

*A Review: A. Jaime, "Política global y sociedad civil en las Américas: Nuevas diplomacias en Argentina y México" [Global Politics and Civil Society in the Americas: New Diplomacies in Argentina and Mexico] (Madrid: Catarata, 2017)*

by Cynthia Arredondo

Although the presence and participation of Non-Governmental Organizations (hereafter NGOs) in multilateral spaces can be dated back to the first half of the twentieth century, there is little academic thought on the political implications of such participation at global level, on the institutional transformations that multilateral organizations have implemented to promote (or curb) the inclusion of the voice of NGOs in political discussions, normally attended by accredited diplomats. Likewise, there is little academic consideration on the different dynamics in which NGOs engage in order to reach global political scenarios. The theories of collective action took a look at transnational actions of NGOs and its dynamics in the 1990s and early 2000s; the beginning of the new century seemed marked by a wave of social demands at the global level, as the civil demonstrations during the World Trade Organization summit in Seattle, United States, in 1999 and the formation of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001; two events that are already iconic in the literature, since they marked a paradigm shift highlighting the need to create spaces in global forums for diversity of voices beyond diplomatic protocols.

To study the phenomenon of NGO dynamics in global politics, the author questions the more classical and traditional visions of global politics and opts for an alternative vision to the studies of diplomatic practice; as a result, he offers an analysis of agents and structures in a Latin American context through the observation of interactions between Ministries of Foreign Affairs, multilateral organizations and civil societies that, in the



author's words, democratise global politics. Through a multiple case study, Alejo highlights the interactions between institutions, actors, and their narratives.

The author bases the analysis of the study cases in two basic assumptions: *a)* the State is not the only actor in constructing global politics, in consequence, there is a global political action that goes beyond the State, but at the same time this action does not annul the one of the State; and *b)* the interactions between State actors – summits and multilateral organizations, institutions in charge of foreign policy – and NGOs imply novel dynamics in the diplomatic circuits that denote a pluralization in the first instance and a democratization in the last instance of global politics. These assumptions are the baseline from where the author observes and analyses three types of dynamics: the institutionalised spaces set in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Argentina and Mexico to include NGOs; the structures of supranational mechanisms and multilateral summits that integrate NGOs; and the transnational activities of NGOs.

One of the assumptions suggests that the institutionalised practices of civil society inclusion mean a democratizing trend of global politics; this idea about democratization tends to weaken along the research when there is no causal relationship between democratization and the presence of NGOs in global policy spaces; the presence of NGOs in multilateral fora does not directly lead to a more democratic process of global policy-making. It is true that the democratization of global politics is not the main focus of the research and being this idea merely a suggestion, it may raise false expectations for the reader.

Three questions guide the research and analysis, all of which enquire about the relationships between the agents – traditional and non-traditional actors –, and structures – institutions – of global politics. The first research question seeks to understand the linkage between local actions, understood as actions of a national and sub-national level, and global actions, understood as the interventions of NGOs in global policy pro-



cesses; notions of this nature are coined in concepts such as glocal, defined by Ulrich Beck, and glocalization developed by Roland Robertson, both of which blur the boundaries between the national and the global. The second research question that guides the analysis, explores the existing institutional conditions for the promotion of transnational practices of NGOs in the Americas, for which the author notes the *ad hoc* permanent mechanisms for the inclusion of NGOs at different structural and discussion levels in national and multilateral institutions. Finally, the third question is about the organizational and discursive strategies that civil society actors in the Americas use to achieve their objectives.

The answers to these questions are the result of a qualitative research methodology that combines documentary analysis and interviews with the main actors. Through a multiple-case study the author collects empirical evidence that proves the diplomatic transformations in a global context with a regional focus in the Americas.

The author produces evidence on the relationship between structures and agents. For the examination of structures, the author analyses the institutionalized spaces in the Americas that include NGOs. The author focuses his analytical efforts on two axes: on the one hand, he examines five supranational mechanisms – including summits and forums – that illustrate the encounter between civil societies, State actors, and multilateral organizations. On the other hand, the author focuses on the permanent spaces that the governments of Argentina and Mexico have established for the involvement of their civil societies in the foreign policy discussions of each respective country; namely, the Consejo Consultivo de la Sociedad Civil (hereafter Consultative Council of Civil Society) in Argentina, and the Dirección General de Vinculación con Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil (hereafter General Directorate for Liaison with Civil Society Organizations) in Mexico. In the study of agents, the author presents the transnational practices of the civil societies of the Americas through the experiences of two NGOs, from

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both Argentina and Mexico, that work in a global context on human rights and indigenous rights issues; on the subject of human rights, the book presents the experiences of the organizations Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (hereafter Centre for Legal and Social Studies) from Argentina, and Equipo Pueblo<sup>1</sup> from México; on the subject of indigenous rights, the author reviews the actions of the Organización de Naciones y Pueblos Indígenas (Organization of Nations and Indigenous Peoples) in Argentina, and the Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (Indigenous Front of Bi-national Organizations) in Mexico.

Through the analysis of cases of institutionalized spaces and transnational practices of NGOs, the author explores the experiences of national civil societies who have built a transnational profile towards their insertion into global political issues; this multiple-case study analysis manifests what the author calls the social appropriation of diplomacy.

Along seven chapters the author makes a theoretical interdisciplinary journey and observes cases of interactions between structures and agents, being the main objective the identification of social transformations in a global context, questioning the traditional theoretical visions of Social Sciences. The theoretical approaches used in the analysis of the transformations of diplomatic practice and the emergence of what the author calls “NGO diplomacy”, come from the sociology of collective action, diplomatic studies, political science, and particularly from the global political sociology. This theoretical assortment enriches the visions of International Relations that traditionally have a limited scope regarding NGOs as agents of global politics. In the interest of an International Relations disciplinary development, it is necessary to subscribe to the discussion of academics and practitioners the role of NGOs and other non-State actors as active and interactive agents, their dynamics, their contributions, tensions, and contradictions in multilateral scenarios.



The first and second chapters are devoted to the revision and, above all, the interpellation of concepts that are not novel but they are under constant debate since its emergence. The two reviewed conceptual blocks are globalizations and civil societies, in the first and second chapters respectively; both concepts are enunciated in the book in its plural form in order to emphasize the diversity of understandings and explanations of these two key concepts emerged from Social Sciences. These two chapters analyze how and why NGOs reach global policy circuits, and how these types of organizations are defined from the global civil society perspective. The outcome of such theoretical review is the identification of some elements for the analysis of NGO activity in global politics. Some of these elements are the actors involved, their discourses, and institutions, among others. In the analysis of globalization dynamics, the author recaptures contemporary but classical authors such as Saskia Sassen, Anthony Giddens, and Robert Cox, while for the analysis of civil societies he recalls central authors in the field such as Helmut Anheier, Mary Kaldor, John Keane, Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, among many others.

The study cases are displayed from the third to the sixth chapter. The third and fourth chapters focus on the analysis of the institutional conditions for civil society participation in global politics. The third chapter deals with the review of international institutionalized spaces designed for the participation of NGOs in global politics; in a recount of five spaces in supranational mechanisms, the author shows the institutional fragility of these spaces as well as the resistance of the multilateral mechanisms to a greater inclusion of NGO actors in multilateral dynamics; despite these weaknesses, these spaces are useful in the sense that they are points of encounter and strategic for the NGOs that attend them. The fourth chapter puts under scrutiny two offices within the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of two countries, created with the specific purpose of integrating the civil society in the foreign affairs thematic definition; these are the Consultative Council of Civil Society, in Argentina, and the Gen-

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eral Directorate of Liaison with Civil Society Organizations in Mexico. Through an organizational analysis of these two government offices, the author presents the features of linkage policies to include – up to a limited extent – the civil societies of these countries into their respective foreign policies; this involvement of local aspects in the foreign affairs thematic agenda implies a transformation of the State and its dynamics.

More empirical content is presented in chapters fifth and sixth, where the author analyses the dynamics of four NGOs, providing evidence of what he calls NGO diplomacy. The fifth chapter and Equipo Pueblo in Mexico. The sixth chapter discusses the activities of two indigenous NGOs: the Organization of Nations and Indigenous Peoples in Argentina, and the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations, constituted in California, United States but with origins and broad relationship with Mexican organizations. Again, an organizational analysis helps to reveal the relationships and networks, agenda, the type of activities in international spheres, their narratives and their repertoires of action of the aforementioned four NGOs.

The theoretical review jointly with the empirical analysis, establish the foundation of the main arguments of the research presented in the final chapter: *a)* NGO diplomacy implies a transformation of the diplomatic practice, which demands a reassessment of decision-making processes in foreign affairs; *b)* this transformation entails relevant and permanent institutional changes towards the democratization of diplomatic dynamics by involving non-traditional actors, such as NGOs, which has lead to; *c)* the praxis of new diplomacies in the twenty-first century, that face – at least – two challenges: to link global politics to local issues and processes, and the plain integration of non-State actors in the global policy circuit; *d)* all these transformations together imply a transformation of the State.

This book represents a Latin American contribution in various senses; first, by providing alternative understandings of a research field primarily dominated by the Anglo-Saxon academy, whose cases of study have focused on social organizations



and movements from developed countries – mainly from the United States; Alejo offers study cases from the global South. Second, the most part of the literature on the topic is in English language; the book referred here is in Spanish language, making available to the academics, practitioners, and students from Spanish speaking world the discussions on the transnational activity of NGOs and its implications for diplomatic transformations. Third, and probably most important, the selection of study cases and the results of its analysis reveal an epistemic position located in the global South, setting particular, and mostly unexplored aspects, and cutting-edge points of analysis divergent from the mainstream.

This book also provides elements for the analysis of the circuit of relations implied in global politics, circuit of relations that considers non-traditional actors. Structures of political opportunity, interpretative frameworks, mobilization structures, connections between the global and the local, actions of NGOs at different scales – local, regional, international, transnational –, actors, discourses and institutions, are some of the dimensions of analysis that the author uses in his research, and can be recalled by researchers interested in the topic to unveil the complex practices and relationships of heterogeneous actors that share spaces of interaction in global and regional arenas. Just as this book studies some cases from Latin American region, this methodology can be applied for the study of cases of other regions as Europe, where there are also institutionalized mechanisms for the inclusion of civil society. It would also be relevant to study the involvement of civil society in its transnational practices in geo-economic and political blocks as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia) G20, G7, and other blocks of different natures.

The major achievement of the reviewed work is the recognition and documentation of new formats of interaction between governmental foreign policy offices, supra-national mechanisms and institutions, and non-State actors, all of them

as part of the dynamics of what the author calls the new diplomacy of the twenty-first century. From these interactions, Alejo establishes a characterization, a typology of these new diplomacies; citizen diplomacy, global politics from the south, indigenous diplomacy and civic bi-nationality. This typology establishes clear categories that help to understand an unexplored dimension of global politics; the participation of non-State actors in global policy processes.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> The names of institutions and organizations are presented in its original language: Spanish. The translation of the names into English is presented in parentheses. "Equipo Pueblo" is the exception by keeping its original name in Spanish and without a translation to English, since the name in English loses its meaning.

