

Chapter 1: Introduction: Global Civil Society

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Introduction

“In relation to contemporary world politics, civil society is conceived as a political space where voluntary associations seek, outside political parties, to shape the rules that govern one other aspect of social life. Civil society groups bring citizens non-coercively in deliberate attempts to mould the formal and informal norms that regulate social interaction.”

(Scholte, 2004, p. 214)

As the above quotation illustrates, civil society, in a contemporary political context, is a somewhat complex concept (Powell, 2013; Lahiry, 2005; Blakeley, 2002; Allen, 1997). Politicians and academics of different political ideologies embrace the ideas around civil society. Since the 1990s, there has been a great assurgency of civil society as a political concept; this can be traced back to the political events of the falling of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. Countries in Western Europe and the United states put their political faith in civil society, as it was seen at the time as a modernizing idea for the new information age.

According to Carothers and Barndt (1999), the historical beginnings of civil society originate with the roman statesman, Marcus Tullius Cicero, and other Romans and philosophers. Interestingly, Carothers and Barndt (1999) go on to add that:

“The modern idea of civil society emerged in the Scottish and Continental Enlightenment of the late 18th century. A host of political theorists, from Thomas Paine to Georg Hegel, developed the notion of civil society as a domain parallel to but separate from the state—a realm where citizens associate according to their own interests and wishes. This new thinking reflected changing economic realities: the rise of private property, market competition, and the bourgeoisie. It also grew out of the mounting popular demand for liberty, as manifested in the American and French revolutions.”

(1999, p. 18)

Then, from this, the conceptual ideas of civil society were forgotten about due to the rise of the industrial revolution (Carothers and Barndt, 1999). But, civil society re-emerged after the Second World War through the writings of Antonio Gramsci and his Marxist theories. In his books, Gramsci focused on the ideas of the state, dictatorships, and hegemony, and how these are bound together with civil society (Öncü, 2003). Gramsci’s publications were instrumental, as noted by Carothers and Barndt who state:

“in the 1970s and 1980s with persons fighting against dictatorships of all political stripes in Eastern Europe and Latin America, Czech, Hungarian,

and Polish activists also wrapped themselves in the banner of civil society, endowing it with a heroic quality when the Berlin Wall fell.”

(1999, p. 19)

Hence, historically, civil society is seen as the growth of civilization, as democracy and society is regulated through relationships. Kumar (1993) notes that civil society is social order driven, whereby citizens actively engage in public life by resolving disputes corresponding to the law of the country. Moving forward today, civil society is situated within the social, economic, political and cultural context, and is perceived as a “democratic catalyst” (Karolewski, 2006, p. 168). As Kumar acknowledges:

“Civil society has been found in the economy and in the polity; in the area between the family and the state, or the individual and the state; in non-state institutions which organize and educate citizens for political participation; even as an expression of the whole civilizing mission of modern society.”

(1993, p. 383)

The social and political events concerning civil society have turbo-charged the concept, bringing it into focus globally, i.e. ‘Global Civil Society’. In the 2002 Martin Wight memorial lecture, the British academic Mary Kaldor stated:

“global civil society is a platform inhabited by activists (or post-Marxists), NGOs and neoliberals, as well as national and religious groups, where they argue about, campaign for (or against), negotiate about, or lobby for the arrangements that shape global developments.”

(2003, p. 590)

As Kaldor acknowledges, civil society, in a global context, has many actors that can influence economic development. The premise of this edited book is to critique and demonstrate the ways in which the global community is dealing with a complex political world within the narrative of global civil society. This introductory chapter sets the overall context of global civil society in today’s global world. The authors will firstly provide a definition of civil society from social and political science perspectives. Then secondly, the authors provide a contemporary overview of global civil society debates in the current social and political environment; they also offer a short examination of COVID-19 and how this global pandemic has developed new spheres of contestation and collaboration. In the final part of the chapter, the authors present a brief overview of each chapter contributed to this volume.

Defining Global Civil Society

There is no doubt that the conceptual provenance of the ideas of global civil society has been driven by the empowerment of globalization. McGrew observes that the concept of globalization “refers to the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend the nation-states (and by implications the societies) which make up the modern world system” (1992, p. 65). The empowerment of globalization has

been driven by the transportation and communication revolution, which has opened up the world and created new global connections. As Leyshon notes: “Advances in transport and communication technology have served to speed up the space of life and brought progressively more areas within the orbit of capitalist relations of production” (1995, p. 29). For transportation, the level of innovation, especially in the 20th century, has been a great. Examples include the introduction of air travel (e.g. Boeing 747 Jumbo Jet; Concorde) and high speed passenger trains (e.g. the bullet train, TGV). Whilst for communication technologies, there have been numerous technological advancements, such as computers, mobile phones, and tablets, all of which have access the World Wide Web. The rise of communication technologies in global civil society has created a “Network Society”, and as Manuel Castell notes:

“The new society is made up of networks. Global financial markets are built on electronic networks that process financial transactions in real time. The Internet is a network of computer networks. The electronic hypertext, linking different media in global/local connection, is made up of networks of communication – production studios, newsrooms, computerized information systems, mobile transmission units, and increasingly interactive senders and receivers. The global economy is a network of financial transactions, production sites, markets, and labor pools, powered by money, information, and business organizations. The network enterprise, as a new form of business organization, is made of networks of firms or subunits of firms organized around the performance of a business project. Governance relies on the articulation among different levels of institutional decision making linked by information networks. And the most dynamic social movements are connected via the Internet across the city, the country, and the world.”

(2010, p. 248)

The rapid development of globalization adds emphasis to the greater importance of global civil society. Martens et al. state:

“The concept of global civil society has, when fully fulfilled, wonderful characteristics. The political pursuit of equality, transparency and accountability helps establish a new set of ethical norms taking into account the different circumstances around the world.”

(2010, p. 576)

The intense relationship between globalization and global civil society has emerged due to the new form of global politics occurring across the world. These closer ties between globalization and global civil society can be perceived within three distinct paradigms (see Table 1.1.).

Paradigm One: *New Social Movements*

- “Developed after 1968 concerned with new issues, like peace, women, human rights, the environment, and new forms of protest.
- The language of civil society seemed to express very well their brand of non-party politics.
- The concept was enthusiastically taken up in South Asia, Africa – especially South Africa – and Western Europe.
- During the 1990s, a new phenomenon of great importance was the emergence of transnational networks of activists who came together on particular issues – landmines, human rights, climate change, dams, AIDS/HIV, corporate responsibility.”

Paradigm Two: *New Policy Agenda*

- “Civil society was understood as what the West has; it is seen as a mechanism for facilitating market reform and the introduction of parliamentary democracy.
- The key agents are not social movements but NGOs.
- NGOs increasingly look both like quasi-governmental institutions, because of the way they substitute for state functions, and at the same time like a market, because of the way they compete with one another.”

Paradigm Three: *Postmodern Version*

- “Social anthropologists criticize the concept of society as Euro-centric, something born of the Western cultural context (according to argument, Latin America and Eastern Europe are both culturally part of Europe).
- Non-Western societies experience or have potential to experience something similar to civil society, but individualism.
- Postmodernists, new religions and ethnic movements that have also grown dramatically over the last decade are also part of global civil society.
- Global civil society cannot be just the 'nice, good movements'.”

Source: (adapted from Kaldor, 2003, pp. 589-590)

Table 1.1: The Three Paradigms of Global Civil Society set out by Mary Kaldor (2003).

With these emerging paradigms and the emphasis on its relationship with globalization, the social and political sciences have recentred their focus on global civil society. For example, Corry points out that globalization and global civil society concepts “have become ever more dependent upon each other” (2006, p. 306) due to their global interconnectedness. More interestingly, Corry also notes that global civil society must be seen as “beyond the state” (2006, p. 309) because it reaches out to global networks that create new ideas and values. Therefore, global civil society is defined as:

“the myriad of individuals and institutions which operate under the principles of networking and voluntarism, outside of traditional institutions, and collectively seeking changes in the social order and inequalities, transcending individual interests and national boundaries.”

(Gonzalez-Perez, 2013, p. 42)

The rapid development of global civil society has been triggered by the continuous focus on the third sector from public policy perspectives (Bernauer and Gampfer, 2013; Nanz and Steffek, 2004; Fries, 2000). Organizations, such as charities, NGOs and social enterprise, have played a more important role in public policymaking in recent times. International organizations such as the United Nations (UN) have nurtured and maintained the concept of global civil society, strengthening the global community and supporting the networks of global citizens (Juergensmeyer, 2013). From this, governments across the world have engaged with the UN on their vision for global civil society.

Global Civil Society and the Pandemic: Contestations and Collaborations

The coronavirus disease has caused tall expectations and severe strain on administrations around the globe. A lot has been written on the reoccurrence and revival of big government. To some extent overlooked amid the concentration on governments' disaster responses, the coronavirus pandemic has sharpened and deepened the role of organized civil society acts. Civil society manifests as coronavirus-related activism, as many civil society organizations (CSOs) have stepped in with emergency relief, and to assist with the management of the pandemic; many new civic groups emerged, especially at the local community level, whilst many CSOs repurposed themselves. Government administrations experienced severe strain, and civil society filled the gaps left by their chaotic responses to the emergency. For example, a report by CIVICUS notes "CSOs worked not only as frontline responders, but also as defenders of human rights during the pandemic, including the rights of vulnerable and excluded groups" (2020, p. 2). Coronavirus related activism has worked both as compensation for government shortcomings during the crisis and as partner to government initiative.

More understanding is required of society-level responses to the pandemic and the ways in which it is restructuring the connection between states and societies. Across numerous countries, the question that is being asked is: How far has the pandemic spurred innovative forms of civic activism?

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the world and its social and economic processes, triggering an international and unparalleled public health crisis, CSOs are responding by providing frontline assistance across the world. CSOs have vast experience of supporting public health services, immunization programs, social support, livelihood programs, and social liability. Bhargava confirms that CSOs have begun to complement governments' COVID-19 responses, noting:

"The Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunization (Gavi) and the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX), the global initiative for procurement and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, also recognize the expertise of CSOs in public health and vaccination and have included them in their governing boards and operations."

(2021, p. 2)

Governments can generate a constructive environment for partnership with CSOs by appealing for their engagement in efforts in specific areas of their expertise, sharing

evidence and data with them, and creating reciprocal dialogues between local establishments and CSOs.

Simultaneously, CSOs have been facing profound challenges that could damage their capacities to continue playing critical roles in the distribution of social good and services, promoting human rights, and defending the most vulnerable whilst preserving participatory democratic institutions and civic deliberation in the near future. Across diverse towns and states, residents came together through innovative voluntary links and mutual support societies; they raised financial support for emergency relief, awarded medical supplies and protective gear like PPE kits and masks for overwhelmed hospitals, and distributed assistance to those who lacked social protection. Civic actors are also co-operating with several local level businesses to donate masks, medical paraphernalia, and meals, and to contribute to relief attempts in other ways: “In the face of these challenges, civil society adopted a can-do mindset, mounting a constructive response characterised by flexibility, creativity and innovation” (CIVICUS, 2020, p. 5).

While many governments offered funding and support to the vulnerable sections of society impacted by the dramatic slowdown of economic activity, structures and systems were often insufficient, leaving many individuals still fraught. States failed to take into consideration the needs of specific excluded clusters, such as the many individuals working in the informal sector of the economy who may not access government support measures that are often available to formal workers; together with undocumented migrants who are often not eligible for assistance, women, inter alia, were side-lined by sustenance arrangements that targeted males as heads of households. CSOs worked to compensate for these shortfalls by offering dynamic backing and evidence (CIVICUS, 2020).

Civil society actors perform vital roles in apprising and communicating to the public about the nature of coronavirus and the spread of the disease. Many resourceful local groups are springing up, with immediate neighbours organizing support for the vulnerable communities. CSOs have familiarity with and are trained in calamity responses; they are very frequently the primary and first responders in emergencies, and “are particularly important in ‘last mile’ delivery and in reaching the most excluded communities” (Vaughan and Hillier, 2019, p. 2).

Many organizations pitched in to supply oxygen during the deadly wave of the pandemic in April 2021:

“In Iran, a group of businesses and volunteers has delivered 70,000 respirators and other protective gear to Iranian health workers. In Finland, the Helsinki Parishes Union operated within the town, factories, private industries, the Red Cross and Deacons Foundation to establish a help desk for senior citizens, responding to their calls and assisting them with errands and meal delivery. In Malta, Caritas Malta, the Alfred Mizzi Foundation coordinated daily distributions of nearly 850 meals with more than 70 volunteers. Similarly, Sweden’s Linköpings Stadsmission offered food and socio-psychological care to diminish the effect of social distancing and isolation and other kinds of stress factors caused during the pandemic. In Singapore, civil society organisations have effectively

demanded that governments need to improve living conditions in a migrant worker dormitory where foreign workers have been confined to contain the pandemic. The pandemic has had both constructive and adverse effects on global civic activism.”

(Brechenmacher et al., 2020, p. 15)

Across various countries in Asia, the Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact took on the responsibility of providing food to indigenous poverty-stricken communities, much like India, where discrimination against indigenous people deepened during the pandemic, leading to some individuals being frightened of displacement and barred from using public services. For example, in the case of India:

“hundreds of CSOs, like Goonj, Gram Bharati Samiti and Mahatma Gandhi Seva Ashram mobilised support to aid migrants, casual workers and slum dwellers by providing food, masks, sanitiser and menstrual hygiene products. Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action provided food to healthcare workers, along with support to India’s homeless people and slum dwellers.”

(CIVICUS, 2020, p. 8)

Faith institutions also played a significant part. Sikh communities globally tapped into the teaching and faith of Sikhism and started huge collective pantries to deliver essential support and food to the poor, together with support for elders and those powerless to fend for themselves; they also set up hotlines and websites for people to request help. During the deadly second wave of COVID-19 in India, they also distributed oxygen cylinders to the needy (CIVICUS, 2020, p. 12).

Political responses by some governments are also disrupting civil society globally; regular lockdown measures are upending their capability to unite, shape and advocate. Numerous civil society organizations have placed strategic and regular functions and roles on hold; many other NGOs and CSOs are scrambling to move their efforts online. More disturbingly, illiberal regimes are benefitting from the calamity, using it to stiffen their dogmatic grip by weakening the systems of checks and balances, imposing restrictions, and escalating state shadowing and scrutiny at a time when civil society organizations are powerless to fight back. Whilst in some cases restrictive actions were balanced and defensible for the protection of lives, some administrations have used the crisis disingenuously to curb democratic freedoms and silence critical voices. Globally, the crisis has firmed up the prevailing partisan fault lines – in state and local areas, amongst opposite political camps, or between diverse religious and ethnic communities. Some fragile democracies and autocracies have suffered a serious lurch towards more centralized control and subjugation, with possible lasting ramifications. All these measures pose a substantial danger to civic activism. Restrictive rules devised during the pandemic are already squeezing civil society. The pandemic offered expedient shelter for governments to furthermore tilt the power equilibrium in their own favor.

The pandemic equally sharpens the requirement to shield democracy and presents new access points for national and global actors dedicated to its undertaking. The

drastically changed political milieu calls on global organizations not only to recommit to shielding democracy, but also to regulate their approaches. The pandemic is also developing innovative arrangements of civil society mobilization. Civil society actors in several democratic and nondemocratic countries are responding to the trials and difficulties posed by COVID-19; they are trying to fill the voids left by governments to distribute critical facilities, publicize evidence, and shelter the side-lined and deprived sections of society. In some cases, civil society actors are associating and collaborating with businesses and community establishments to support local groups struggling for financial support; they are also developing novel coalitions and unions to hold diffident or disobedient governments to account.

The recent urgency in civic society organizing themselves during the pandemic nonetheless provides an occasion to highlight the dynamic role of civil society, and its extensive support of vibrant and strong communities and democracy. Global supporters of civil society maximize their efforts to reinforce evolving local initiatives, to magnify civil society concerns in pandemic responses, and pitch their backing behind energies to pre-empt additional government limitations on democratic civil rights. Some states have stoked suspicion in civic actors' agendas and activities by labelling them as unaccountable, elitist, or as foreign-aid actors with a specific agenda disengaged from the local communities they claim to signify. Consequently, as civic groups get involved to distribute essential services to impacted communities and plug the gaps in administration responses, they can increase their influence and scope (Brechenmacher et al., 2021).

Newly formed associations and alliances with industries and civic networks benefit traditional CSOs to spread their reach and widen their networks within society. The growing energy of CSOs during the pandemic is viewed as local communities' endeavours to collaborate in order to deal with the direct effects of the crisis. This emerging pattern underpins an adjustment from the somewhat professionalized global civil society organizations to more confined, familiar civic activism. This is a drift that was hitherto continuing in many places, but the pandemic has intensified the swing. The upward trend of localism may endure if the reciprocated aid societies and networks moulded during the emergency persevere as conduits for advocacy, assistance, and mobilization. The current worldwide commotion may open the door to utilitarian socioeconomic and political restructurings by representing the requirement for healthy societal safety nets, dynamic healthcare funds, improved equity, and enhanced international and state governance.

The array of civil society responses has established the dynamic and dependable roles that civil society plays: as a steadfast partner to government agencies; as an enabler and protector of society and left out clusters and sections of the public; as an appreciated foundation of care, leadership and suggestion; as a critical counteractive to government and market let-downs; as an unyielding supporter for reinstated approaches that spread to the communities, meet grassroots necessities, and guard civil rights; as a dynamic basis for accountability over state and private sector choices, and also as the provider of protection against exploitation, sleaze and bribery. There was never a greater requirement for civil society as there has been during the COVID-19 pandemic, and ostensibly, although the physical distancing was required, it could not be at the cost of societal camaraderie. Solidarity was

desired more than ever, to support one and all to get through this disaster and overcome its effects.

It is therefore becoming obvious that for swift responses to emergencies and disasters, states should recognize the worth and significance of CSOs should endeavour to empower and partner with them throughout civil society; doing so will lead to more joined-up and efficacious functional solutions. The lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic must benefit the world, to equip it for better synchronization for the next series of trials to arise in the future. Overall, the coronavirus is a herald for global civil society to revamp and reconsider their role. The global pandemic has placed extensive pressures and stresses not only on governments, but also on civil societies around the globe. Whilst currently considerable attention has focused on governments' emergency responses, at a subterranean level the predicament is altering the connection between states and societies. Global civil society may emerge from the pandemic looking very changed and this alteration will be a momentous feature of today's extremely fluid global politics.

Structure of the Volume

This introductory chapter has set out the contemporary background context of global civil society and now provides a short summary of each of the upcoming chapters. To begin with, in Chapter 2, Ian G. Cook and Paresh Wankhade critically evaluate the concept of social capital and its intrinsic relationship with civil society. To do so, the chapter applies a SWOT analysis of social capital and provides some useful insights for the current COVID-19 context and the future. In Chapter 3, Roopinder Oberoi, Jamie P. Halsall and Michael Snowden examine the concepts of social capital and social enterprise within the context of innovation. Here, the authors examine the conceptual ideas of social capital and social enterprise and how they connect from a public policy standpoint. The authors of Chapter 4, Cátia Miriam Costa, Enrique Martínez-Galán and Francisco José Leandro, examine the fundamental features of global civil society and the main tests for the industry revolution from stages four to five. Here, in particular, the authors explore institutional arrangements (i.e. international organizations, governments and higher education establishments). Chapter 5, by Tom Cockburn, explores the contemporary debates of civil society within the context of the network society, with emphasis on the effect/impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on a global civil society.

Using a case study approach, in Chapter 6 Marie dela Rama and Michael Lester examine the political agendas of neo-liberalism and how Australia has reacted to the economic challenges presented by COVID-19. In Chapter 7, Antônio Márcio Buainain and Junior Ruiz Garcia provide a modern perspective on civil society in Brazil from an environmental protection perspective. Here, the authors put forward the ways that the current right-wing government is responsible for the decline in the environmental situation. In Chapter 8, Tom Cockburn and Cheryl Cockburn-Wootten address how social capital is developing in the age of globalization, particularly in the face of the pandemic; in their work, there is a clear analytical focus on social capital as an unequal concept. The authors of Chapter 9, Qingwen Xu and Sam Yuqing Li, examine the function of social capital and social enterprise in China's poverty relief. Moreover, the authors of Chapter 9 discuss China's new policies in welfare/rural

development and question whether social enterprises and entrepreneurship can improve people's lives. The final chapter, written by the editors of this volume, provides an assessment of global civil society and how the concept could move forward in the future.

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