

Donatella della Porta, Massimiliano Andretta, Lorenzo Mosca and Herbert Reiter.

Globalization from Below: Transnational Activists and Protest Networks.

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Since widespread mobilization against global capitalism in Seattle during 1999, a number of social movement scholars have begun to examine the manifestation of transnational, if not global, social movements. This book contributes to emerging scholarship on the issue by challenging claims of prominent scholars in the area, such as Sidney Tarrow, that transnational mobilization is merely characterized by coalitions of organizations rather than a distinct movement of its own.

Della Porta et al. question whether contemporary social movement perspectives account for contention against “neoliberal” globalization and whether such mobilization is defined by distinct repertoires of actions and identities. They conclude that it indeed is and as a result this defines such mobilization as a unique social movement characterized by “globalization from below.”

They argue that contention against global capitalism consists of distinct organizational structures, identities, strategies and interactions with power holders. Unlike past movements, associated with centralized networks, the movement against capitalist driven globalization is defined by heterogeneity. The family of movements acting against power holders range from religious to environmental, and traditional left-leaning organizations as well as many others. This is an important insight that remains only partially developed in their analysis. Instead, their focus is on the structure of such movement organizations and how they formulate their decisions and claims. Della Porta et al. argue that common to most groups in the movement are affinities to internal democracy, grass roots administration, and consensus building.

This is extended through their discussion of the movement’s identities, which they argue are multiple and fluid. Nevertheless, they illustrate that various movement organizations share a meta value of democracy from below. That is, decisions and interactions are not structured in a centralized, procedural, or top-down manner. However, they also note that social justice, against institutions of global capitalism, is the master frame that bounds divergent interests.

On this front, they also note that the movement is largely non-violent in orientation and is very conscious of its media profile and wider interpretation. However, it is not constrained by a fixed set of tactics and its repertoire of actions is wide and complex. It bridges older actions used by established organizations, but at the same time is diverse enough to innovate new means of contention, including actions against consumerism and the emergence of counter-summits which are acts of democracy from below. If dominant global institutions such as the IMF or World Bank sacrifice the interests of the masses, then the movement holds its own court creating an alternative global vision. As a result, although most groups are against neoliberalism, the authors contend the movement is not against globalization. Rather its aim is to gain more control of the process and make global institutions more accountable and socially just.

This becomes even clearer as della Porta et al. examine interactions between the movement and dominant power holders. It is explored through an analysis of policing and the role of nation-states at international summits. The authors note that mainstream reaction to the movement largely reflects

the heterogeneity of mobilizers and the unique situations that emerge as result of the global sphere where power holders must address both internal and external pressures. For instance, police recognize different interests and zones of contention, finding it difficult to manage the right to legitimately protest or hold counter summits while also engaging extreme or radical elements that may challenge national and international leaders. Thus, it is apparent that the means of social control are still firmly rooted in nation-state models that have legitimate authority to manage contention. Yet, the international nature of globalization presents unique obstacles that challenge such authority.

The movement's relation to power holders is further examined by its alignment of interests to the right and left of mainstream politics. Because of the diffuse nature of the movement and demands for democracy from below, the authors argue that the movement has largely failed to build alliances with political elites. At the same time the movement's repertoire of actions also challenges the authority of nation-states signing into international treaties. As a result, when the movement acts outside national and international institutions, holding mock summits, it engages local and supranational organizations to ensure inclusion of voices from below.

These claims are examined by a wide range of evidence, including surveying protestors against the G8 in Genoa and participants in the European Social Forum in Florence; they also observed protests, held focus groups and interviews, conducted a content analysis of local and international newspapers, and examined calls to mobilization, organizational documents, and web sites. The wide scope and innovative use of methods used to triangulate their research questions makes this study particularly strong.

However, although della Porta et al. convincingly illustrate the emergence of a discourse of "globalization from below," which defines anti-global capitalism in the North, they do not fully engage the asymmetry of the movement. Most of their data focuses on events and protestors in North America and Europe and thus one is left asking: whose voice from below? As a result, concerns raised by the likes of Clifford Bob or Kathryn Sikkink that global issues are firmly entrenched in the hegemony of the North over the South remain under examined.

Nevertheless, the book is well researched and offers an important contribution to the emerging literature on transnational mobilization. It could easily be adopted for graduate courses in political sociology, social movements, or globalization and is a strong contribution to each of these areas.

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