

World Wide Webs: Social Movements Cross Global Divides in the Public Cyber-Sphere¹

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Introduction

This essay explores the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the operations and activities of social movements. A social constructivist perspective of technology is adopted, whereby it is recognised that a balance must be maintained between technology's transformative capacities on the one hand, and social agents' capacity to utilise technologies, and shape them in their use, on the other.² The South African Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) is noted as an example of a locally-based social movement that has used the Internet to expand its global reach. Habermas's theory of the public sphere and the lifeworld is used to assess how new social movements (NSMs) are incorporating these concepts in their self-understandings and missions on the Internet. The extent to which a medium such as the Internet can fill what may be regarded as a communicative deficit in the informal layers of political society, as identified by Habermas,³ is examined in a local and global context. Geser's detailed investigation into the functions and consequences of the Internet for social movements and voluntary associations is considered, to provide a comprehensive framework of issues to be taken into account in assessing the impact of ICTs on social movements. The degree to which differing access to ICTs affects the ways in which it can be used by social movements across what is commonly referred to as the 'digital divide' is also discussed. The TAC example is used to demonstrate certain limitations of ICTs in social movements where access is limited, as well as highlight alternative means whereby these technologies can still be considered useful despite the lack of access of the majority of members.

NSMs in the public sphere of Lifeworld Online

This section begins with a discussion of the distinction between 'old' and 'new' social movements and is based on Cohen and Rai's⁴ analyses of trends in global social movements. It also notes a series of critiques of 'new' movements posed by Edelman.⁵ Developments in the media, including ICTs, is noted as a key determinant in giving rise to new forms of social activist organisations in what has become known as the New Social Movement (NSM). This is followed by an overview of the Habermasian concepts of the public sphere and the lifeworld looking at how these concepts can be used to examine NSMs' relationship with and use of the Internet. The computer used as a communication device⁶ is shown to be ideally suited to 'lifeworld' interaction and mobilisation in the 'public sphere'.

'Old' vs. 'New' Social Movements

The distinction between 'old' and 'new' social movements is often considered to have entailed a radical break from the old to the new during the 1970s. While old

social movements were linked to the dominant political system, the new social movement strove for changes in social values or lifestyles. Cohen and Rai note how this change corresponds to post-modernist and post-structuralist schools of thought, emphasising the 'radical contingency of structures and events' over former, socio-historical and political framings such as Marxism, liberalism and socialism. The new social movements were able to introduce various tactical and organisational innovations through the expanding power of the media and telecommunications, including the Internet. Ultimately this enabled them to reach a wider, global audience. Nevertheless, Cohen and Rai question the sharp distinction drawn between the new and the old. They do so with particular reference to both the labour movement, as well as human rights movements, neither of which could be said to conform to the move away from political concerns to social values by which the shift from 'old' to 'new' is commonly characterised. Indeed, both (labour and human rights movements) do, and always have, emphasised both political change and social transformation.

Edelman notes the irony of the emphasis on the newness of NSMs, which "sought to uncover hidden histories of their political ancestors in order to fortify their legitimacy and forge new collective identities,"⁷ and notes how the complexity of old and first-wave social movements appear to have been 'rediscovered' by their 'new' descendents. Edelman further critiques some NSMs' focus on particularist identity, which emphasise difference as a claim to rights, but which do so with equal potential to imply a renunciation of rights that often conceals the material conditions of poverty and the structural relations of inequality. The danger of such identity issues to be used in corporate marketing campaigns is also highlighted by Edelman. Such potential pitfalls in the identity approach are shown to have led to a return to class politics, which privileges issues of equality (rather than difference) as the foundation for collective action and the struggle for rights.

Though sceptical of any clear distinction between old and new social movements, Cohen and Rai do note the important shift that has taken place in the move from social movements focused on local and national issues to ones now involved in global or transnational affairs. The focus on global reach is echoed by Escobar,⁸ who argues that "anti-globalization social movements struggle in various ways for the defence of local places and cultures, the transformation of entrenched forms of power and domination (such as gender and race domination), and the construction of coalitions through media and actor-networks." Escobar goes on to suggest that various collective identities intersect and are mutually transformed in transnational movements, and that the formation of a global collective identity may occur at the intersection of various identities. Langman and Morris note various adverse economic-, political-, cultural-, environmental-, and human rights-related consequences of globalisation, showing the globalisation of social movements to be a response to growing awareness of these consequences.⁹ Falk uses the term "globalisation-from-below" to refer to a global civil society in which transnational social forces are linked by a number of concerns: human rights and environmental concerns, hostility to patriarchy and domination, and a common vision of human

community based on the unity of diverse cultures seeking to end poverty, oppression, humiliation, and collective violence.¹⁰ This has emerged in explicit opposition against “globalisation from above,” as is clear from the increasing pervasiveness and dominance of multi-national corporations.¹¹

At this point I would like to examine how conceptions of the public sphere as well as the lifeworld-system dichotomy, as developed by Habermas, relate to the rise of new global social movements. The impact of Internet technologies, which have provided “cheap ‘real time’ communications networks” (cited by Cohen and Rai as one of the circumstances that forced (or enabled) some social movements to go global) is an issue I discuss with reference to the conceptions of the public sphere and lifeworld.

The public sphere

According to Salter Habermas’s central thesis in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) is that independent forums for rational-critical debate arose during a period of epochal change.¹² Bourgeois revolts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe led to the elimination of the relationship between title, status, and voice in the public sphere, which was formally open to all irrespective of class. Typically, the power of the better argument triumphed over the power of coercion. However, Salter notes that once the bourgeois had consolidated a hegemonic position, the concept of the bourgeoisie’s public sphere which, let us say, was founded upon the public use of reason to critically challenge authority, lost its substance. Rather than being freely generated by rational debating, “public opinion” became something to be manipulated and citizens were, at best, consulted.¹³

Palczewski distinguishes between Habermas’s description of the political public sphere,¹⁴ in which “public discussions concern objects connected with the practice of the state,” and the public sphere that “mediates between state and society, a sphere in which the public as the vehicle of public opinion is formed.”¹⁵ She cites theorists such as Felski¹⁶ and Fraser,¹⁷ who recognize the existence of counter-publics as sites which develop critical oppositional discourses, and emphasise the need to theorise beyond the “monolithic public sphere.”¹⁸

In contrast Calhoun, who tried to directly project the idea of a public sphere as described by Habermas in *Structural Transformation* onto the Internet,¹⁹ Salter draws attention to their dissimilarities, noting that whereas the bourgeois public sphere sought to form a common will, “the Internet seems to fragment or at least question the idea of universality or common interest, facilitating precisely the opposite – pluralism.”²⁰ Like Palczewski, Felski, and Fraser, Salter recognises the need for a broadened conception of the public sphere. He uses what I understand to be a more comprehensive analysis of Habermas’s work when he distinguishes between what might be called the formal public sphere, as described in *Structural Transformation*, and a more informal conception of the public sphere. In particular, Salter draws on the Lifeworld-System dichotomy developed in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1987), as well as the “core-

periphery” concept developed in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996). Here Habermas makes an explicit claim for the structure of a democratic society. I use these notions to illustrate the role of the informal public sphere in which ICTs may be seen to fill a “communicative deficit”. “It has seemed clear for some time now,” as Salter writes, “that the informal layers of political society identified by Habermas have suffered a communicative deficit that may well be filled by a medium such as the Internet.”²¹

Lifeworld-System dichotomy and colonisation

Habermas describes the “lifeworld” as “a reservoir of taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation.”²² He argues that this lifeworld struggles “against overextensions of the systemic imperatives of money and administrative power.”²³ While both lifeworld and system attempt to coordinate society, according to Habermas only the lifeworld can make a legitimate claim in social coordination. The process whereby the system penetrates forms of lifeworld through the legislation and subversion of communicative rationality is referred to as the “colonisation of the lifeworld.”²⁴ Habermas argues that while relieving the lifeworld of coordinating capacity is appropriate in certain contexts, it has a damaging effect in others. The citizen’s role in a colonised society is described as having become neutralised, as political participation is cleansed from participatory content.²⁵

Salter distinguishes the types of rationality on which Lifeworld-System dichotomy are based. While the lifeworld relies on “communicative rationality”, that responds to the “original mode of language,” the system uses “instrumental rationality” responding to “a mode of language that is ‘parasitic’ upon the original.”²⁶ A key distinction between the lifeworld and system according to Salter is the reliance of the lifeworld on communication, by which it is generated and sustained, while the system is not.

Center (/core)/ periphery dichotomy for the public sphere

The Lifeworld-System dichotomy introduced in *Communicative Action* (1987) is expanded in the center (/core)/ periphery dichotomy for the public sphere developed in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996), where it is used to highlight the role of an informal public sphere. The center (/core)/ periphery dichotomy for the public sphere involves a core consisting of a nexus of administrative, judicial and governance systems that is distinguished from the periphery in that it is able to act, and is subject to formal rules.²⁷ The public sphere is thought of by Habermas as a “social space generated in communicative action” that must be protected from systemic imperatives by separation. The periphery (or informal) public sphere must be grounded in a civil society made up of “those non-governmental and non-economic connections and voluntary associations that anchor the communication structures of the public sphere in the society component of the lifeworld.”²⁸ While the informal public sphere must be able to have an effect on the political system, decisions reached within the political system would lack legitimacy if the system were to detract from the autonomy of this informal sphere. When this happens, Habermas argues that “the political system is pulled

into the whirlpool of legitimation deficits and steering deficits that reinforce one another.”²⁹ Cleaver emphasises the importance of maintaining a clear distinction between state and civil society, and warns that collaboration with the state could result in the absorption of civil society within the state, thus putting an end to whatever autonomy it has managed to assert.³⁰

The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) recognised the potential danger of such *subsumption* when, following their initial exclusion from the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on AIDS (UNGASS) in 2001, supposedly due to objections from the South Africa Government, they were invited by the government to participate as part of a country delegation. This remained in conflict with the tenets of the meeting, whereby TAC should have been able to independently represent its role as civil society, and not be subject to the government’s political agenda.³¹ The power of global networking could be extrapolated from the fact that the TAC remained independent by securing invitations from international partner organisations. In this manner TAC opened up new spaces to challenge the government’s response to HIV and Aids.

Habermas requires that the informal public sphere has the advantage of a medium of unrestricted communication, which enables it to perceive problem situations – thus widening the discourse community itself – and allow for the articulation of collective identities and need interpretations.³² Similarly, Salter emphasises the use of the Internet as “medium of unrestricted communication”³³ in this informal (as opposed to the eighteenth century bourgeois) public sphere. He notes how NSMs are undertaking a form of lifeworld activity in modern democracies as bodies that perceive problems and draw them into a public agenda.³⁴ These are bodies that “patrol the borders between system and lifeworld, protecting the ‘grammar of ways of life,’ and also protecting civil society from encroachments by the system.”³⁵ Wasserman notes how the tenets of local struggles can be amplified to reach national or even global agendas, thus allowing them access to remote information pertaining to their particular struggle.³⁶ Geser also shows how online publication channels assist in disseminating information an association considers relevant to the public sphere. This ensures that ongoing activities and events are covered even when they evoke no attention in a wider public.³⁷ The next section of this paper will examine in more detail the parallels in structuring and organisational processes between the rise of New Social Movements and the development of Internet technologies.

“The Computer as a Communication Device”

Smith and Kollock emphasise the significance of the “Computer as a Communication Device,”³⁸ and suggest the profound impact of technology to be the way in which it alters the means with and through which people come together and communicate. Licklider emphasises the value of effective communication to facilitate more effective research, highlighting the value of collective wisdom. “Society rightly distrusts the modelling done by a single mind” he writes. “Society demands consensus, agreement, at least majority.”³⁹ Furthermore, Licklider believes that “a particular form of digital computer

organisation...can improve the effectiveness of communication among people as much as perhaps to revolutionize it."⁴⁰ The adoption of the Request for Comments (RFC) system in the development of the Internet inspired an open discussion model according to Beckett.⁴¹ In this model, common standards are created by consensus, without barriers, secrets or proprietary content. Salter notes that this system resulted in the semi-institutionalisation of co-operation, which has thus been reified into the application structure of the Internet.⁴²

NSMs generate collective identities, knowledge, and information. Eyerman and Jamison describe these new movements as "a cognitive territory, a new social space that is filled by a dynamic interaction between different groups and organisations,"⁴³ and emphasise the loose structure of the Internet – the product of a series of social encounters – as key factor providing for NSMs being processes in formation. Langman and Morris refer to the loose organisation of NSMs compared to their more traditional forerunners, and note their more participatory democratic practices and processes.⁴⁴ Wasserman also highlights the Internet's suitability for use by social movements due to its loose structuring,⁴⁵ suggesting that the medium of the Internet is suited towards a non-hierarchical structure, which thereby reduces the need for centralised communication.

Salter shows the theoretical consistency of the link between NSMs and the Internet, and suggests that there is a similar culture between the two as that shown in the development of Internet Standards based on consensus. If the lifeworld is based upon human communication, and NSMs are perceived to support such communication, a communication system that is suited to NSMs must support communicative rationality in relation to the lifeworld. Salter extends this logic to show that through strengthening the lifeworld, the Internet may be regarded as a foundational medium for civil society and the informal public sphere. It does this by enabling social movement groups and organisations to communicate, generate information, and effectively distribute such information at low costs; and allowing for response and feedback.⁴⁶

ICTs and social movements

May shows that individuals and groups are enhanced and empowered by increased use of ICTs that expand access to informational resources (and knowledge) previously hoarded by specialists and governments.⁴⁷ This can allow interaction between state and citizen to become reciprocal in such a way that interaction can be used to inform and shape the role of the state in civil society. The ease of communication furthermore prompts an increase in participation as well as civil society initiatives – distinct from governmental initiatives or those of state agencies. According to Geser, the support of unilateral and bi-directional information flows and bilateral, as well as multilateral, communications make the Internet a particularly useful tool for associations.⁴⁸ In the highly generalised technological environment created online, all possible communications can be processed and linked to each other at virtually no cost. This relative ease of communication obliterates spatial limits and temporal delays. Fukuyama emphasises the power of transnational networks, and the risk this poses for

traditional authority. He argues that such networked movements “have information, greatly abetted by modern communications technology, and thus the ability to set agendas for nation-states and transnational organisations like the World Bank, Shell Oil Corporation, or Nestle.”⁴⁹

Manuel Castells identifies various social movements that have built on these new possibilities presented by communication technologies, most notably environmentalism, feminism and organised resistance to globalisation (left wing and right wing).⁵⁰ While originally organised on the basis of resistance to global capitalist society (as discussed by Cohen and Rai), these emerging politicised communities are now attempting to build positive bases. Wasserman notes that the speed of communication on the Internet enables activists to act more quickly and co-ordinate their activities on a regional, national and international level.⁵¹ It furthermore makes it possible to circumvent regulations monitoring political organisation, as noted by Baber.⁵²

The Internet can help with the building of support networks and promotion of solidarity between local and international groups that share similar interests, facilitate communication across physical or ideological distances, as well as enable the sharing of ideas and skills with other movements or groups.⁵³ The Internet (as well as other ICTs, such as mobile phones) is thus noted to have been “a valuable tool in the activities of the new ‘superpower’ or the ‘third wave of democratisation’, namely the global social movement of citizen activists that represents a broad agenda including social development.”⁵⁴

Use of ICTs by civil society and social movements

The extent to which NSMs make use of ICT developments is evidenced by the number of websites they have produced, as well as the range and extent of their content. Salter refers to numerous forms of political, and therefore NSM, activity on the Internet,⁵⁵ including what Resnick has termed “political uses of the Net,” “politics within the Net,” and “politics which impacts upon the Net.”⁵⁶ Geser shows the Internet to be an ideal facilitative tool for founding, integrating and managing voluntary associations.⁵⁷ Organisations mediated through the Internet can be thought of as internetworked social movements (ISMs), according to Langman and Morris. These ISMs are organised through mobilising networks or coordination structures that mediate and articulate new forms of identities and strategies for participation in social action to contest current social and global conditions.⁵⁸

Norris lists the multiple functions served by the Internet for a wide range of protest movements and organisations across the globe.⁵⁹ These include e-mail lobbying of political representatives, officials, and elites; networking with related associations and organisations; mobilising organisers, activists and members; fundraising and recruitment; and disseminating messages to multiple publics. Norris notes that the global reach and real-time speed of the Internet make it particularly useful for transnational advocacy networks. This is demonstrated by diverse campaigns such as the movement against the production and sale of land mines, demonstrators critical of the World Trade Organization meeting in

Seattle, environmentalists opposing genetically modified foods, and anti-sweatshop campaigners opposed to the manufacturing conditions of Nike shoes.⁶⁰

“Privatization of public participation”

Stubbs refers to the “privatization of public participation,”⁶¹ as does Fernback, who demonstrates that the use of e-mail can be seen as politically different from many other forms of political action as one usually uses a computer alone, even if not in the ‘privacy of one's own home.’⁶² Cyberspace may thus be conceived as both public and private space. Geser takes up the notion of the “privatization of the public sphere” to show that online communication provides better conditions for combining associational participation with any environmental conditions, social roles and personal activities, as it allows individuals to participate in collective action without leaving their actual physical environment.⁶³ According to Castells, “the ‘new power’ lies in the codes of information and in the images of representation around which societies organise their institutions, and people build their lives, and decide their behaviours. The sites of this power are people’s minds’. Community in the information age is elective; we join because we wish to, because we believe.”⁶⁴

Online vs. face to face interaction

Geser emphasises the role of the Internet as a tool for facilitating, supporting and enhancing face to face interactions, by showing how it can be used to: facilitate and catalyse physical gatherings; embed face to face interactions in larger, richer and more extended communicative settings; overcome the temporal limitations of gatherings fixed in space and time; expand the social reach of movements; expand topics of discussion; facilitate open discussion by anonymising contributions; and enhance group effectiveness by facilitating the articulation and aggregation of opinions and effectiveness.⁶⁵ Calhoun notes that although processes of social movement formation may be enhanced by electronic communication, the Internet is far more significant as a supplement to face to face community organisation and movement activity rather than a substitute for it.⁶⁶ May agrees with this sentiment. Although new ICTs may enhance already existing networks, this should be distinguished from stimulating the development of new types of community, which still requires direct interaction.⁶⁷

While Wasserman notes the potential of the Internet to augment existing communication methods and thereby assist activists to mobilise participation, he does not believe that the Internet signifies a radical break with the old ways in which society was ordered.⁶⁸ Drawing on work of Agre⁶⁹ and Brants,⁷⁰ Wasserman agrees with the theory of amplification, whereby it is argued that the Internet may enlarge and accelerate processes already in place in societies and organisations, but does not create entirely new forces.⁷¹ Thus, the Internet can be regarded as embedded in larger networks of societal processes, and may serve to amplify existing social forces when appropriated for use by participants in the communication process, rather than acting as a revolutionising force.⁷²

In his assessment of the use of the Internet by the South African Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), Wasserman notes that while the TAC uses traditional media to promote its cause, it also uses a website and email to communicate with supporters and establish links with solidarity networks.⁷³ According to Geffen, traditional means, like the use of pamphlets, word of mouth, phone calls and house-to-house visits are used to mobilise supporters for protest action.⁷⁴

TAC's mass mobilisation and advocacy programmes are spearheaded by the Campaigns and Organising Programme (COP), which is responsible for leading TAC campaigns locally, provincially and nationally; and for setting up and servicing branches. TAC has grown especially fast at the branch level, with a current (2007) 237 branches working in 32 out of the 56 health districts. The local emphasis is highlighted in the TAC Annual Report 2007, which states that:

To ensure that the voices of our communities inform TAC actions at all times, the COP has worked hard to develop a skilled and dedicated membership base across the country. Community members are the local eyes and ears of TAC and ensure that TAC's activities and strategies are relevant to communities. Local advocacy and activism give momentum and legitimacy to national campaigns.⁷⁵

The simultaneous global focus is carried out through the TAC's international programme, which was formally conceived of in January 2002. The programme aims to build global alliances with individuals and organisations, who share experience and are willing to engage in joint actions to increase access to antiretroviral therapy, to hold international multilateral institutions accountable, and to create a more conducive international environment. In 2006-7, TAC intensified its International Solidarity work by facilitating conferences where advocacy groups could share experiences and receive support and training. They also engaged with other organisations around issues of intellectual property rights, new drug registration, price reductions, and monitoring access to treatment internationally.⁷⁶ Important to note here is that this international focus has been facilitated through use of Internet technologies. Such elective use of new media technologies by social movements in South Africa to serve particular purposes, I think serves to re-iterate Salter's argument that "social movements shape the Internet to suit the form of communication appropriate to their interests."⁷⁷

Online mobilisation across the digital divide

Echoing Falk's conceptualisation of "globalization from below,"⁷⁸ Geser notes that ICTs provide new tools for bottom-up communication and grassroots campaigning. For Geser the emphasis is on the expanded scope for NSMs to reach more heterogeneous publics, diversified support bases and broadened definitions of issues.⁷⁹ Geser also discusses the shift from territorial segmentation to functional specialisation facilitated by ICTs, as well as increased capacity to organise widely dispersed and irregularly moving members. Wasserman warns that problems of connectivity should prevent overly optimistic analysis when assessing the potential ICTs hold for African social movements.⁸⁰

When referring to 'connectivity' and 'access,' Wasserman takes care to specify the requirement of "real access."⁸¹ This includes access to the necessary skills and technological literacy in addition to physical connectivity.

TAC's use of more traditional forms of communication to appeal to their mass membership (as opposed to the use of the Internet to gain support amongst a small connected elite), is the example used by Wasserman⁸² to illustrate amplification theory,⁸³ according to which the Internet amplifies existing structures and forces. The Internet is shown to have amplified the TAC's support network to include members of the connected classes who would not otherwise be reached through more traditional mobilisation campaigns. An example of partner organisations reached through TAC's global network is Friends of the Treatment Action Campaign (FOTAC),⁸⁴ a United Kingdom-based charity that campaigns for the rights of people with HIV and AIDS, and fundraises for both treatment and treatment programmes. FOTAC supports and works with the TAC. They raise awareness in the UK about the HIV and AIDS crisis in southern Africa, and attempt to work with as many sectors as possible: schools, colleges, businesses, unions, NGOs, other HIV and AIDS organisations and networks, as well the media.

Wasserman argues that the Internet's viability in a civil society organisation such as the TAC, is the fact that its appeal reaches to members of society who can afford Internet connections.⁸⁵ In contrast, Struwig and Conradie note that in a survey done on Internet use among various South African institutions and organisations in the political sphere, including NGOs, a range of problems were raised regarding affordability and skills.⁸⁶ Other barriers to ICT use in Africa include strict regulations and taxes,⁸⁷ as well as a range of socio-cultural, economic and infrastructural hindrances.⁸⁸

Wasserman thus demonstrates that, although it may seem as though ICTs are used pervasively in the activities of TAC, their effectivity is mainly limited to harnessing support from a connected middle class, while traditional media are used for activities aimed at the grassroots. "If TAC, with its large component of elite support is so limited in its use of especially the Internet, it will probably be more so in the case of organizations with a smaller measure of support among the elite. This might also be true in other African countries."⁸⁹

In contrast with Wasserman's skepticism about Internet use in grassroots organizations, Kathy Becker of The Bullitt Foundation believes that "The most grassroots, lowest-funded, rural groups are the ones embracing this technology the fastest."⁹⁰ In a similar vein, Geser believes the Internet community to maintain a very broad interface to the "non-internetted" environment – those without access to PC's, modems and telephone lines. Geser notes that some of the most successful examples of political Internet use concern populations on the margins of society.⁹¹

Examples of collaborative approaches cited by Geser include opposition groups in Burma communicating their messages orally to people in Thailand border

villages, who then feed the messages into the Internet.⁹² Geser also mentions the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in Chiapas (Southern Mexico). While the Zapatista communities themselves are Indigenous, poor, and often cut-off not only from computer communications but also from the necessary electricity and telephone systems, they have had a mediated relationship to the Internet through volunteering intermediaries from various Western countries. This has involved hand-written reports passed on to reporters for typing or scanning into digital format for online publication.⁹³ Examples such as these lead Geser to the conclusion that “the Internet may well have an extensive impact on the whole mankind, because even highly marginal population segments profit at least indirectly from it: by having relationships to sympathetic users.”⁹⁴

It is interesting to note the difference in emphasis between Wasserman and Geser’s accounts of the TAC and Zapatista movements, both of which have used Internet technologies very specifically to interact with a larger, more affluent, global public; while both still rely on more traditional means of communication for their grassroots membership. Although describing very similar phenomena, while both recognise (as Salter does) the way the new medium is used selectively by grassroots (and other) organisations in specific local contexts to further their needs as appropriate, Wasserman uses his example to point to limitations of the net. On the other hand, Geser sees in the Internet the potential to enhance inclusivity across socio-economic divides.

Conclusion

This essay has examined the way in which the development of ICTs has facilitated the rise of new social movements (or NSMs as distinguished from their forerunners) by the global reach of online activism. The Internet as medium of communication ideally suited to these new movements was emphasised through drawing on Habermas’s theories of the informal public sphere and the lifeworld. I note how the loose structure of the Internet resonates with the multiple projects of the new social movements, who may be dispersed across the globe, yet in many cases united by a set of common ideas and visions. It was also shown that NSMs use the Internet selectively for canvassing and communication across global networks, while still relying on more traditional forms of media to interact with local membership. Where it is used, technologies can be seen in many ways to have *privatised the public sphere*, by allowing for online engagement and activism without leaving the privacy of one’s own home.

While unequal access to technologies do limit the way in which they can be used for grassroots mobilisation, the flexibility with which they can be used in conjunction with face to face interaction, as well as print and other media, was highlighted. The key benefit of Internet communication is in enabling NSMs to reach a far broader, global, audience and attract support from more affluent groups and individuals than those traditionally targeted by their activities. Their evolved lifeworld function to bring to light the plight of the periphery public sphere is thus enhanced by evolved global communication systems. The use of ICTs to expand an organisation’s international network, in conjunction with an active on-the-ground mobilisation strategy using more traditional means of

campaigning, is illustrated in this essay by drawing on the example of the South African-based Treatment Action Campaign. The TAC uses its international associations to strengthen its support base globally. This has allowed it to function independently from the South African government, and has also enabled the organisation to represent civil society in a public sphere that is independent of government or corporate control.

Notes

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² L. Salter, "Democracy, New Social Movements, and the Internet: A Habermasian Analysis," in M. McCaughey and M. D. Ayers, *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice* (Routledge. New York & London, 2003), p. 121.

³ Salter, "Democracy, New Social Movements, and the Internet," p. 117.

⁴ R. Cohen and S. Rai, (eds.), *Global Social Movements* (Athlone Press: London, 2000).

⁵ M. Edelman, "Social Movements: Changing Paradigms and Forms of Politics," in *Annual Review of Anthropology* (30) 2001: 285-317.

⁶ "Joseph Licklider, former head of the Information Processing Techniques Office and the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) was the first to refer to "The Computer as a Communication Device" (1968). See J. C. R. Licklider and R. W. Taylor "The Computer as a Communication Device." Reprinted from *Science and Technology*, April 1968.

⁷ See Edelman, "Social Movements" p. 294

⁸ A. Escobar, "Notes on Networks and Anti-Globalization Social Movements," Paper presented at the Annual American Anthropological Association Meeting, University of North Carolina, November 2000, L. Langman and D. Morris, "Internet Mediation: A Theory of Alternative Globalization Movements," in M. Gurstein and S. Finquelievich, (eds.), *Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Community Informatics* (Montreal, Canada, October 8, 2002). Accessed online. See <http://www.csudh.edu/dearhabermas/langmanbk01.htm>. Last accessed on 9 July 2008.

⁹ See Langman and Morris, "Internet Mediation," (2002).

¹⁰ R. Falk, "The Making of Global Citizenship", in J. Brecher, J. Brown Childs, and J. Cutler (eds.), *Global Visions: Beyond the New World Order* (Black Rose Press: Montreal, 1993), as cited in Edelman, 2001.

¹¹ Edelman, "Social Movements," p. 304

¹² Salter, "Democracy, New Social Movements, and the Internet", p. 121.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ H. Palczewski, "Cyber-Movements, New Social Movements, and Counter-Publics," in D. Brouwer and R. Asen, (eds.), *Counterpublics and the State* (SUNY Press: New York, 2001), p. 1.

¹⁵ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 1989), p. 230-1.

¹⁶ R. Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1989).

¹⁷ N. Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in C. Calhoun, (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1992), pp. 109-142.

¹⁸ H. Palczewski, "Cyber-movements, New Social Movements, and Counter-publics," in D. Brouwer and R. Asen, (eds.), *Counterpublics and the State* (SUNY Press: New York, 2001), p. 1.

¹⁹ See Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1992).

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