canadian movement into the United States as well and vast displacements of persons from the rural areas of Mexico, Canada and the United States to places where there chances of finding jobs are better.

As Rajesh Tandon and Miguel D'Arcy de Olievera observe, "the weaker, the more vulnerable, the powerless, those who do not produce or consume anything of value for the world market, those who can hardly be privatized or internationalized are becoming expendable." The same sweeping forces for global economic integration deepens the age old divisions of the rich and the poor. Our 'global village' has an expanding slum area and the affluent are increasingly afraid of the poor, choosing to live in walled compounds. The many faces of globalization not surprisingly create new forms of resistance, new calls for community revitalization, a renewed emphasis on self-sufficiency, withdrawals into searches for security through reinforcing cultural identities, new forms of community economic development. And as this paper will explore later, new forms of regional and global networks of activists, non-governmental agencies and citizens are actively contesting the movement towards poverty, ecological imbalance and

exclusion.

The Shipwreck of the Grand Society

Serge Latouche, a French economist writing extensively on themes of globalization and issues of contemporary western economic culture, provides us with an extensive critique of 'the grand society'. Liberal ideologues pose the grand society as the western market oriented ideal of modernity and consumption offered as the highest stage of human civilization. He argues that we are experiencing the shipwreck of both the idea and the practices of the grand society. He notes that the shipwreck of grand society is producing ever larger and growing groups of 'castaways'. In the rich countries economic development produces ever larger numbers of maladjusted people; the newly poor, push-outs from schools, the homeless, the chronically unemployed, the de-institutionalized. Latouche estimates are that there are well beyond 100 million such rich country castaways.

The second group of castaways are the indigenous minorities throughout the world. Being first, being Aboriginal, being indigenous has become a nearly universal qualification for being cast off the ship of Grand Society. There are between 250 and 300 million first peoples of the world. The third group of castaways are the most numerous and live in what the United Nations currently calls the Least Developed Countries. These are not the countries represented in the "emerging markets" categories in the world's stock markets, they are the countries where the physical infrastructure of western development is deteriorating. They are countries where each year more and more children lose places in schools. Much of Africa, parts of Asia and Latin America are the homes to hundreds millions of people castaway from the shipwreck of the grand society. But as in the analysis of citizen activism undertaken by D'Arcy de Oliveira and Tandon in their study of global civil society, Latouche notes that taken collectively these castaways, "also constitute a milieu in which cultural fermentation can take place: they are the laboratories of a possible future"

Other economists criticize the science of economics itself. They view economics as a major tool in extending the Grand Society or attempting to extend the vision of the Grand Society as the only paradigm for human economic interaction. In her book, If Women Counted, Marilyn Waring lay much of the blame on the patriarchal nature of the practice of economics. She argues that men, including the English economist Keynes in part concerned with the financing of WWII, created a system of national economic accounting which measures only the narrowly interpreted production activities as being of value economically. Work done predominantly by women such as child care or elder care is not counted. Neither is the depletion of non-renewable resources taken into account such as mining, oil extraction or clear-cut forestry practices. An oil tanker disaster, she illustrates is, from national economic accounting terms, one of the most productive forms of activity possible. The hole is the ship has to be repaired, thousands of people are thrown into action rescuing sea animals or trying to reduce the impact of the spills, insurance companies leap into action, legislators work night and day, other ships have to take over from the disabled ship and on and on. The fact that the spill destroys a part of an irreplaceable

ecosystem is never figured into the economics at all.

Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., authors of For the Common Good, have their own description of the shipwreck.

...At a deep level of our being we find it hard to suppress the cry of anguish, the scream of horror--the wild words required to express wild realities. We human beings are being led to a dead end--all too literally. We are living by an ideology of death and accordingly we are destroying our own humanity and killing the planet. Even the one great success of the programme that has governed us, the attainment of material affluence, is now giving way to poverty...;

The global system will change during the next forty years, because it will be physically forced to change. But if humanity waits until it is physically compelled to change, its options will be few indeed....If it changes before it has to change...it will not avoid suffering and crises, but it can be drawn through them by a realistic hope for a better world."

Thomas Berry, theologian and cultural historian adds his own eloquent voice to the 'shipwreck' metaphor. His is another voice in this emergent consciousness. He names our historical moment the 'terminal Cenozoic.' He notes that for cultural historians, the marker used for indicating the transition from one of cultural historic era to another is when the 50 per cent of the life forms created at the beginning of one era have become extinct. Berry claims that at some point during the 20th century we passed that point for our era, the Cenozoic period which gave birth to the remarkable fluorescence of flora and fauna, including human beings. For Berry, the Neolithic period, the Civilizational period, and our modern period of Progress have so far been judged by our rational understanding, the increase in our human comfort, in our consumer satisfaction, in our capacity to travel more rapidly from one place to another, by our capacity for communication, by our control over illness, by the abundance of our food supply. We judged our advance simply by its benefits for ourselves. According to Berry, we built our dams for electrical power and thus profoundly disturbed the flow of the rivers. We forced the soil to produce according to our demands through use of chemical fertilizers. We took the petroleum from the earth and used it for heat, energy, fertilizers, plastics, fibres, and a multitude of other uses. We paid little attention to the effects that resulted from massive emissions of carbon and sulphur. In a certain sense, Berry claims we have "borrowed on our savings".

In these late decades of the twentieth century we are becoming aware of our profound disruption of the natural world, the extinction of species, the killing

off of the rainforests, the pollution of the atmosphere and the hydrosphere as well as the geosphere. Even for scholars who have not traditionally focussed on ecological themes, the late 20th century “discovery” of our vulnerability as human beings on the earth has become a signpost of our times. As Eric Hobsbawn, one of the leading western historians of the 20th Century, notes, “The forces generated by the techno-scientific economy are now great enough to destroy the environment, that is to say the material foundation of human life”.

We should not conclude from Berry or from the other authors such as Canadian theorist Edmund O’Sullivan who have elaborated these perspectives for the field of education, that there is nothing to be done. The fact that so many people in all parts of the world have become aware of the sensitivity of the carrying capacity of the earth is a source of positive energy. Berry suggests that we are at a turning point which may move into either a “technozoic” period or an “ecozoic” era. The proliferation of alternative “green economic” activities and, I would argue, the rise of new spaces of political culture such global civil society move us towards the ecozoic vision.

Let us summarize some of the reasons for the emergence or re-emergence of the concept of global civil society. First is the increasing feeling of a loss of state sovereignty in both the richer and the poorer parts of the world. This is linked to the rise of the transnational corporations, several of them having larger internal corporate economies than most of the governments of the world. This plays out as an increased willingness or decreasing ability of the state to address welfare issues. Global civil society represents a resistance to the transforming global mode of production. Global civil society, as Lipschutz notes is an, “On-going project of civil society to reconstruct, re-imagine or re-map world politics”. A second factor in the emergence of global civil society structures has been the dramatic growth in NGOs in the majority world during the 1970s and 80s and the subsequent networking amongst those organization on regional and global basis. In addition many of these majority world structures have had either financial, political or strategical links with NGOs in the richer parts of the world.

A third factor in the growing sense of urgency towards finding a semi-autonomous global political space has been the growing disillusionment with the global market itself. As Latouche notes, there are more and more “castaways” from our shipwreck of grand society. The late 1990s was characterized by a steady increase in economic instability as financial and capital globalization seemingly left country after country in a complex to impossible position relative to their own economic

sovereignty. The writing of Lewis Lapham on the 1998 Davos World Economic Forum offered an inside look at how the questions of stability and morality have even reached the elite members of the “club”. A fourth factor in the increased sense of political viability for a global civil society political space has been the advances made by several global social movements, specifically the women’s movements and the environmental movements. These and other movements such as indigenous peoples or anti-land mines have created over the years new knowledge, new social practices, new legislation and new global policies. Another contributing factor has been the United Nations innovation of the global conference. The past 20 years have seen a steady growth in world conferences which have year by year incorporated civil society and global civil society structures in the planning, carrying-out and implementation of these events. Each of these events has nurtured the seeds of global civil society, a cumulative effect which has offered thousands of persons concrete and practical engagement in global political practice. On the academic side, scholars have become through their university-based email capacities increasingly comfortable with a global exchange of ideas and scholarship. This has a rich country bias at present, but scholars now draw commonly on each others’ work in different parts of the world.

The adult education world is present in all of the factors noted above. Adult educators have created their own regional and global networks over the past 25 years. The International Council for Adult Education, the European Adult Education Association, the Asian and South Pacific Bureau for Adult Education, the Association for World Education, the International Council for University-Based Adult Education, World Literacy, International Institute for Literacy, the Latin American Council for Adult Education to name but a few. Adult education scholars have regular regional and increasingly world-wide meetings of academics and students through structures such as the British Standing Committee for University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults, the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education, the US Adult Education Research Conference and the European Association for Adult Education Research based in The Netherlands. Adult educators benefit from an ever increasing number of international journals such as Convergence, the International Journal of Lifelong Education, Adult Education and Development Adult educators are also active within the full range of global social movements such as the women’s movements, the environmental movements and the peace movements bringing their specific skills and networks as adult educators to the broadening or deepening of the

various social movement intentions.

Networking: The Practices of Global Civil Society

In his review of international networks, Jan Ruysenaars refers to an early article by Marc Satin, who challenged *the assumption that bureaucracy and hierarchy are the only viable forms of organisation for large numbers of people...points to networks as another, and in many cases a more appropriate form of large-scale organisation...networks growing more vigorously at the extreme ends of power and influence. Networks are emerging both among the global elite and the powerless everywhere.*

Ruysenaars then goes on to suggest his own definition,

Networks provide for methods of cooperation between people and/or institutions. During the cooperation the participants remain autonomous; independent. A network may develop horizontally (on the same level), or vertically (between levels). A network as such is a loose, informal structure...working together between individuals and institutions on certain agreed interests."

The late Virginia Hine, in the earliest reference that I have found referring to the organizing efforts of what we are now calling global civil society has noted that, *Since the early 1960s, there has been an intensification of effort by the powerless in nations around the world to organize themselves to effect social structural change. No matter what the 'cause', the goals or the beliefs, and no matter what type of movement it is--political, social, religious--there is the same basic structural form and mode of functioning. Wherever people organize themselves to change some aspect of society, a non-bureaucratic but very effective form of organizational structure seems to emerge."*

She further reminds us that:

The segmentary (network) mode of organization is not a recent innovation, nor has it been useful only to those who want change. Many pre-industrial societies in Africa and the Arabic-speaking world were organized accordingly...It provided an efficient mode or organization for groups of several hundreds of thousands of people and tended to remain relatively stable over thousands of years. Contrast this to the hierarchical, stratified modes of organization that are notable for their inherent instability."

Rajesh Tandon describes the characteristics of networks as, informal and flexible, absence of centralized planning, valuing the experience of all members, encouraging of initiatives by any of the members, shared responsibility for sustaining the network, capacity for rapid mobilization, needing animators or 'nodes'. Indeed, one of the dangers to networks is their tendency change into formal bureaucratic organizations over time. Virginia Hine notes that, "participants in grass roots movements often fail to recognize the organizational genius of their networks...and call for more centralized control".

One often hears the term 'networking'. In fact some circular definitions of networks describe 'networking' as the activities of networks! Based on research for the Canadian International Development Agency on global networking, I suggest that 'networking' consists of at least the following types of activities: research on skills, needs, interests of network members; face-to-face meetings; national, regional, continental or international events; exchange of letters; telephone conversations; fax exchanges; newsletter or bulletin services; publications and exchange of materials; and electronic mail systems using computers. But to return to Russenyars,

Networking is labour-intensive. The frequency and quality of the communication between the participants is of vital importance. This does not just mean communication by means of newsletters or telecommunications (both important) but also regular personal meetings of the network members. Travel and discussions are therefore necessary. The network will weaken if there is not enough communication. A general problem is to know which and how much information should be sent to whom. Both oversupply and under supply of relevant information are problems at present.

In the Communication, Information, Media and Networking Treaty adopted by the '92 Global Forum of NGOs in Rio de Janeiro in June of 1992, a broad definition is used, "Networking involves face-to-face meetings, formal organizations, informal meetings, printed media, telephone, fax, mail, radio, TV, video and computer communications."

There has been much writing about the wide variety of electronic-supported networking. One of the excellent early guides to e-mail usage was the Graham Lane book, Communications for Progress: A Guide to International E-Mail. Electronic networking most often refers to the use of FAX machines, packet-switching computer-based electronic mail, electronic bulletin boards, and computer teleconferencing. For some reason the telephone itself is seldom mentioned even though it is one of the most frequently used electronic network tools! Electronic networking represents one of the fastest growing areas of support for global networks. The introduction of cheap and immediate international communications based on linking microcomputers with global data communications networks has also been picked up by global civil society organizations.

One of the pioneer global networks which has continued to thrive through the late 1990s is the Association for Progressive Communications, itself an international non-governmental organization. Carlos Alberto Alfonso, co-founder of IBASE(the Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Action), the Brazilian development NGO which has pioneered and served as the host to ALTERNEX, the first Brazilian grass roots computer network, described the situation in 1990 prophetically, *Networking, in various forms, has become an international goal of the non-governmental organizations world. The main objective is to exchange reliable information quickly and efficiently in order to attain common objectives, and to learn from each other in order to obtain common objectives, ...While the contents of NGO networking vary widely, the forms are converging recently to an increasingly extensive use of telematic means. These in turn are advancing rapidly to provide*

worldwide multi-media services where the aim is to unify digital and analogic information through common carriers in such a way that video, audio, phone and data services may be available in the same wires that today carry only analogue voice phone services. ISDN (integrated services digital networks) are operating in Asia, Europe and North America, and portable analogue videophones which can connect to each other via a direct call to a satellite channel are commercially available for less than US \$250."

Proponents of the new electronic networks note that the widespread growth and use of the electronic mail box systems have reached a "critical mass" with "members so eager to join that they have become part of an irreversible and uncontrollable process, producing an unimaginable flood of information".

With good international telephone connections, Southern NGOs can be on an equal footing with Northern NGOs, the media, funding agencies, governments or the United Nations system. Availability facilitates collaboration amongst NGOs, decentralization of many aspects of work. Through computer teleconferencing, persons in many parts of the world can make decisions collaboratively without necessitating travel.

Francois Fortier, a Quebec-based researcher beginning an early study on "Telecommunications and Democratic Networking in the Age of Globalization" noted that,

...means of telecommunication are both instruments and objects of power relations and social struggles...As a result, the use and development of means of telecommunication shall not be assumed to be equally beneficial to all sectors of society, nor can the impact be presumed akin from one society to another. In fact, technology has historically been developed to answer the needs of dominant groups...This justifies a careful examination of the use and development of these systems, if we are to understand their social impact and potential role in democratic networking".

Michael Polman of Antenna, a pioneer Netherlands communications NGO describes several negative aspects of e-mail computer-based forms of electronic networking.

1. Technical language: cost-saving demands and the elementary state of operation of e-mail systems mean that language becomes more and more compact and devoid of emotion and subtlety. Computer illiterates are excluded from conversations and a divide is created among NGOs which use e-mail and those which do not.
2. International networking: the demand of international networking may be such that traditional forms of keeping in touch with the base or constituencies are not able to be maintained. The agenda of the INGO and the means of communicating may be distorted.
3. Some traditional relationships of funding are effected as donor agencies go "on-line" as a way of dealing with the proliferation of requests from ever more organizations. Those organizations with an 'on-line' capacity may have an advantage.
4. The 'pale and male' syndrome. Polman reports a distinct lack of participation by women and Third World indigenous communities in an area that to date has attracted more Northern, white males.
5. The 'electronic window' syndrome. Although there is a need to share the information available, this is often overlooked as in the excitement of belonging to an electronic global community, people may not notice that the front door is shut and the window on the immediate world is less important than the

computer screen.

The Role of Adult Education

At its most basic, learning is the process by which we make sense or give meaning to our experiences. Learning is the name given to the most creative of human activities becoming conscious of our movements through life and the movements of others and other processes. In short, our ability to survive, resist or prosper depends on our collective capacities to learn and upon our finding ways to share that learning with each other. For the authors of this text, adult education stimulates or creates conditions for human individual development and collective learning.

Adult education is also about choice. As adult educators committed to facilitating adult learning, both the way adult educators work and the content of our work are important. While we may not have a full range of choice in each of our adult learning contexts, we have the choice to understand the strengths and the limitations of what ever work we do. Choices are sometimes available to contribute directly contributions to actions with potential for effecting the “common good”. In communities, networks and movements, the choices made are important.

Transformative adult education is about supporting shifts away from the global market vision of growth-oriented, market-driven, and consumerist human societies towards life-affirming visions. Transformative practices contribute to the transformation of structures of power and domination be these discursive, electronic, mechanical, social, or physical. Transformative learning is about self-awareness, critique and creation. Adult education and intentional adult learning has an important role to play in the strengthening of global civil society.

Commitment to transformative learning demands considerable self-reflection. In the contests of shifting paradigms and divergent visions of community, men and women need to open themselves to new ways of understanding who and what we are. The dominant world has often privileged whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness and the English language. The conversation between women and men, persons from rich and poor countries need to be honest vital and respectful. Together, we struggle to learn more about the way global corporate power is organized effects countries, universities and life. Self-reflective practice also requires courage and efforts to break with addictive, high intensity consumption patterns. And, as critical adult educators, we struggle to remain open to deepening our knowledge of different social movement. In short, self-reflective practice is about recognizing limits and developing a strong sense of personal location and global connectedness.

There are many ways in which adult education can be or is already engaged in strengthening the learning dimensions of global civil society. Let us look at the environmental movement as an example. Environmental movements are structured through many local and international civil society organizations. Because much of the environmental information comes from natural science and scientists, many of the entire environmental movements are information driven. Many environmental

organizations or environmental research projects focus on various kinds of deliberative processes including environmental assessments, presentations of global warming statistics, energy use models or resource use assessments. Press conferences are called and the 'facts' presented or talks given with slides and data. The public is overwhelmed with data. These meetings seldom produce the kinds of impact the organizers had hoped for. Those of us who work in the field of adult education know that top-down information strategies are seldom the most effective way to stimulate action-oriented learning.

International networks or global civil society organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund, the International Women's Tribune Centre, CIVICUS, the World YWCA or any others could increase the effectiveness of their work through increasing the attention paid to principles of transformative adult education or popular education. For example many of the information programmes of the various global NGOs or networks would be more effective if they were to be re-conceptualized as learning networks or adult education programmes because of the emphasis needed on interactive starting-where-one-lives learning. Global learning strategies are an integral component of an evolving global civil society.

The formal structures of adult education reach literally tens of millions of adults throughout the world in a complex and intricate variety of adult education offerings. Literally any course or programme imagined can explore how we might move from a world that doesn't work to one that does. This may require some extra effort and it may require the development of a whole set of new tools or ways of working. But it can be done and it is important to try. Aside from the formal channels of media communication, the combined network of adult education structures reach a larger proportion of the world's adult population than any other single form of communication. And while many of the offerings may be technical, vocational or in other ways circumscribed by systems imperatives, something could be done in each and every case to draw attention to the need for and the possibilities of change.

Global Civil Society as a place where things happen

We are far safer to operate from a certain amount of scepticism and self-critical examination when putting forward new formulations and concepts. Global civil society, as Lipshutz and others have indicated earlier is a space of wide diversity and contradictions. Global civil society describes a space where many changes are taking place--it is not static. The once purported certainty of past political projects feels gone forever. Civil society and global civil society contains vast and growing contradictions. In international development circles for example, NGOs are being transformed overnight by the opportunities to become sub-contractors to the World Bank or other major national or international funding bodies. Whereas groups of protesting NGOs activists would at one time have been met with police or military force, they are increasingly met with contracts. In situations like this, the lines realm of relative autonomy is dramatically reduced. It is not possible to make sweeping statements about all civil society organizations in contexts like these. We also know that not all global civil society organizations, international NGOs and global networks are democratic spaces. As the stakes within global civil society have become higher, the lines between the state, the private sector and global civil society itself

become at times blurred. Where power exists, abuse of power also exists. Global networks and local NGOs are not immune from issues of gender, racial, sexuality, ability, language and other forms of discrimination and privilege. If we look at some of the most powerful global civil society structures in the environmental movement for example, we note that most of them have their headquarters in the rich countries. How do these structures avoid the same tendencies of euro-centric domination that characterize academic life, economic life in general or the financial structures of the United Nations in particular?

A review of both the conceptual work and the lessons from the practices of global civil society spaces

put forward in this chapter shows that global civil society is a space where, by and large, the following takes place: 1) a transnational sharing of information; 2) leadership is shared and transnational; 3) an “epistemic community” is formed; 4) global resources are used to support local struggles; 5) skills of global networking and advocacy are learned by many; 6) specific advocacy, policy or practices are put forward and acted upon transnationally; 7) alliances are built across movements or sectors.

Adult education, which refers to both institutional as well as social movement contexts and in both formal and informal settings, has an important role to play in the strengthening of the capacities of global civil society. For adult educators who are allied with social movements, community-based associations or non-governmental organizations global civil society contains the vision of a place where the raw savagery of global capitalism can be openly criticized and examined, and is a public sphere where transformative ideas can be nourished and developed. This releases energy in support of a global urgency for environmentally and socially relevant democracy. Such energy ought to be valued for a moment or for a lifetime.

Endnotes

