

## International NGO's and Democratic Accountability

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### I. The Emergence of NGO's Across the Globe

A new institutional life form is spreading rapidly across the globe. Various called NGO's (non-governmental organizations) or CSO's (civil society organizations), this life form has increased its employment by 23% from 1990 to 1995, and now accounts for over \$1 trillion in expenditures. (Salamon, 1998). While the organizations within this new life form are astonishingly diverse with respect to purposes, functions, activities, and financing, the individual species have some common characteristics that allow one to talk as though they were a distinctive phylum in organizational zoology.

One common characteristic of such organizations is that they are typically committed to the pursuit of *public* purposes. They seek to end genocide, empower women, and vindicate human rights. They seek to end starvation, immunize children against killing diseases, and reduce poverty in the world's poorest countries. They seek to protect the world's natural resources from overuse, and preserve the biosphere for use by future generations. They seek these aims both domestically within their countries of origin, and internationally, seeking endorsement from the world political community and the network of international institutions that provide its institutional underpinnings. And they do so by relying on voluntary rather than coerced action, and through a combination of political advocacy on one hand, and direct service provision on the other.

Now, much turns on the idea that these organizations pursue "public" rather than "private" interests, and that they do so through "voluntary action." This claim gives these organizations a moral claim that sets them apart from the greed and self-interest of for profit enterprises on one hand, and the ambition and corruption of politics and government on the other. Indeed, this claim is arguably at the heart of their distinctive competence and competitive advantage that has allowed them to grow so large in today's world. They offer the "efficiency" of the private sector and the attractive "social causes" of the public.

Yet, it is by no means clear what it means when we say that their goals are "public." One meaning is that the goals they seek are *transcendently valuable* -- that they define universal moral imperatives. Many goals sought by these organizations do seem to have this character. They are moral imperatives not only within a given country, but also across the world. Who could stand against the importance of feeding the hungry, immunizing children, and preventing torture and genocide as moral causes?

Unfortunately, the answer to this question is that there are many nations within the international community who do not accept the moral urgency of these causes, or who lack the resources to accomplish them, or some combination of the two. They justify their sins of omission and commission in terms of conflicting priorities, or "other considerations" and allow terrible conditions to continue. For their part, the wealthier nations that could provide some of the political pressure and material resources that could transform the conditions stand aside claiming that it is none of their business in the *realpolitik* world of international relations, or that it would be morally wrong for one group of nations to impose their ideas of morality on others, or that efforts made to bring influence to bear or to provide relief would be ineffective in changing the conditions.

So, a second -- more restrictive -- meaning of the phrase public purpose is that the purpose is not just morally transcendent; it has also *descended into the world and been embraced as a valuable cause by some kind of real political community*. BRAC's commitment to the empowerment of women in the context of the social, economic and political development of communities in Bangladesh is not just an abstract moral commitment; there is an army of individuals prepared both to march on behalf of the cause, and to work to realize it in thousands of tiny villages. The commitment of human rights activists to ending torture and genocide is not just their moral crusade; it lives in the world in the Geneva Convention, and the judgments of the World Court that find leaders of sovereign nations guilty of genocidal policies.

Of course, there is an important difference between having these goals be embraced by political communities living within the boundaries of a sovereign state on one hand, and having these goals be embraced by larger and more diffuse political communities scattered across the international landscape. Political communities of the first type, if strong enough, can actually claim the authority of national governments for their purposes. Political communities of the second type, however, can only claim the limited influence that can be mustered by the creation of international norms and international regimes supported by relatively weak international institutions.

Thus, a third meaning of the phrase public purpose is that the purpose has *actually been adopted* by some governmental institution with significant authority and purpose as its cause -- an aim that it plans to use its authority and resources to try to achieve. Again, one can imagine that some of the purposes embraced by NGO's throughout the world could acquire this status with respect to national governments. Domestic NGO's could achieve this result by effectively lobbying their own national governments through their own internal political processes. Or, they could achieve this result by making alliances with international NGO's to bring pressure to bear on their own governments. Or, they could use their own resources or the networks of international NGO's to bring pressure on the few international institutions that could bring effective moral, political, or legal power to bear on their own countries. Any of these paths could result in one country embracing a purpose desired by a local NGO. We could say, then, that the purpose of the local NGO had become a public purpose of their country.

Similarly, we might say that a cause championed by an NGO -- whether domestic or international -- had become an international public purpose if that purpose was embraced by some kind of international institution that has effective moral, political, or legal influence over sovereign nations. Again, that effect could be achieved either by direct lobbying of these international institutions by domestic NGO's, or by international networks of domestic NGO's, or by explicitly international NGO's.

These observations suggest that there are many purposes that claim to be public purposes in some morally transcendent sense might easily fail to become public purposes in a more concrete political or governmental sense. This could occur if the purposes that animate NGO's fail to rally international public opinion adequately, or if these purposes fail to make powerful moral, political, or legal claims on the governments who now represent the world community and its capacity to act collectively. Given the sharp divisions among the countries that now make up the world community, and the weakness of the varied institutional mechanisms that exist for allowing them to act like a political community and embrace collective goals as morally, legally, and politically binding, a high hurdle must be leaped if these goals are to become formally embraced public purposes.

The claim that NGO's pursue public purposes is one defining characteristic of these organizations. The second -- alluded to briefly above -- is that they pursue these goals through voluntary, charitable action. The charity starts with the motivations of those who create, lead, or participate in the activities of these organizations. Their motivations are claimed to be different than those who create private enterprises, or who run for office. The leaders who created the organizations do not necessarily think they own the organizations, and in any case are prohibited from selling them for a profit. Those who manage the organizations may be paid a professional wage, but it will often be much less than those who manage similarly large and complex organizations in either the private sector or in government. Those who contribute their time and money to the organization, and in some sense, finance the organization and become equity holders, do not think that they will necessarily be repaid in financial terms. Their motivations for creating, sustaining, and enlarging the organizations is not to claim any financial equity the

organization might secure; it is, instead, their satisfaction in the success of their cause in either securing the commitment of governmental entities to their goals (in the "advocacy" mode), or helping governments achieve these goals (in the "partnership/service delivery" mode), or in directly producing the conditions they seek to alter (in the "self-help" mode). Indeed, in many countries, those who create, lead, and participate in the activities of NGO's are prohibited from distributing either the financial returns the organization earns, or the financial equity it builds up to themselves. If these enterprises ever stop serving the cause, or are sold to a private enterprise, the financial assets of the enterprise must be turned over to some new public foundation. In short, these organizations are animated by purposes other than building wealth through equity, and the returns they expect are not financial ones.

Charity also shows up in the financial balance sheets of these organizations. Included among the resources that such organizations use to sustain their operations (in addition to sales of products and services to customers, and sales of their services to governments through contracts) are some explicitly charitable contributions. Some of these financial contributions come as gifts from foundations, others from large individual donors, others from small, individual donors, still others from private corporations, and some as grants from government. But much of the charity that infuses these organizations comes in the form of time and effort, not money. This doesn't show up in the balance sheets. It does show up "on the shop floor" where the work gets done. It shows up not only in the volunteers who show up regularly on the staffs of the organizations, but also in the lowered wages that paid employees accept, and in the citizens who show up to demonstrate their commitment to causes.

A third important characteristic of these organizations is that while their purposes often entangle them closely with government, the organizations strive to retain some degree of independence from government. They may benefit from government recognition and protection. They may also benefit from government grants and contracts. But they strive to be independent of government in the sense that they retain their own autonomous capacity to decide what they think is publicly valuable, to criticize the government when it fails to do what they think is publicly valuable, to mobilize citizens outside of government and traditional party channels, and so on.

Now, these characteristics are offered as an ideal type. There may be many NGO's and CSO's who present themselves as organizations that have the qualities enumerated above, but on close examination, turn out not to have them; in effect, they are be frauds. This is the concern of international donors who want to be able to invest in organizations of the type described above, but may find it difficult to distinguish organizations that really have these characteristics from those that do not. It is also the concern of governments, both domestic and international, who also want to find valuable partners. And it is the concern of both government and business when they find themselves as the targets of such organizations. They worry that their carefully developed, responsible plans have suddenly become hostage to an organization that presents itself as the representative of world public opinion, but might instead be nothing more than "three kooks with a fax machine."

Whatever the reality of these emerging organizations, there are many who see the importance and value of their emergence not simply in terms of their productive activities, but also in terms of what they can do to enhance "democratic accountability" across the globe -- within particular nation-states, and also perhaps of nation states to some emergent international political community. The purpose of this short paper is to develop an analytic framework that might be helpful in guiding thought and empirical investigation about the extent to which the hopes for enhanced democratic accountability might actually be realized through the activities of the emergent NGO's.

It is worth noting at the start, I think, that much of the hope for these organizations and their impact on democratic accountability comes from the extension of US ideas about how NGO's and NSO's (more commonly called voluntary associations and nonprofit organizations) have enhanced democratic accountability in the US. Looking out from America towards the rest of the world, we can imagine, perhaps, that organizations like our voluntary associations and nonprofit enterprises can enhance democratic accountability by acting as a channel for the expression of individually held social aspirations, by creating a kind of social capital that can solve social problems directly without the aid of government, or that can sustain a kind of politics that can be effective in making government meet citizens' needs. The

difficulty, however, is that this vision of the relationship between civil society on one hand, and democratic accountability and the performance of government on the other founded in the political traditions and institutions of the United States has to make some pretty big leaps as it crosses from the United States to democratic accountability within other countries, and to democratic accountability of the international political community. These are might boundaries to be crossed, and it is by no means clear that this fragile new life from can make the leap to these much different environments.

I begin by discussing the concepts of "accountability" and "democratic accountability" more particularly. Although I am not much in favor of "de-constructing" concepts, I think a certain amount of self-consciousness in the use of these ideas will help add clarity and precision to the discussion. I then turn to a consideration of some of the hypothesized mechanisms by which NGO's and CSO's could enhance democratic accountability. This is in the interest of developing some kind of research program that might inform us of the extent to which, or the conditions under which, the NGO's and CSO's might reliably advance our hopes for democratic accountability.

## II. Democratic Accountability

Nearly everyone is in favor of increased accountability. Yet, it is a bit hard to say what we mean by accountability, and why we think it is a good thing. (Moore, \_\_\_\_)

### A. Accountability

While we are a bit careless about the concept, it is probably best to think of "accountability" as a relationship. We can say that someone is more or less accountable without adding anything more to the phrase and have it be a comprehensible statement. But a great deal of clarity and precision is added when we say that *one actor is accountable to another for some particular things*. To say that I am accountable is to say that there is someone who can hold me to account for an alleged failure to do what I was supposed to do. *Holding me to account* means demanding that I live up to commitments at the risk of humiliation and other penalties if I fail to do so. So, accountability lies in: 1) the fact that an actor has commitments to another actor; 2) in the substantive character of those commitments; and 3) and in the means that the actors have to ensure that each does what they are committed to do.

Often when we think about accountability relationships, we imagine the kind of relationship that economists have described as principal/agent relationships. In such relationships, one actor -- the principal -- is assumed to have the moral right to have his purpose realized through the work of another actor -- the agent. The challenge in principal/agent theory is to find means by which the principal can reliably hold the agent to account, and thereby ensure that the principal's purposes are achieved.

In principle, however, we can and do have accountability relationships that are more "mutual" than the implicitly hierarchical assumption of the principal/agent relationship. Most contracts, for example, are mutually agreed upon deals that allow each party to make claims on the other: I agree to deliver a load of cantaloupes in exchange for a payment made by the other party. If I fail to deliver the cantaloupes in good condition I can be sued. If the other party refuses to pay, he can be sued. In these cases, there is no person whose aims are considered morally superior; there are simply claims on one another that have been agreed upon. Still, these claims can be enforced with the aid of an outside power.

We think that accountability is good, and increased accountability even better, primarily because we imagine that accountability is a means to an important end. In this view, increased accountability is good because it increases the likelihood that actors will perform well; that they will do what they are supposed to do, and will do so with some degree of efficiency and effectiveness. (It is worth noting, however, that this effect works only if the structure of accountability holds them to account not only for compliance, but also for efficiency and effectiveness). With a structure of accountability, and process that can hold actors to account, actors will have incentives to live up to their commitments. Knowing that they are in such a relationship, will cause them to do so voluntarily rather than be coerced, since failures to perform will be punished.

To some degree, however, we also think that being accountable and living up to one's obligations is good in itself and not merely as a means. The reliable fulfillment of duties under a contract can be a satisfying human relationship independently of its effect on performance. It stands as an instance of justness and fairness realized which can be satisfactory to both parties. It can leave behind a residue of trust, loyalty -- even affection -- which are satisfying to "consume" (enjoy) as well as a productive asset for future work.

#### B. Democratic Accountability

Adding the adjective "democratic" to the word "accountability" invokes a concrete image of the actors whose relationship we are describing. We imagine, in the first instance, that we are describing the relationship between a "government" on one hand, and its "people" on the other. Indeed, the whole radical idea of a democratic government is precisely an idea about accountability: that those who exercise the powers of government -- the powers to tax, to regulate, to enforce laws, etc. -- should be accountable to the people on whose collective behalf these powers are wielded. That relationship is built around many rules, institutions, and processes that allow citizens to call their government to account: rules that allow citizens to speak, to associate, to shape the institutions by which they will be governed, to elect their representatives, to petition the government, to participate in policy deliberations undertaken by government, and to claim relief from arbitrary government actions that injure their interests. We think that such a relationship between a citizenry and a government is valuable partly because it increases the likelihood that the government will do what citizens -- assembled in various sized political communities and groups ranging from a national political community, through interest groups, to grass roots organizations, to individuals interacting with government -- want it to do; and partly because it will do these things with greater integrity, focus, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Note that this is largely a procedural rather than a substantive idea. That should not be surprising since accountability is primarily a procedural idea. Yet, to some, the idea of "democratic accountability" evokes some substantive as well as procedural ideas. Or, put somewhat differently, there are some purposes that societies and governments could have that are consistent with the ideal of "democratic accountability."

These purposes could begin with the goal of protecting "human rights." The difficulty with the general idea of "human rights," however, is that human rights include many things that are procedural rights, and many things that are substantive rights. For example, among the most important human rights arguably are those that recognize the freedom and autonomy of individuals, and their right to influence the governments to whose authority they are subject. This includes the idea that individuals ought to have the right to protest against their governments, and should be free from political repression and torture. These are what we think of as political rights. And one could in some sense say that the pursuit of democratic accountability demands that such rights be enacted, realized and defended in all countries and in the world community. (This, of course, acts as though democratic regimes were the best ones for all peoples in the world.)

Alternatively, the concept of human rights includes ideas about what material conditions are consistent with living a dignified and independent life. This could include the idea that children are entitled to basic immunization and health care; to be free from abuse and neglect at the hands of their parents and caretakers; and to receive some degree of education that will allow them to participate effectively in the social, economic and political life of their countries. It could also include the idea that individuals should be free from hunger and famine, that they should have the opportunity to earn their livelihood without having to endure hazardous and exploitative working conditions, etc. Such conditions could be seen as conditions necessary for individuals to be able to claim the important procedural rights associated with human dignity and empowerment. Or, they can be seen simply as part of the list of substantive rights that go along with being a human being in society. The difficulty with such rights, however, is that they cannot be secured simply by agreeing to them as a feature of proper relationships among individuals in the society. They specify material conditions that must be produced, not just agreements that can be made. And societies may or may not have the material conditions or the will to produce both the level and distribution of material welfare that these substantive rights imply.

Somewhere between the procedural rights and the substantive rights are the rights to be secure in one's person and property. Some of these are the procedural rights granted to individuals to allow them to defend themselves against state action. But some argue that the ideal of "democratic accountability" would demand protection of individuals from one another by the state as well as protection of individuals from the state by the creation of an independent judiciary. For example, one could argue that "democratic accountability" would demand that the state defend individuals from genocidal acts carried out by private actors or subordinate levels of government as well as by the state. One could also argue that a properly accountable democratic state would provide protection from crimes committed against citizens by other citizens, and would provide the means for the adjudication of civil disputes of one kind or another. I say these lie between the pure procedural rights on one hand and the substantive rights on the other for this reason: on one hand, these rights arise from an understanding of a proper relationship among citizens and between citizens and the state and, in this sense, are like procedural rights; on the other hand, the state must raise and spend money to help enforce the rules and thereby produce the experience of security, and in this respect, these rights seem like substantive rights.

In any case, the crucial question is whether we can say that "democratic accountability" has been produced when a certain relationship has been created between citizens and the state, or when certain material conditions have been created. This question is closely related to the distinction made above between "transcendental purposes" and purposes that are embodied more concretely in political aspirations, or in concrete policies. It may be that if states realized true democratic procedural rights in their activities, it would naturally follow that a certain set of substantive rights would be embraced. (Indeed, that is the position that Rawls invites us to consider.) But without having run the experiment, we cannot know for sure what the real relationship would be between ideal procedural democratic rights and the substantive rights that would be engaged by the polity that enjoyed the ideal procedural rights. Instead, all that we can observe is an imperfect set of procedural rights, from which emerge visions of more ideal procedural rights, and claims as to the substantive rights that would be necessary to realize the procedural rights, or the substantive rights that would be endorsed by a polity that enjoyed the ideal procedural rights.

What many NGO's are now doing is using the more or less limited procedural rights they enjoy to try to enhance both procedural and substantive rights in pursuit of increasing democratic accountability. The paths that are open to them, and the way in which we might evaluate their progress, are set out briefly below.

### III. NGO's and Enhanced Democratic Accountability

In discussing the role of NGO's in enhancing democratic accountability throughout the world, it is hard not to adopt a Western and Northern -- or even more narrowly -- an American perspective. After all, the idea that a civil society is important to the quality of democratic societies is most strongly associated with American rather than Continental democracy. It is also necessary to adopt a particular perspective to make sense of words like "domestic" and "foreign," "national" and "international," and "indigenous" and "alien." The reason is that what is foreign and what domestic, what indigenous and what alien, and what national and what international depends on one's current position. So, in talking about the role of NGO's in enhancing democratic accountability I want to confess to an American perspective -- one that thinks that democracy is good, that democratic accountability is a key part of what makes democracy good, that the voluntary associations that constitute much of civil society (including, perhaps, political parties) are part of the important mechanisms that link citizens to their government and thereby help create and sustain democratic accountability, and that a world composed of high performing democratic countries would be a world that was good for the citizens of the world, and for the peace and safety of our own democracy. From this (admittedly limited) perspective, I can see several different ways -- I will describe them as cases -- in which NGO's could be enhancing democratic accountability throughout the world.

The first case is where indigenous NGO's help to strengthen democratic accountability in their own countries. The picture I have heard is where doughty social and political entrepreneurs, seized with a vision of the procedural and substantive purposes judged to be consistent with the advancement of democratic values and accountability, seize the small "spaces" granted to them by flagging authoritarian regimes, and develop themselves into powerful associations that can: 1) engage or tap into the suppressed

energy and passions of the downtrodden; 2) link the newly empowered individuals together in associations and networks; 3) use these networks to advance either political or substantive causes through some combination of self-help, advocacy, or partnerships with government and business. Such enterprises could be said to be advancing democratic accountability insofar as they were reliably connected to the concerns of citizens, able to engage them in collective action, successful in holding open the spaces in which they were operating, and able to make effective demands on their national government.

The second case is where indigenous NGO's reach outside the boundaries of their own countries to gain leverage over their own national governments. The reach outside could be for money; it could be for organizational support and assistance from a network of other indigenous organizations; or it could be for the aid of some existing international institution. They could be reaching outside because they simply did not have enough leverage and power inside their own countries; or because they think their leverage could be significantly enhanced by reaching outside their own national boundaries.

Whether this action represents an increase in "democratic accountability" is a bit more problematic. What makes it problematic is that the political mobilization happens outside the country in which the indigenous organization lives and works. One can say this is in aid of "democratic accountability" if the goals being pursued are the procedural rights associated with the ideal of democratic accountability, and if the repression within the country is sufficiently strong that it is reasonable to suppose that there is no democratic accountability worth acknowledging in the country. This is probably the strongest case for increased democratic accountability in this case. One can also say that it is in aid of democratic accountability if the goals are the substantive goals of democratic accountability. But this claim is a bit weaker than the first claim since it is not at all clear that the citizens of the country would choose these goals if they had full procedural rights. One could also say this is in aid of democratic accountability if one imagines the existence of a world political community to which sovereign nations owed some degree of accountability, including being accountable for the development of the procedural and substantive rights associated with the ideal of democratic accountability. But this is a huge step both philosophically and practically. It is not at all clear that the world is ready to embrace the idea of a world political community; nor that if it did, it would choose to be a world democracy; nor that our current view of the procedural and substantive rights associated with the ideal of democratic accountability would be the particular view of democracy that would emerge. So, some could claim that the efforts of indigenous groups to reach beyond the boundaries of their politics to demand "democratic accountability" from their own (repressive) governments is in aid of democratic accountability. But that claim is strongest when the claim comes from an indigenous group in a repressive country that is demanding procedural rather than substantive rights.

The third case is one in which indigenous NGO's from several different countries band together in an international association to make powerful claims on an international institution such as the UN, or the World Court, or the World Bank, to get them to use their leverage in forcing procedural and substantive changes in their several countries. What makes this case different from the second case is that the indigenous NGO's have separated themselves more completely from the politics of their own country, and joined more closely the rudimentary forms of world politics that are developing around international institutions with their limited and fragile authority over the actions of sovereign nations. Instead of working in domestic space within their own countries to mobilize internal political machinery to produce local changes, they work in international space to develop a coalition that can make claims on an international institution. Again, insofar as one can conceive of an international political community, that is represented by a network of international NGO's that can properly hold an international institution politically accountable, one can imagine that this third case is an example of increased democratic accountability. Yet, there are two problematic aspects of this idea as a growth in democratic accountability.

The first problematic aspect is that it is by no means clear that a network of indigenous NGO's (combined and supported, perhaps, by NGO's from developing nations) adequately represents the world political community. Without other forms of world politics, it is hard to know whether the "interest groups" that petition the world organizations are reliably representative of the concerns of the world's citizens. They might well be idiosyncratic views of indigenous countries. Or, even worse, they might be the stalking horses of views held by idiosyncratic groups in developed countries. The second problematic aspect, is that it is not at all clear that world institutions are accountable to a world political community. They may be

accountable to the collection of sovereign states rather than to world citizens, or to ad hoc collections of interests expressed around the world. If, then, indigenous NGO's find leverage outside their own country and misrepresent the aspirations of the citizens of their own countries, and if they succeed in wresting the control of international organizations from their proper constituencies, then one could say that democratic accountability had been reduced rather than enhanced.

One can escape this conclusion by once again claiming either that the procedural and substantive goals being sought are important to democratic accountability even though local governments do not support them, or that there ought to be a world political community to which local governments owed accountability, but these are less widely supported views than the idea that NGO's can enhance democratic accountability by advancing procedural rights within their own countries. One could even argue that insofar as these groups and their activities help to create a world political community, of course, they may be helping to create the future conditions for a kind of democratic accountability that crosses the boundaries of sovereign states. But that goal still seems many decades or generations off. Even with the help of mass media including TV and the Internet, the creation of a real world community that can be thought of as the people to whom sovereign states need to be accountable still seems an abstract ideal (or nightmare, depending on one's views of the rules that might be insisted upon by such a world community).

The fourth case is one in which international NGO's seek to advance purposes through international organizations. In many ways, this case is similar to the problems of the third case, but the problems are potentially even greater. In the case where one was looking at a network of indigenous NGO's, one had some sense of whom they represented, and some confidence that there were at least some troops who marched under their banner and agreed with their aims. In the case of an "international NGO," it is much less clear who such groups represent. They can represent the interests of the donors who support their causes. Their causes may be for the procedural and substantive goals that are thought to be consistent with democratic accountability. But precisely because no well developed world political system exists to stand alongside a world governmental system that decides how it will use its collectively owned authority to advance certain causes, it is hard to know whom the international NGO's represent, and therefore what claims they might reasonably make on the institutions of world government.

The fifth case is one in which international institutions with collectively owned assets, with effective influence over sovereign states, and broad procedural and substantive responsibilities to defend human rights, promote health, encourage economic development, etc., who are looking for effective partners in the NGO community, decide that they must push back against the claims of indigenous and international NGO's and ask the embarrassing question about whom these organizations represent. In short, as these institutions gain assets and power, and as the political space of the world community begins to be inhabited not only by sovereign states but also by these NGO's operating outside and above national boundaries, the international organizations have to develop their own ideas about whose advice they should take from among the competing organizations. That means developing a theory of politics that defines whom they are accountable to, and what characteristics of organizations that want to exercise influence over them entitles them to do so.

Arguably this development is in the direction of increased democratic accountability for at least three reasons. First, it focuses attention on the important question of to whom the various international institutions are properly accountable. If the old answer (that they are accountable to the sovereign nations who created them by multilateral agreements, and continue to support them for some combination of purposes) is breaking down under pressure from both indigenous and international NGO's, it is important to come up with a new answer if these powerful institutions are to remain accountable to anyone other than themselves and their own ideas of what would be valuable to do. Second, precisely because there is now a collective asset owned (to some degree, at least) multi-laterally or internationally, and because some organizations have emerged to try to lay claim to or influence the uses of those assets, there is beginning to be a functional world politics. Something is at stake across the boundaries of sovereign states, and some groups are emerging that are trying to get their hands on this. This helps to create a world political community. Third, the discussion that emerges is the kind of discussion that is always at the core of the ideal of democratic accountability: namely, what is it that we own, what is that we owe to one another, what would we like to achieve together, and how might the instrumentalities of the state be enlisted in



efforts to protect what we own, secure what we owe to one another, and help us realize our collective ambitions. The most important and enduring contribution of the emergence of NGO's in the world politics may be precisely that they focus our attention on these questions not only in our own countries, but across the world.