

‘Emailed applications are preferred’: ethical practices in mine action and the idea of global civil society

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ABSTRACT *The 1997 Ottawa Convention banning the use, stockpiling and production of anti-personnel landmines has been widely hailed as a triumph of an emergent global civil society—a claim that has done much to underwrite the legitimacy of the ban, efforts to extend it and ongoing mine action more generally. Transcending limitations of space, a watershed aspect of the mine ban movement was its use of new information and communications technologies to forge a transnational activist network and raise a global groundswell of popular sentiment pushing states to accede to the ban. While the centrality of civil society actors to this process is beyond dispute, the idea that the campaign is appropriately regarded as an initiative of global civil society may not as easily withstand scrutiny. It is precisely in many of the world’s most mine-affected areas, for example, that access to email and the Internet can least be taken for granted. To the extent that majority populations in these locales are effectively excluded from equal participation in its transnational networks, then, the global civil society rhetoric of the larger mine action movement may ring rather hollow. It is argued that this circumstance poses a serious challenge not only to ethical practices in mine action but to the notion of global civil society as well.*

In late 2000 the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) announced that it was seeking applicants to fill two paid positions. The job postings, one for an Advocacy Co-ordinator and the other for a Government Relations Co-ordinator, listed among the required qualifications a university degree, strong oral and written communication skills in English, and a high degree of computer literacy. Applicants were invited to forward their curriculum vitae, letter of application, a writing sample and a list of references to the ICBL at a Washington, DC address. Significantly, the postings concluded parenthetically with the following advice: ‘Emailed applications are preferred’.¹ Although it might easily have escaped the notice of any who applied for these jobs, both the required qualifications and the preference for electronic submission of application documents were quite revealing of the relative privilege of the sites from which candidates for positions such as these were likely to be drawn. More particularly, this aspect of the postings begs to be read as an allegory of the effective inaudibility of some

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voices (notably from many of the world's most mine-affected areas) in the realm of mine action. This, in turn, is suggestive of the potential for ethical dilemmas to be masked by uncritical acceptance of the widespread idea that the ICBL is an expression of global civil society—a claim that, implying broad franchise, has done much to underwrite the legitimacy of the movement to ban landmines and of ongoing mine action, even though its rhetorical weight might turn out considerably to exceed its material foundations in some important respects.

The stock narrative of what has come to be known generically as the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel (AP) landmines has it that the convention's origins reside not in any state action or initiative, but in civil society—in particular, with committed activists and interested non-governmental organisations (NGOs).² To be sure, there is much to recommend this account, since most states actually came quite late to the process that saw the treaty inaugurated with 122 initial signatories in December 1997.³ Accordingly, the prevailing view of the ban has found its origins not in the traditional workings of diplomacy but in the co-ordinated efforts of a range of civil society actors who first brought the humanitarian crisis wrought by these weapons fully to light and then worked to propel the issue onto government agendas.⁴ Taking full advantage not only of personal mobility but also of the possibilities unlocked by new real-time information and communications technologies, activists and NGOs built a transnational network of advocacy and engagement, enabling them to seize the initiative and lead the process toward a mine ban in new political spaces transcendent of state borders and relatively free from the fetters of conventional diplomatic practice. The dissemination of campaign information via the internet also helped in moving governments to act to the extent that it helped forge broad popular consensus that the humanitarian crisis wrought by AP landmines outweighed any military utility that might be claimed for them.

This origins narrative has invested considerable moral authority in the movement to ban landmines, the Ottawa Convention itself and, no less, ongoing efforts to universalise the ban. In particular, all have been at least rhetorically marked apart from whatever suspicions might otherwise be aroused by cynicism regarding the underlying aims of self-interested states. That is to say, no ulterior motive on the part of the actual signatories to the Ottawa Convention can reasonably be linked to the founding moment of the ban. Instead, legitimacy inheres in the idea that in its founding the landmines prohibition derived not from the foreign policy imperatives of some state(s), but from actors untainted by allegiances other than to mine victims themselves and, more broadly, to widely held principles of humanitarian justice. Moreover, its apparently global franchise seems to have insulated ongoing mine action from charges of incipient neo-colonialism of the sort levelled against, for example, liberal-inspired development discourses spoken from the privileged and authoritative North over and against voices in the South. Consequently, questions about the ethics of mine action turn vitally on the rendering of the ban as an initiative rooted in an emergent global civil society transcendent of states and, therefore, of their more parochial interests.

While there is little room seriously to question the pivotal role played by civil society-based actors in the campaign to ban landmines, the rather less modest

claim to the effect that the campaign is best understood as an initiative of global civil society may not as easily withstand critical scrutiny. The most serious implications of this reside in the legitimising function performed by the global civil society rhetoric that has been such a central element of the origins narrative of the Ottawa Convention and the mine ban movement more generally. Inasmuch as reference to global civil society has therefore been a vital enabling factor in the movement's successes to date, it can be read as a progressive rhetoric yielding tangible practical improvements in the lived realities of people in mine-affected areas. More generally, the liberal-inspired hopes bound up in the idea of global civil society imbue it with a decidedly emancipatory flavour—it bespeaks an open, democratic space wherein the aspirations of the globally disempowered might hope to find meaningful expression in concrete political action. The basis of such optimism is, of course, the expectation that transnationalised civil society networks are broadly accessible, such that a full range of voices can be raised through them irrespective of whether they speak from sites of privilege or margin. And it is in this view and the sense of broad franchise to which it gives rise that the legitimacy of the campaign to ban landmines inheres most fundamentally.

The global civil society origins story of the campaign to ban landmines has become an important part of the enabling narrative of both mine action itself and its rhetorical appeal. This has significant implications not only in terms of the practical lessons that some might hope to infer from the campaign, but also as regards the ethical practice of ongoing mine action. With respect to the former, the failure to parlay the momentum of the mine ban into similar restrictions on small arms and light weapons suggests that civil society actors might not be quite so fully the inexorable agents of change that some may have imagined in 1997.⁵ More immediately, however, the legitimising function of claims about the civil society sources of mine action initiatives is such that said claims' precise nature and content beseech careful scrutiny lest they too readily obfuscate ethical dilemmas arising from the matter of whose voices really can contribute meaningfully to the shaping of the mine action agenda. In this sense, the case of mine action might be revealing of an important problematic confronting transnational civil society undertakings more generally. But before inquiring into this possibility directly, it is useful to consider briefly the basis upon which the campaign to ban landmines has been understood as both the project and the proof of a functioning global civil society.

The campaign to ban landmines as a global civil society initiative

That the successes to date and future prospects of the campaign to ban landmines owe much to the dedication and determination of a wide range of civil society actors seems beyond question. An umbrella organisation that today brings together more than 1300 NGOs from over 90 countries around ongoing mine action efforts,⁶ the ICBL is well placed to trade on its impressive record of achievement. By December 2002, just five years after the mine ban treaty opened for signature in Ottawa, only 48 holdout states persisted in their refusal to disavow landmine use; in addition, tens of millions of stockpiled mines had been

destroyed, and both humanitarian de-mining and mine victim rehabilitation programmes were being expanded.⁷ The ICBL also remains as engaged as ever in its efforts to universalise the landmine prohibition. And as much now as in its infancy, the movement to realise a global ban finds its hopes for success in the continuing efforts of the committed civil society actors around the world who have come together under the ICBL's umbrella. In the light of all that the unprecedented coalition built by the ICBL has achieved in little more than a decade, there is ample basis for the considerable attention it has garnered, not only from those concerned with issues of arms control and disarmament but also from policy makers, activists and scholars with an interest in the idea of an emergent global civil society. From a wide range of perspectives, it seems, the route to the Ottawa Convention signals a watershed worthy of careful attention for the important lessons it is expected to bear and the hitherto unimagined possibilities it seems to promise.

In general, the origins story of the movement to ban landmines has met with precious little in the way of critical scrutiny. Indeed, renderings of the landmine ban as the product of an emergent or already functioning global civil society have characterised much of the popular, activist and even scholarly literature on the subject. While this has sometimes been cast quite broadly, it is the central role of NGOs in particular that has most often been emphasised. According to Stefan Brem and Ken Rutherford, for instance, NGOs played a 'critical role ... in instigating and facilitating the landmine ban'.⁸ Celina Tuttle concurs, describing the content of the Ottawa Convention as having been 'arrived at by the sustained and concerted efforts of non-governmental organizations ... and international agencies concerned about the social and economic devastation caused by AP mines, working closely with like-minded governments'.⁹ What is more, she continues, 'it is a disarmament treaty whose very existence is rooted in an intensive, global grass-roots effort, strongly supported by the will of people around the world'.¹⁰ Similar claims abound, invoked even as empirical evidence in studies concerned with the oft-proclaimed changing nature of global governance more generally. In one such study Craig Warkentin and Karen Mingst characterise the campaign to ban landmines as a 'victory' of global civil society.¹¹ Maxwell A Cameron concurs, situating the origins of the Ottawa Convention in 'a grassroots campaign that originated in global civil society'.¹² Moreover, according to Cameron, whatever its centrality to the process, 'Canada's initiative would not have been possible without a civil society movement of global reach'.¹³ From this perspective global civil society was not only vital to the founding of the mine ban movement, it remained essential to its successes even after interested states like Canada took up the cause in earnest.

What, then, is this emergent or extant (the extent of the claim varying from one narrative to another) global civil society that has figured so prominently in dominant accounts of the campaign to ban landmines even as the latter has been invoked as evidence of its very existence? In an influential and pioneering analysis of what are increasingly regarded as important changes in the nature of local and global governance, Ronnie D Lipschutz contrasts global civil society with the sharply delineated and discrete political spaces long marked out by separate nation-states, each containing its own civil society. It is the trans-

cence of precisely these boundaries, Lipschutz argues, that gives concrete expression to the idea of a *global* civil society:

The spatial boundaries of global civil society are different, because its autonomy from the constructed knowledges of the state system also allows for the construction of new political spaces. These political spaces are delineated by networks of economic, social and cultural relations, and they are being occupied by the conscious association of actors, in physically separated locations, who link themselves together in networks for particular political and social purposes ... While the participants in the networks of global civil society interact with states and governments over particular policy issues, the networks themselves extend over levels of analysis and state borders, and are not constrained by the state system itself.¹⁴

It should be understood that these global civil society networks do not replace nation-states as important sites of political action. Rather, they signal an enlarged political terrain populated by a wider range of meaningful actors than is suggested by the traditional preoccupation with the conduct of self-interested states. In Lipschutz's view, what we are witness to is 'the emergence of a parallel arrangement of political action, one that does not take anarchy or self-help as central organising principles, but is focused on the self-conscious constructions of networks of knowledge and action, by decentred, local actors, that cross the reified boundaries of space as though they were not there'.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, much of the attention devoted to questions and claims about the changing nature of global governance in general has been focused on the role and conduct of NGOs as increasingly important actors in transnational political processes. Here, the campaign to ban landmines is emblematic, but other mobilisations around issues ranging from particular visions of human rights to the protection of the biosphere are similarly instructive. Transnational political mobilisations are not a new phenomenon, however; this suggests that NGO activism alone is not a sufficient cause of whatever changes in the modalities of global governance might seem to be suggested by the Ottawa Process and by comparable initiatives raised to some practical effect from beyond the confines of established circuits of state interaction. Underscoring this point are less recent experiences of transnationalised social movements that, despite having attracted significant NGO participation, were unable to transcend the limitations of spatial dispersion well enough to raise a co-ordinated movement of the sort exemplified by the ICBL. The peace movements of the late 1960s and early 1980s are but two examples here: although a mass following was attracted in each case, it remained to a large degree parcelled off into separate national contexts, each oriented vertically (that is, with civil society actors addressing themselves to national governments) much more than horizontally (ie across state boundaries through networks connecting like-minded civil society groups in different countries). Moreover, the peace activists of the cold war era did not enjoy anything approaching the privileged access to active circuits of diplomatic practice that was achieved by the ICBL. This is not to say that they did not exert an influence from without; they did, perhaps even decisively in some instances. But these earlier movements nevertheless remained quite decidedly relegated to the

margins not only of international diplomacy, but of domestic politics in most contexts as well.¹⁶

Clearly, then, the remarkable achievements of the campaign to ban landmines must be the result of more than just the willingness of NGOs to become actively engaged in the cause. Lipschutz argues that the emergence of global civil society has been occasioned less by large-scale political activism—which, as noted above, is not a new phenomenon—than by a confluence of transformative trends that include the diminished inclination and/or ability of national governments to provide public goods and social welfare, as well as the ‘leaking away of sovereignty from the state’ towards both supra- and sub-national institutions.¹⁷ In combination with these developments, the spread of liberal norms and values—which find the locus of sovereignty in individuals rather than states—has undermined the state’s claim to be sole mediator between the ‘secured’ inside and ‘dangerous’ outside of the domestic/international dichotomy of human socio-political interaction. This has occurred at a time when the unprecedented destructive potential of weapons technology has made traditional military solutions to the problem of security seem less viable.¹⁸ The result has been an opening up of political spaces such that both legitimacy and discursive authority have been conferred upon civil society voices, making them audible in realms that were once the exclusive preserve of those appointed to speak on the state’s behalf.

Of course, while these developments are all significant, they tell us more about why it is that voices from civil society can now be heard than how it has become possible for them to speak. That is to say, these too are necessary but not sufficient causes of the new possibilities for global governance seen in the campaign to ban landmines. Equally significant are the practical bases upon which transnational networks of political action are built and sustained. The vital infrastructures of these civil society-based networks are expressed in technologies that produced the late-twentieth century revolutions in personal mobility, communications and information handling. Writing on the eve of the boom in personal computing and widespread internet connectivity, Lipschutz places the emphasis on the mobility made possible by the advent of relatively inexpensive commercial air travel that has accompanied the dramatic expansion of carrier capacity since the middle of the last century. ‘Travel’, in his view, ‘is more than just a means of getting about, it is a process of knowledge exchange ... that allows all kinds of political and social transactions to take place outside of the purview or control of governments.’¹⁹ In this sense it is a critical infrastructure of global civil society, facilitating the construction of transnational communities and the maintenance of civil society-based networks unbounded by the rigid territoriality of states. And more particularly, personal mobility has proved indispensable to the sort of transnational political activism enabled by these networks to the extent that members of civil society-based groups are empowered to make their presence felt at key sites of international decision making at decisive moments. In the case of the campaign to ban landmines members of the engaged NGO community lobbied state diplomats directly in the corridors of international arms-control and disarmament fora. Mobility also played a part in the ICBL’s coalition-building efforts as it worked to broaden

its own membership base, mounting NGO conferences around the world and establishing a presence in mine-affected areas.

Arguably of even greater significance to the campaign to ban landmines, however, was the unprecedented capacity to mobilise and co-ordinate a large transnational movement by making use of new information and communications technologies. Although the mobility of key members of the campaign was important, the raising and co-ordination of a mass movement was enabled more by the emergent ‘wired world’ of the mid-1990s. The ability to communicate effortlessly and inexpensively in real time as well as to distribute (email) or make available (websites) vast amounts of information to an international audience unlocked the potential of transnational activist networks as a potent force in global political processes. Much more than a mere conduit through which an essentially passive audience might receive information, the internet opened up interactive channels of communication through which virtual communities of activists and supporters could be forged around shared objectives.²⁰ Richard Price notes that this also endowed civil society actors with a ‘surveillance capability’, carving out a role for them in the monitoring of state ‘compliance with desired norms of behaviour’.²¹ Indeed, cyberspace furnished a new realm for political action wherein neither the fixity of territorial boundaries nor the privileged speaking positions of governments and diplomats could contain civil society-based networks of activism. According to Warkentin and Mingst, ‘the nature and possibilities of the World Wide Web combined with those of an emergent global civil society to create a new international political environment, one in which state sovereignty was constrained and NGOs—as key actors in civil society—were able to work in novel and notably effective ways’.²² Moreover, they argue, an important effect of new communications technologies, one that was quite unmistakable in the campaign to ban landmines, is that they have ‘collapsed political time’ by accelerating the pace at which transnational mobilisations can be made.²³

Interrogating the ‘global civil society’ rhetoric of mine action

The sort of transnational activism exemplified in the campaign to ban landmines is aptly characterised as an instance of what Paul Wapner calls ‘world civic politics’.²⁴ Taking on what is undeniably an issue belonging to the ambit of ‘world politics’, the mine ban movement originated from and was articulated through the realm of social life known as ‘civil society’: the ‘complex network of economic, social, and cultural practices based on friendship, family, the market, and voluntary association’.²⁵ That the campaign to ban landmines is rightly regarded (at least in its origins) as a civil society-based movement, then, seems not to be in serious question. Similarly, the ‘global’ nature of the particular political problem to which the movement addressed itself is not at issue—after all, even if the pernicious effects of AP landmine use are not universally felt, mines themselves have nevertheless long been a near-ubiquitous staple of states’ military arsenals. To concede that the campaign to ban landmines is identifiable as a civil society-based initiative in world politics is not, however, to make the more extravagant claim that it is appropriately rendered as an initiative of *global*

civil society. Here, a more stringent test is in order: one that is signalled by the legitimising effect of the notion of broad franchise imparted in the global civil society rhetoric of the mine ban movement's origins story.

As Ann Marie Clark, Elisabeth J Friedman and Kathryn Hochstetler have argued, 'to describe the social relations among nongovernmental actors as *global* is to assume that ... global civil society is widespread enough that actors from all over the world are involved in the interactions'.²⁶ Globality, they note, 'raises the stakes considerably' because it implies 'geographically diverse' representation in the transnational processes of civic politics.²⁷ Obviously, in order for the global civil society rhetoric discussed above to contribute to the legitimacy of mine action, this representation must be meaningful in comprehensiveness, in depth and in terms of the practical possibilities for affecting the mine action agenda. The last of these, in particular, is not to be overlooked—the relative (in)ability of those speaking from sites of margin to participate fully in the fashioning of political praxis is, after all, the litmus test by which the validity of the *global* civil society rhetoric must ultimately be judged. But, as with other liberal discourses, the Achilles heel of the more optimistic renderings of global civil society lies in the apparent assumption that the formal right to speak is one with the practical ability to raise a voice. The best hopes and intentions of formal equality, however, are too often subverted by the exigencies of real inequality.

Under these circumstances, there is a danger that emancipatory designs spoken from sites of relative privilege will work violence of their own by dictating the terms of emancipation over and against less audible voices speaking from the margins, despite the fact that the latter's well-being may be most directly at stake. Moreover, to the extent that such discourses bear pretensions of universality, they perpetuate the inaudibility of dissenters in marginal locales who might imagine the needs of their own salvation in terms different from or even contrary to those used without. Particularly instructive in this regard is Chandra Talpade Mohanty's celebrated critique of some strands of Western feminism that stand on universalised claims about the sources of women's oppression in ways that are profoundly disempowering of 'Third World' women.²⁸ In a similar vein, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reveals how even a radically emancipatory politics can have the effect of suppressing marginal voices in its very midst.²⁹ More broadly, from the liberal-inspired institutions of global governance to radical development discourses, enduring structures of inequality frustrate emancipatory designs by authorising and enabling privileged voices whose universalist discourses subject marginal voices to erasure.³⁰ This is something that ought to be taken seriously *vis-à-vis* ethical practices in mine action, since the global civil society rhetoric from which mine action derives some measure of its legitimacy professes universality. It should be emphasised, however, that to raise this point is not to question the humanitarian motives of those engaged in mine action from sites of relative privilege. Rather, it is to draw attention to the unfortunate circumstance that even the most well intended and thoughtfully conceived emancipatory projects become ethically problematic when largely spoken into a given locale from without.

Against this backdrop the details of the global civil society rhetoric of the mine ban movement bear closer examination. As Warkentin and Mingst point out,

Lipschutz finds NGOs among the most important of the actors playing ‘pivotal roles in the construction of a global civil society’s constitutive networks’.³¹ With more than 1300 NGOs under its umbrella, then, it is hardly surprising that the ICBL has attracted so much attention from those with an interest in what seem to be changing patterns of global governance. Of course, care should be taken not to conflate NGOs with civil society itself.³² This is a caveat that sometimes seems to have been missed in the usual renditions of the origins story of the campaign to ban landmines, tending to focus as they do on the ICBL and its member organisations. Arguably, this has the effect of implying a more comprehensive franchise than might turn out to be the case in some countries. It should be remembered therefore that, although NGOs are civil society actors, it does not automatically follow that they represent a civil society consensus on any issue. The extent to which possibilities exist for ordinary people to connect with the mine ban movement is thus a crucial consideration in any reasonable measure of civil society engagement.

Equally significant is the matter of where the various member organisations of the ICBL are based geographically and how this maps with the specific roles that they play in the campaign to extend the ban and in ongoing mine action more generally. The ICBL is, as noted above, able to boast a membership list made up of NGOs from over 90 countries. But somewhat belying this apparently global franchise, its founding members are all based in Northern countries, none of which are mine-affected, with the ICBL itself headquartered in the USA.³³ Certainly, member NGOs that *are* based in mine-affected countries have been indispensable to the campaign and to mine action in general, but it is noteworthy that theirs is typically a local role: implementing humanitarian de-mining and victim rehabilitation ‘on the ground’ and, variously, lobbying their own governments to support the ban. They are thus characterised by a vertical insertion between their own local contexts and the larger campaign. It is the co-ordinating body of the ICBL and some of the larger Northern member NGOs, operating across many national contexts, that reach out horizontally across the global, with the result that theirs are the privileged voices of mine action—a fact reflected in their increasingly close partnering with the United Nations on mine action initiatives.³⁴ As campaign organisers Jody Williams and Stephen Goose recall, ‘large-scale expansion of the campaign throughout Asia and Africa did not occur until the ICBL network had been consolidated in the North and political momentum had begun to build’.³⁵

Nevertheless, there are, without a doubt, very good practical reasons for the leading role of Northern NGOs. Jackie Smith suggests that, although the disproportionate basing in cities like London and New York ‘in part reflects global inequalities ... it also results from strategic organizational choices’. Among the important considerations, according to Smith, is the reality that ‘telecommunications are more reliable and often cheaper in more industrialized regions and transport to and from these places far more convenient, thus facilitating transnational organization’.³⁶ While there is no disputing this, the point should not be missed that these practical realities also reflect global inequalities. Moreover, the very fact of unequal access to mobility and new information and communications technologies calls into some question the idea

of a meaningfully *global* civil society. In the case of the landmines campaign, as we have seen, accessible air travel and, more importantly, access to the internet were essential to the forging of a transnational activist movement. It is primarily in the developing South, however, that these requisites of effective civil society mobilisation are not as readily available to majority populations, which means that people living in many of the world's most mine-affected areas are effectively disenfranchised from equal participation in transnational networks of mine action.

Since the 1990s activist communities have seen important changes in both the breadth and depth of their membership bases, as internet connectivity has enabled ordinary people in the more developed parts of the world to reach beyond local contexts to communicate with and even participate directly in transnational groups and movements.³⁷ Although activist organisations in the developing world do not enjoy the same quality and degree of access to the internet as their counterparts in the developed North, neither are they cut off from it entirely. Moreover, transnational coalitions of related organisations are themselves networks through which 'information-poor' groups receive support from those who are more privileged, even to the extent of developing direct internet access.³⁸ But in a world where the global poor tend also to be the 'information-poor',³⁹ ordinary people in many mine-affected areas are more likely to be left on the disadvantaged side of the so-called 'digital divide'. According to Manuel Castells,⁴⁰ the diffusion of internet access, though impressive, overwhelmingly favours urban centres over the rural areas where so many of the world's estimated 100 million mines are sown. Catherine Frost points out that while internet connectivity is a possibility wherever telephony is available, 'it should be remembered that there are still plenty of places where you can't take basic telephone service for granted'.⁴¹

Proceeding from the claim that the internet has enabled ordinary people to become informed about issues such as landmines and to make their views known instantly to their governments, Warkentin and Mingst call attention to the collapsing of political time made possible by new information and communications technologies.⁴² Asking who these ordinary people are, however, yields a different sense of the situation because, while political time might have been compressed, political space, or at least the unequal division of it, remains relatively unchanged. In other words, voices of influence and authority still issue from more or less the same locales of privilege. Ironically, the rhetorical connection of the movement to ban landmines with the idea of an emergent global civil society is most profoundly unsettled by the ICBL's own job postings. Even leaving aside the qualifications sought in applicants, the preferred means of application further restricts the pool of potential candidates: the majority of those living in most of the world's mine-affected areas are, after all, much less likely to have access to email. In the light of this and taking account of the 'local' experience of the landmines issue in mine-affected areas, the idea of global civil society is destabilised by the confirmation that, from here, marginal voices cannot be heard. There are important senses in which they cannot 'hear' either, residing as they do beyond the pale of the internet-based outreach efforts of the campaign.⁴³ That those whose daily lived experiences are most intimately tied to

the landmines issue are effectively excluded from full participation in the broader political mobilisation that it has brought about is also illustrative of the problems of unequal power and material relations imposed by the legacy of colonialism and ongoing conditions of dependency—all of which poses a serious challenge not only to ethical practices in mine action but to the notion of a global civil society as well.

Conclusion

Just as there are good organisational and strategic reasons for the basing of NGOs in major cities of the North, so too does the list of desired qualifications identified in the ICBL's job postings issue from practical considerations that are not easily ignored. Indeed, the duties listed for each position and the very fact that the ICBL interfaces with states and with the United Nations clearly necessitated that applicants should possess good computer skills, be fluent in English, and so forth. Arguably, the requirement for a university degree is a more arbitrary measure (especially in the light of the fact that no particular discipline was specified), and one that is likely to have had greater exclusionary effect beyond the North. But it is the advice that 'emailed applications are preferred' that most clearly highlights how sites of privilege are reflected and unwittingly reproduced through the campaign to ban landmines. Admittedly, it is a preference that is indicated here, and applications could still have been forwarded by regular post. But, as argued above, privileged voices find their relative advantage not through the formal exclusion of marginal ones but because of structural inequalities that limit access to audible speaking positions. Underscoring this, the online job postings themselves would never have been seen in the first place by persons lacking internet connectivity.

As they are most commonly articulated, the progressive and emancipatory hopes bound up in the idea of global civil society—those of political liberalism—suggest a universal wherewithal to engage directly in political action and, consequently, a franchise that is potentially boundless. Unfortunately, such wherewithal is not evenly apportioned, and this should move us to sustain critical inquiry into whose emancipation is at stake and according to whom. These are the sorts of imperative self-reflective questions that are obviated by the claim that the mine ban movement and ongoing mine action are appropriately read as an initiative of global civil society. It turns out that what we are witness to might more rightly be characterised as transnationalised elements of civil society—perhaps globalising elements of Northern civil society. The importance of distinctions such as these is that they highlight whose voices can be heard in the new political spaces opened up by, for example, information and communications technologies. Again, this is to suggest neither that the ICBL's jobs might easily have been less exclusive nor that they were deliberately so. But, whatever its sources, there is an exclusionary effect that calls for some reflection upon its potential implications for ethical practices in mine action. Besides conferring legitimacy, the global civil society rhetoric of the mine ban movement has a tendency to depoliticise mine action. This is something that must be self-consciously problematised and resisted inasmuch as the realities of deep

structural inequality in the global political economy are such that opportunities for meaningful participation in transnational civil society-based networks and practices are not at all equally apportioned across geopolitical space. This does not mean that ethical practices of mine action are a chimera, however. Rather, it enjoins us always to bear well in mind that even the best-conceived practices must be implemented across contexts that are shot through with persistent structures of inequality that can work to frustrate their aims.

As a discourse of legitimation, the global civil society origins narrative of the campaign to ban landmines has worked to great practical effect. However, the foundational claims bound up in it, whether implicit or explicit, should not be allowed to escape critical interrogation in deference to political expediency. To be sure, civil society networks of activism have shown themselves to be a potent force in contemporary global governance, and the experience of the mine ban movement stands as a compelling expression of this. Most unprecedented in this regard is the demonstrated ability of ICBL activists to make effective use of new information and communication technologies, enabling them to lead the political agenda well enough to bring over a hundred states to a binding AP landmine prohibition in the remarkably short span of just a few years. But while this clearly bespeaks a compression of political time, the disposition of political space remains largely unaltered. It is this enduring reality that is most profoundly mystified by the unqualified invocation of global civil society rhetoric. A more nuanced understanding of transnational civil society initiatives and the inequality of opportunity for their meaningful engagement by people occupying different political spaces both unsettles this rhetoric and yields a repoliticised account of mine action. At the same time, it calls into question the extent to which the mine ban movement is itself appropriately taken as unproblematic evidence of a functioning global civil society. In the light of these significant implications, we would do well not to allow a preoccupation with what is new in global governance to obscure from view the enduring influence of those things that remain essentially unchanged.

Notes

- ¹ The two job announcements were available at <http://www.icbl.org/prerelease/2000/dec30.php3#advocacy> and <http://www.icbl.org/prerelease/2000/dec30.php#government>, accessed 24 January 2001.
- ² The convention is formally known as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.
- ³ As Kenneth Rutherford points out, 'even as late as 1994, there was consensus among all states that landmines were legal'. K R Rutherford, 'The evolving arms control agenda: implications of the role of NGOs in banning antipersonnel landmines', *World Politics*, 53 (1), 2000, p 74.
- ⁴ For a sophisticated and thorough articulation of this perspective, see R Price, 'Reversing the gun sights: transnational civil society targets land mines', *International Organization*, 52 (3), 1998, pp 613–644.
- ⁵ J M Beier & A Denholm Crosby, 'Harnessing change for continuity: the play of political and Economic forces behind the Ottawa Process', in M A Cameron, R J Lawson & B W Tomlin (eds), *To Walk Without Fear: The Global Movement To Ban Landmines*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998, p 278; and S Brem & K Rutherford, 'Walking together or divided agenda? Comparing landmines and small-arms campaigns', *Security Dialogue*, 32 (2), 2001, pp 169–186.
- ⁶ International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 'More about the campaign', at <http://www.icbl.org/info/about.html>, accessed 11 January 2003.

- ⁷ International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 'Campaign celebrates progress on mine ban treaty fifth anniversary', at <http://www.icbl.org/news/2002/263.php>, accessed 11 January 2003.
- ⁸ Brem & Rutherford, 'Walking together or divided agenda?', p 171.
- ⁹ C Tuttle, 'Landmine ban rooted in civil society', *Peace Magazine*, 13 (6), 1997, p17.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ C Warkentin & K Mingst, 'International institutions, the state, and global civil society in the age of the world wide web', *Global Governance*, 6 (2), 2002, p 246.
- ¹² M A Cameron, 'Democratization of foreign policy: the Ottawa Process as a model', *Canadian Foreign Policy*, 5 (3), 1998, p163.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ R D Lipschutz, 'Reconstructing world politics: the emergence of global civil society', *Millennium*, 21 (3), 1992, p 393.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 390.
- ¹⁶ This is not to overlook that the landmines issue was in many ways unique. For a fuller account of circumstances enabling a ban on landmines, see Beier & Denholm Crosby, 'Harnessing change for continuity'. Nevertheless, the campaign to ban landmines did achieve a degree of transnational integration and co-ordination not matched by earlier movements.
- ¹⁷ Lipschutz, 'Reconstructing world politics', p 399.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 405–407, 418–419.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 413.
- ²⁰ R Thakur & W Maley, 'The Ottawa convention on landmines: a landmark humanitarian treaty in arms control?', *Global Governance*, 5 (3), 1999, p 282.
- ²¹ R Price, 'Compliance with international norms and the mines taboo', in Cameron *et al*, *To Walk Without Fear*, p 343.
- ²² Warkentin & Mingst, 'International institutions, the state, and global civil society in the age of the world wide web', p 246.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p 253.
- ²⁴ P Wapner, 'Politics beyond the state: environmental activism and world civic politics', *World Politics*, 47 (3), 1995, p 313.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ A M Clark, E J Friedman & K Hochstetler, 'The sovereign limits of global civil society: a comparison of NGO participation in UN world conferences on the environment, human rights, and women', *World Politics*, 51 (1), 1998, pp 2–3, emphasis in the original.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p 3.
- ²⁸ C T Mohanty, 'Under Western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses', *Boundary 2*, 12 (3)/13 (1), 1984, pp 333–358.
- ²⁹ G C Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in C Nelson & L Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp 271–313.
- ³⁰ The universalist pretensions of international law, for example, occlude enduring unequal relations of power that are a legacy of European colonialism. See S N Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-Determination in International Law*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. Even self-consciously critical emancipatory discourses such as dependency theory can have the unintended effect of erasing local specificity through totalising narrative. See I Kapoor, 'Capitalism, culture, agency: dependency versus postcolonial theory', *Third World Quarterly*, 23 (4), 2002, pp 647–664.
- ³¹ Warkentin & Mingst, 'International institutions, the state, and global civil society in the age of the world wide web', p 239.
- ³² The distinction here is not always well observed. Clark *et al*, 'The sovereign limits of global civil society', for example, inquire into the possibility of global civil society by focusing on the NGO–state or NGO–IGO interfaces without due attention to the NGO–civil society interface. In much of the literature the problematic implication seems to be that NGOs *are* civil society.
- ³³ The founding members of the ICBL are Handicap International (France), Human Rights Watch (USA), Medico International (Germany), Mines Advisory Group (UK), Physicians for Human Rights (USA) and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (USA).
- ³⁴ For example, in the case of the Survey Action Center, the United Nations Mine Action Service joined with the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining, Handicap International, the Landmine Survivors Network, Medico International, the Mines Advisory Group, Norwegian Peoples' Aid and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation. See Thakur & Maley, 'The Ottawa convention on landmines', p 283.
- ³⁵ J Williams & S Goose, 'The international campaign to ban landmines', in Cameron *et al*, *To Walk Without Fear*, p 25.
- ³⁶ J Smith, 'Global civil society?', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 42 (1), 1998, p 97.

- ³⁷ P Brophy & E Halpin, 'Through the net to freedom: information, the internet and human rights', *Journal of Information Science*, 25 (5), 1999, p 354.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p 356.
- ³⁹ T Cawkell, 'Sociotechnology: the digital divide', *Journal of Information Science*, 27 (1), 2001, p 56.
- ⁴⁰ M Castells, *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp 262–263.
- ⁴¹ C Frost, 'How Prometheus is bound: applying the Innis method of communications analysis to the internet', *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 28 (1), 2003, p 21.
- ⁴² Warkentin & Mingst, 'International institutions, the state, and global civil society in the age of the world wide web', pp 251, 253.
- ⁴³ Underscoring the reality of the digital divide in this regard, the ICBL has reported that more than half of the endorsements and requests for information it receives via the internet come from US citizens. See <http://www.icbl.org/action/us.html>, accessed 4 June 2003.