

# **Global activism and changing identities: Examples from the Grand Council of the Crees, the Saami Council, and Médecins Sans Frontières Canada**

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## ***Introduction***

Research on global activism has become an important part of globalization studies. Spectacular demonstrations take place at the door of global organizations' meetings and summits, but less spectacular activities are also conducted by some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on a more frequent basis and with more traceable impacts. NGOs' global activities and their participation in a growing global civil society constitute some of the forces directing globalization.

In this paper, I present some of the results from my Ph.D. research. I focus on my observations and findings about the global activism of the three organizations I have studied, and on the evolution of the identity of these organizations.

Tracking the global activism of three organizations over fifteen years is a way to see if global activism has changed over time because of globalizing processes and if other factors have had an influence on the organization and its global actions during that period. It can also lead to the detection of new forms of global activism that might have appeared recently because of globalization or other factors.

Studying the global activism of an organization also tells us about the organization itself and about its identity. I address the hypothesis that as the global activism of an organization changes, its identity changes too. The definition of global activism that I prefer to use reflects this connection. I define global activism as the expression of a collective identity through actions directed at a global public. A global public is a public (a concept a little more inclusive than an "audience") comprising persons living in more than one state and including not only governmental officials, but also other non governmental actors. A global public is formed of people who have the potential to be touched by global activism, because they are attentive to world politics or to issues with a global dimension or because they are simply touched by the demands of an individual or a group from the same country or another one. They can be specialists on an issue or come from the general population (see Warner 2002 for a longer discussion on publics).

The first organization I have chosen to study is the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee). It was founded in 1974 and represents the nine Cree communities living near the James Bay and Hudson Bay in the province of Québec. There are now approximately 14,000 Crees or Eeyouch. The second organization is also an Indigenous people's political organization, the Saami Council, founded in 1956. The Saami are a people living in Northern Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, and Finland) and in the Kola peninsula in Russia. There are between 70,000 to 100,000 Saami. The fifteen representatives of the SC come from the eight member organizations forming the SC.

The third organization chosen is a more classic NGO: Médecins Sans Frontières Canada. The section was formed in 1991, although some preparatory work took place in

1990. The mandate of MSF is to offer humanitarian aid, mostly through medical assistance. The Canadian chapter has grown considerably since its formation. While 45 persons were interviewed in 1992 as potential volunteers, Canadians accomplished at least 164 missions in 2004. It is a little difficult to separate the Canadian section from the rest of the movement. The Canadian section is not (yet) an operational one, i.e. it does not plan and organize operations in the field. Volunteers and funds from Canada are sent to missions directed by the five operational sections. It is important to know that an important component of the volunteers are not doctors or health workers, around which the missions are structured, but administrators, logistics specialists, water and sanitation workers, whose work makes the care of the health workers possible.

I based my research on documents and interviews. I had complete access to GCC archives and documents, and examined those I identified as relevant to their global activism. It was more difficult to have access to the documents of the SC, partly because I did not visit the main office of the organization because I was told that many of the documents were not available in English. My corpus for the SC is essentially made up of statements and declarations made at global forums and summits. MSF Canada does not have a strong archival culture. The documents I was able to access and analyze are essentially their newsletter and annual reports. Most of the press releases on the website, for instance, are not “made in Canada”, which also reduced the scope of the possible documents. I conducted eleven interviews in a semi-structured manner, in person and two on the phone with people I had met before. I do not refer much to the interviews in this paper, although they have contributed to form my understanding of the organizations and what they were/are doing. Considering the nature of the data, I do not often refer to particular documents in the present paper. The data are mostly considered in an aggregated manner.

### ***1. The evolution of global activism***

In this section, I compare and analyze the evolution of global activism of the three organizations. I trace this evolution by seeking to assess new departures and continuity in the global activities of each organization over fifteen years, from 1989 or 1990, to 2004 or 2005. It is generally easier to observe new elements than to see that there is continuity in the global activism done by an organization. The fact that many global actions do not take place constantly over time but occur at various and disconnected moments makes these new elements more transparent to the observer. Another difficulty in the study of evolution through new elements and continuity is that patterns of activism, i.e. sequences of particular activities, seem to appear that have elements of new steps and of continuity. Moreover, the origin of these patterns is often traceable to the period before the one I studied, which complicates a real appreciation of the novelty of a given activism pattern. I try to decompose these patterns even if we may lose a part of their meaning doing so.

To better assess the evolution of global activism, I discuss both its objectives and its style and arguments. Of course, the context influences global activism. Decisions made by others, emergency situations, and the general evolution of society prompt organizations to react and engage in global activism. But these triggers do not determine which kind of activism the organization will choose to do, nor do they establish how the organization will interpret the external situation and what can be made of it. The agency of the organizations is very important to keep in mind when analyzing global activism,

even if decision-makers in the organizations sometimes have the impression that very few choices were available to them. This kind of argument – globalization limits choices for action – was often made by governmental decision-makers during the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium. What is given less attention is the realization of social and political actors that globalization is not this juggernaut that nobody can direct or control. The creativity of non-governmental organizations in utilizing globalizing processes to make a difference in a globalizing world is impressive. In summary, external context, at a global or local level, does not tell us all about the evolution of global activism.

### **A) Objectives pursued through global activism**

No global action can be really effective if organizations do not define in the first instance the objectives they seek to realize. Some actions correspond to short-term objectives, others to long term ones.

#### *1) Grand Council of the Crees*

From 1989 to 2004, the general objectives of the Grand Council of the Crees remained fundamentally constant. They can be summarized as advancing Cree rights in Québec and, by defending these rights, trying to help the advancement of the realization of Indigenous peoples' rights. Defending these rights included planning for the socio-economic future of the Cree nation. With a booming population, where people under 30 years old now form the majority (Awashish 2005), these objectives do not necessarily lead to direct global actions but the possibility of engaging in these remained an option in the mind of decision-makers during this period.

Over the years, more specific objectives arose and motivated global activism. The first of these was to stop the Great Whale and Nottaway-Broadback-Rupert (NBR) hydro projects, or at least to reduce their scale and their impact on the Crees. A campaign was led against these projects, predominantly in the United States, where an important part of the power from the hydro projects would have been sold, but also in Europe and at UN forums.

The second objective was to affirm the self-determination of the Cree nation during the referendum episode in Québec. The Grand Council made its voice heard on international tribunes to argue against their (forced) inclusion into any new sovereign Québec state. Their objective was not only to raise consciousness about their invisibility in Québec's discussions on sovereignty, but also to show that double standards seemed to exist in acknowledging self-determination. Self-determination was possible for the Québécois more generally, but not for Indigenous peoples in Québec. This objective went hand in hand with Indigenous peoples arguments more generally being made in global forums that they are *peoples* and not only populations (Bergeron 2002).

A third objective that needed global activism in order to be fulfilled was to counter a fur ban envisioned by the European Union. Similarly, a fourth objective pursued through global activism was the denunciation of the forestry regime in force in Québec. Finally, the GCC also used global activism to have the Paix des Braves, signed with the Québec government in 2002 to help it be recognized as a good agreement, a model for other Canadian and foreign Indigenous peoples. After many criticisms from the GCC directed at the Québec government over many years, a round of explanations was

certainly necessary for other Indigenous peoples to understand what had happened and why this agreement was special and acceptable. Moreover, the Québec government probably asked for this global activism in order to brighten its own image.

As problems are solved, the GCC changes the focus of its global activism. Although it is not continuously active globally, it participates in almost all events with a global aspect in the indigenous world, events that are more and more institutionalized, and it has attended many global summits. The organization also takes advantage of the various committees and conferences to draw attention to and to expose the problems it has with governments and how governments are not fulfilling their obligations towards the Crees and other (Canadian) Indigenous peoples. It is also quite clear that when the objectives pursued will only be realized within a given span of time, the GCC knows it must create events and find ways to get its message into the global domain through a global campaign. Although it has been pursuing specific goals during the fifteen years period of study, the GCC has found a way to put them in the larger picture of Cree rights and the global need for recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights.

## *2) Saami Council*

The Saami Council is similar to the Grand Council of the Crees when it comes to the evolution of their objectives from 1990 to 2004. The SC has been using global activism to have Saami and Indigenous peoples' rights recognized and applied. The SC has put more emphasis on the general recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights globally than the GCC. The institutional context has also been more eventful in the Saami case than in the Cree one, which may have created opportunities of global activism for the SC. There was the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the inclusion of Russian Saami in the SC in 1992. It led what was known until then as the Nordic Saami Council to leave out the Nordic in its name. In addition, a third Saami parliament was formed in Sweden in 1993 (the one in Finland appeared in 1973 and the one in Norway was created in 1989) and was followed by the entry of Sweden and Finland into the European Union in 1995. Also, we can note the creation of the Arctic Council in 1996.

The SC has not adopted the "campaign" mode of activism preferred by the GCC. They were involved in the Alta-Kautokeino battle against a hydroelectric dam from 1979 to 1982, which involved demonstrations, a hunger strike, and court battles. In the last fifteen years though, the SC has only led a few "mini-campaigns" such as the protest recently against logging in Inari (see Saami Council website), or the presentation of a "briefing paper on the recently proposed Norwegian Finnmark county land management act" at the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (Saami Council 2003). Rather than campaigns, the Saami have concentrated its global activism on pressuring and advocating for self-determination, land rights, education, and the recognition and support of language and culture. When talking about their problems in global settings such as the United Nations, the SC has very frequently asked for changes for all Indigenous peoples. They have been at the forefront of the "S" battle, asking global forums (the UN and the Arctic Council) to designate them as "Indigenous peoples" and not as "indigenous people" or "indigenous populations". Ole Henrik Magga, the first president of the Norwegian Saami Parliament and then the first chairperson of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, wrote in 1985 (22), well before he took these positions: "We hope of course, that if we succeed in strengthening our rights, this might

also have a significance for others at an international level.” The Saami Council was also an active member of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples since its beginning in 1975. This organization has now disappeared.

Land rights have been and still are the most important issue for the Saami people. It has also been the most contentious with state governments. As Sillanpää (1994, 224) writes: “land title is a fundamental issue for Sami rights activists and represents the penultimate step in their political mobilization as an aboriginal people within the northern regions of Fennoscandia. The Sami claim to title over the lands and water they have historically occupied and used to carry out a traditional lifestyle is a much more all-embracing issue than reindeer husbandry...” Sillanpää mentions reindeer husbandry because it has often been a contentious issue with governments when they have tried to modify laws and rules directing that economic activity which has a profound cultural significance for the Saami.

In recent years, the SC has developed what I would call “intellectual global activism”. This approach has been present before, because the organization would put forward arguments from international law and refer to treaties and covenants. It has become more apparent recently because new issues have been the object of their interest, like traditional knowledge, or like free, prior and informed consent before resources or knowledge is appropriated and patented as intellectual property. As an example of this intellectual global activism, in 2004, the Saami Council was solicited by Yozo Yokota, member of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, to prepare a working paper, in collaboration with them, on guidelines on the heritage of Indigenous peoples (Yokota and Saami Council 2004). Another objective of the Saami Council that is pursued through intellectual global activism has been to help other Indigenous peoples to better prepare themselves and form organizations. A training program in international human rights standards was initiated in 1999, for instance, and projects with the San of Namibia have been realized. There is now a unit in the Saami Council called the Indigenous Cooperation Unit, which undertakes this kind of global outreach, a form of activism quite unique in the indigenous world.

As Saami parliaments obtain more (administrative) responsibilities and take a better established place in Nordic countries’ political systems, and even if they remain consultative assemblies, the Saami Council has become, over the last fifteen years, more focussed on regional and international issues. There are now “easier” canals through which Saami communities can protest and oppose governmental decisions.

It is interesting to note that, in a way, the SC has been less successful, even if more “moderate”, in its global activism than the GCC. Their objectives are more difficult to meet than the ones of the GCC. It would appear that international and national law is more difficult to change than stopping or changing detrimental projects or regimes.

### 3) *Médecins Sans Frontières Canada*

The whole MSF movement, including MSF Canada, respects the charter adopted by the organization. The current charter emphasizes four points, none of which relates to awareness raising, *témoignage*, or activism other than offering “assistance to populations in distress, to victims of natural or manmade disasters and to victims of armed conflict, without discrimination and irrespective of race, religion, creed or political affiliation” and demanding “full and unhindered freedom in the exercise of its functions”. Looking at the

charter, one can even question the possibility of activism by the organization, since it promises “neutrality and impartiality” and volunteers “maintain complete independence from all political, economic and religious powers”. Hence, the primary objective of MSF as a movement is to directly intervene medically during humanitarian emergencies, and not to promote ideas and try to raise awareness of global problems. Since its beginning in 1991, the objectives of the Canadian section are to recruit volunteers to go on missions and to raise money for the organization, which essentially goes to support these missions. By the end of 2006, the role of the Canadian section will be enlarged so that it can plan operations in the field on its own. Previously it had to leave such a task to the five European operational sections.

Despite these constraints, advocacy is an important part of the work of MSF. It is what prompted its birth, by French doctors working for the Red Cross who could not speak about the horrors they were seeing in Biafra and against the government causing them. *Témoignage*, as it is known in the movement—a word not as strong as advocacy but better at conveying the idea that you fight and talk because of what you have seen—is a small part of MSF activities (“5 to 6 percent of its operating costs”<sup>1</sup>) but “it’s an important part of its identity” (Bortolotti 2004, 242).

At MSF Canada, global activism has taken many forms. Among others, I note: *témoignage* from volunteers coming back from the field; conferences; workshops; exhibitions; a newsletter sent to members and donors; support for an international treaty on landmines ban; a refugee camp tour; special sections on the website dealing with international issues; and the Campaign for access to essential medicines. Many of these actions are not global in scope and they were conducted in Canada. I see them as global activism more because of their subject matter and because of their potential spill-off effects. Moreover, other MSF sections in the world are often engaging in the same actions.

MSF Canada has thus had many objectives over the last fifteen years, and it is difficult to keep track of them. Over time though, their main goals have been constant: to recruit volunteers and raise money. The Campaign for access to essential medicines is a particular case in MSF and in MSF Canada. More structured and formal than any other *témoignage* or advocacy done by MSF in previous years, the Campaign started in 1999 in response to accumulated frustration on the part of volunteers who could not adequately take care of patients because of a lack of medicines or inappropriate drugs. The HIV/AIDS pandemic played a major role in triggering this Campaign. In MSF, the Campaign is said to now have a life of its own and is still a controversial matter.

In Canada, the Campaign took a particular turn when the government decided to put into practice an agreement of the WTO in August 2003 on the production of drugs for countries without production capacities. The bill, initially discussed in 2003, entered into force after much discussion in 2005. MSF Canada played an active role in the process, denouncing the flaws of the proposed bill and repeating the importance of “getting it right” as Canada was the first country to try to put in practice the WTO decision.

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<sup>1</sup> Between 3 and 5 percent in Canada according to author’s calculations, based on “public education” figures published in the 2004 Annual Report. It seems that there is no strict bookkeeping for advocacy (except for the Campaign for access to essential medicines) since 15 percent of “common expenses” is allocated to “public education”, while it was 25 percent in the previous years.

## **B) Activism style and arguments raised by global activism**

In this section, I present some of the arguments used by the three organizations in their global activism. It would be very fastidious to go through all these arguments, but I hope to show by the examples given the type of arguments they use and the general “style” and attitude they adopt in their global activism. Of course, this analysis is based upon a personal interpretation of the documents gathered and the events that I have witnessed or that have been reflected in the media.

### *1) Grand Council of the Crees*

During the campaign against the Great Whale and NBR hydro projects, Cree leaders often presented their point of view on their first hydro campaign against the La Grande project in the 1970s. The speeches describe how they won an injunction to stop the construction in court, then how it was reversed because of the interest of the majority, or so said the Superior Court of Québec. Instead of going further in the justice system and seeing the construction of the project being carried out in the meantime, the Grand Council of the Crees decided to negotiate an agreement with governments, the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA). The GCC used this story to show how little things have changed in governmental disrespect towards the Crees.

The GCC emphasized that no environmental evaluation was carried out before the realization of the La Grande dam, and that the Crees had been lied to about environmental consequences, which were much more severe than what had been discussed with them. In their campaign against the Great Whale and NBR projects, they argued that no comprehensive study had been carried out to evaluate the environmental impact of these new projects. Moreover, there were even calculations to weaken the existing law on environmental reviews, and not enough people were hired to do them.

The environmental argument had many aspects. The GCC argued that environmental impacts in relation with Cree life are not always easy to see or evaluate. What is the psychological impact of flooding ancestors’ graves? How do you measure the significance of the disappearance of a territory? How well can you predict the reactions of animals and waterfowl, some of them critical for Cree physical and cultural survival?

The GCC also maintained that governments were already not respecting the regime of environmental protection from the JBNQA. They criticized the Québec government saying that there had been no environmental review for aluminium smelters, and this was a supplementary proof of the general disrespect for the environment that this government had.

The Cree organization explained that it was better economically and ecologically to conserve energy than to build gigantic dams that would become monuments to the abuses of the twentieth century, especially with the development of renewable energies. In addition, the GCC argued that dam construction and flooding generated CO<sub>2</sub> and methane, and that hydro-electricity should not be considered a clean energy or a real alternative to fossil fuel energy. Moreover, some uncertainty remained about the reliability of hydro-electricity in light of climate change.

The environmental message was certainly the main one in the Great Whale and NBR campaign. It emphasized that degradation of the environment affects not just Crees but everyone, as the destruction of the Amazon forest in Brazil was proving, an example often used in the campaign. It also underlined how much the “Western” lifestyle

translates into over development and over consumption. Another provocative expression used in that campaign was “environmental racism”. Here is a statement by Matthew Coon Come, the Grand Chief of the GCC at the time, where he explained this concept and how it applied to the Cree situation, in Washington in 1990:

We have one message: WE ARE THE VICTIMS OF ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM. You, the larger society, do not respect the same rules for native people that you do for yourselves. ... Our forests are clear-cut, but yours are preserved for parks and recreation areas. Who would consider the total diversion and elimination of the Hudson River? Yet much larger rivers have been completely destroyed where my people live.

Is this not racism? Why should it be easier to destroy our environment? Should not the same rule and principles apply for everyone? (Coon Come 1990, 5)

Environmental racism has since become a relatively common concept in the discourse of Indigenous peoples worldwide.

During the campaign against Québec secession, the Grand Council of the Crees used arguments relating to international law. They put into evidence the right of the Cree people to self-determination. The GCC drew on developments of international law that Indigenous peoples (and the GCC) helped to concretize at the UN. They played their right to self-determination against the one Québec was claiming. International laws designed to protect territorial integrity were included in the discourse. The leaders of the GCC reminded their publics that no one asked for their consent in previous attempts at administrative and constitutional change in Québec or Canada. They also mentioned that they were the only inhabitants using the land on a permanent basis. The Cree way of life is based on the land occupied by the Crees.

The Grand Council of the Crees has not been afraid of provocation when it entered into campaigns against specific projects. They used strong words and those were needed to get the attention of the press and of foreign audiences in a context of (relative) emergencies. Their global activism reflected their pride and the deception from governments not fulfilling their promises (which, I think, eventually led to the nation to nation agreement that is the Paix des Braves, when the Québec government was tired and ashamed of being portrayed this way on the international scene). Although there may have been a few arguments with questionable implications, most of them were convincing, based on scientific evidence, experience, or accepted interpretations of international law. Many arguments appealed to common sense, compassion, and emotions relating to the will of living a good life according to a people’s beliefs. The organization was very good at mixing emotions and rationality. A few of the speeches during the campaign against Québec secession remind me of law journal articles, with long footnotes.

## 2) *Saami Council*

My access to documents has been limited in the case of the Saami Council, partly because of language barriers. There has been no big campaign generating a lot of speeches and declarations in the Saami case during the last fifteen years, from what I



know. Moreover, a Saami Council staff member has told me that the SC members try to share their ideas informally when they are present in global forums, and that they will talk only when these ideas have not been publicly conveyed by other organizations. “If you need to talk, you haven’t done your job.” The exception is that new people from the organization will be “introduced” to a global forum by taking the floor and speaking on behalf of the SC. I have also noted that the Saami Council frequently teams up with other organizations in collective statements, which reflects the idea that sharing ideas is very important in such forums. The style of the Saami Council has thus been very different from the one of the Grand Council of the Crees, although in recent years the GCC has been less confrontational and provocative, and in the first line of speakers (this also has to do with the charisma and personality of the GCC representatives in global forums). The Saami Council has often talked about Russian Saami in the first place in global forums because they are the least privileged and the ones suffering the most compared to other Saami. The SC has been particularly active in climate change and environmental degradation discussions. Most of the activities of the Arctic Council are related to the environment, and this forum has been one where the SC has been voicing its concerns.

Much of the global activism of the SC is focussed on international law. When it comes to self-determination, land rights, and protection of the environment, the SC often has appealed to international law and put forward interpretations with potential positive consequences for Saami and Indigenous peoples.

The Saami generally believe in a step-by-step approach. For example, Saami are conscious that Saami Parliaments do not have the attributes of a Parliament and have limited, consultative powers. But they prefer something to nothing, and are confident that with time and negotiation, these powers can be broadened and will become more significant. The SC works with that kind of mindset too. Over time, as the Saami Parliaments have become more recognized, the Saami Council has redistributed its functions to them and other institutions, and has become “more activist” (Åhrén 2005), and more oriented toward global action and cooperation.

### 3) *MSF Canada*

Since the first issue, the newsletter of MSF Canada has featured the work of its volunteers and the action of MSF in its projects amid war, medical crisis, or humanitarian emergencies. Some of these articles were informative and traced back, for example, the history of a conflict. Many others are more personal, when a volunteer makes a *témoignage* and explain how she got on the field, what is the situation, what she has been doing, what problems and frustrations she met, how successful the project is and so on. Often in these articles there is a not-so-hidden criticism of the country and its lack of medical services to its population, a criticism that also touches international institutions and the international community.

An excerpt from an article (no author given) in the *Dispatches Newsletter* of June and July 1996 about the Chechenya situation explains the dilemma MSF faces when it comes to speaking out or not: “When should we quietly carry on our work, when is it time for quiet diplomacy and behind the scenes pressure, and when has it finally reached a point of public denunciation of human rights violations? This is always a crucial question for Doctors Without Borders, weighed in each individual situation. In each case, the impact on our field presence is paramount: will we be forced to leave, and be unable

to aid the population, and will it put our teams in danger themselves? The final decision must rest with the field team.” Sometimes, if it is publicized, even a returned volunteer's *témoignage* can put teams still in the field in danger. Security for the volunteers is a criterion always present in the mind of MSF decision-makers when it comes to speaking publicly about a country. Coordination becomes necessary for that very reason, even if the “free spirit” of the movement allows for much questions and debates inside it, and tries to provoke them in other people’s minds.

Even if the particular situation may change, MSF work builds awareness about forgotten crises and populations in danger, creating a link between “us” here in the West and “them” away in poor countries. This is a bit too sketchy as a vision, as projects in Europe exist, mainly to help refugees and disadvantaged or marginalized people. Creating a link is nonetheless one of the goals of these projects.

Similar to the whole movement, MSF Canada is very focussed in its publications and interventions. At the beginning of 2005, when MSF stopped taking money after the tsunami, many people were surprised and some other NGOs criticized the announcement. But this was a typical MSF reaction: we have the money to do what we can do and what we need to do. Donors for the tsunami were confident that their money was being used for the tsunami; when the financial target was met, donors were asked if they wanted to cancel their donation or if they accepted to redirect it to an emergency fund for other crises. Transparency is not always easy to achieve in an NGO; this was a very transparent announcement. At the same time, it said: we can’t change the world. This is similar to what MSF said when they denounced the genocide in Rwanda: you can’t stop a genocide with doctors. The NGO is conscious that political powers need to be involved to realize profound changes.

And MSF decided to do just that with its Campaign for access to essential medicines. When the NGO received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999, its president, the Canadian James Orbinski, seized the occasion to mention that “[m]ore than 90% of all death and suffering from infectious diseases occurs in the developing world. ... [L]ife saving essential medicines are either too expensive, are not available because they are not seen as financially viable, or because there is virtually no new research and development for priority tropical diseases. This market failure is our next challenge.” This was in a way the announcement of the Campaign. But it was also a call to political institutions, the pharmaceutical industry, and civil society, because, as Orbinski continued: “The challenge however, is not ours alone. It is also for governments, International Government Institutions, the Pharmaceutical Industry and other NGOs to confront this injustice. What we as a civil society movement demand is change, not charity.”

This Nobel lecture referred to another contentious issue, “military humanitarian operations”. A part of the activism of MSF Canada was also directed against these operations which sustain confusion and deny the apolitical character of humanitarian assistance: “if food is allowed to be used as a weapon of war, then it also legitimates that populations can be starved as a weapon of war” ([Orbinski] 1999).

MSF Canada is not so distinct in its activism style from the rest of the movement, although it seems that each MSF section has its own identity. The organization uses its experience in the field to present issues to the public. Raising awareness is a way to gather voices to ask for change.

## Summary

Is there a link between globalizing processes and the changes observed in the global activism of the organizations studied? New information and communication technologies had an impact on the way global activism is made and how it is conducted. They have speeded up interactions and fund transfers, and have created new possibilities for the organizations to reach wider and different publics, through the Internet for instance. Web campaigns are generally not sufficient though; they need to be supported by other events and more traditional communications. Globalization is sometimes also mentioned in speeches and in campaign material. Yet still, I would be hesitant to say that we can directly attribute changes in global activism to globalizing processes. They have contributed to modify the context in which the organizations work, and one can always find connections between them and different global actions —global actions that contribute to globalization itself— but solid links are difficult to find and probe.

## *II. Changing identities*

Although in the three cases studied there is a notable continuity in how and why each organization is doing its global activism, there have been changes in this global activism during the fifteen years period, either in the scale or in the tone of this activism. None of the organizations has fundamentally changed during this time, but all have evolved. In this second short section, I would like to show how the evolution in the identity of each of these organizations is connected with the changes in its global activism.

The Grand Council of the Crees was, in 1989, an organization for which resistance and activism were already important in the identity of the organization. It was quite confrontational toward governments and had already sued them numerous times. With the Great Whale and NBR opposition campaign, these elements were reinforced in the identity of the organization. The GCC was also securing the support of environmental and conservation groups, not only in Québec but also in the United States, and it took every opportunity to talk about its campaign. The organization was well established and already had a reputation in UN forums as an active participant in groups where Indigenous peoples' rights were discussed.

In 2004, the climate was much more serene in good part because of the Paix des Braves which stopped litigation against the Québec government. The identity of the organization as the “government” of the Cree people has been reinforced by that agreement, which implies a certain form of bureaucracy. Yet, there is now more contestation inside the Cree nation on the role and decisions of the GCC.

The evolution of the GCC identity has been subtle. There has been more continuity than rupture or completely new elements. As in its global activism though, the organization went from a very confrontational and vocal critique of governments to a more “low key” negotiator, still standing for its rights, but, having achieved some of its objectives, able to take a less direct approach to gain more with time. My understanding is that the identity of the organization was already well defined, and it did not change much during those fifteen years even if the tactics have changed. Moments of intense campaigning crystallize the *raison d'être* of the organization and its general objectives, but they are not reinventing the organization, maybe only its public image.

The identity of the Saami Council has not endured a revolution either. In 1990, it was an organization with an established international presence, and an important

interlocutor for Nordic governments. In 2004, it had become even more central in international debate and had developed formal co-operation with some other Indigenous peoples. It was still an important regional organization but with less direct interaction with Nordic governments.

In the meantime, it was a very important organization for Russian Saami, when they were not yet well organized, and it still gives them much of their funds today. Symbolically, to be able to represent all Saami has been an important change in the identity of the SC. The development of Saami Parliaments led the organization to adopt an agenda where global issues occupy a more important space. The organization has become more activist too, even if its negotiating style is still quite measured. Intellectual resources inside the organization have been valued as the years have passed, and this is reflected in the intellectual global activism of the SC. More and more, the SC seems to adopt a NGO identity more than a “governmental” one like the GCC. Increased collaboration with other Indigenous peoples and the professionalization of the organization can explain this perception.

Médecins Sans Frontières Canada was simply a “child” of the section based in Holland at its beginning in 1990-1991. This connection certainly had an influence on the structure and the “mentality” of the Canadian chapter, although this is difficult to recognize without a more complete knowledge of the movement and the Holland section and without contact with the first people involved in the Canadian section. The identity of the section at its beginning was certainly very modest and built on the growing recognition of the MSF movement. The activism of the section at its beginning was to make the movement better known in Canada and to start raising awareness with *témoignages* from returning volunteers. The core identity of the section was, at the beginning, defined by the MSF movement and a clear vision of the future was not possible.

Fifteen years later, in 2005, MSF-Canada is very well known in the country and not only in medical circles. The section is engaged in global activism, especially on the subject of medicines. It is about to have more responsibilities and prepare field operations. The organization is much bigger, with a presence throughout the country. It continues to value its independence from governments and to cultivate its uniqueness among other NGOs.

The evolution of MSF-Canada, as an organization, has been impressive. After the effervescence of the beginning, a period of consolidation (1998-2004?) has transformed it into a professionalized and more efficient organization. It is now an association that elects the board members of MSF-Canada, and so an institutional change has taken place in the identity of the organization. More importantly though, the Campaign for access to essential medicines changed the identity of the movement and of MSF-Canada. The spectrum of its legitimate interventions has broadened, although it is still cautious to preserve its independence, relevance, and credibility. In Canada, the activism surrounding the adoption of the bill on the production of drugs for developing countries was not only made by MSF, but by a group of NGOs including MSF. This participation has also forced the organization to question itself constantly on its identity because it had to decide every time if it was in its mandate to intervene on precise points at varying steps of this process. The obligation to become more “political” has changed the identity of MSF-Canada. The identity of MSF as a whole is a matter of continuous discussion, because there are

differences of interpretation between the national sections, but also because its will to speak and reach out is fuelled by its experience of the field. As the world and its problems change, the movement is changing too.

### ***Conclusion***

Globalization is a complicated phenomenon involving the widening of possibilities for NGOs and activism, which can become more easily global. Doing global activism is an important defining element for an organization and even those not directly involved in it in the organization will likely feel some effects from that involvement. Global activism is often undertaken to change things that were resistant to change when action was limited at a regional, national or local level. But more and more, we see organizations directly taking to the global scene to express their ideas and demand change. There can be an inversion of the “normal” order: it is only once a campaign is launched globally that the group will try to lobby at a local or national level. This was the case for the Campaign for access to essential medicines by MSF.

My reflection on the interconnections between globalizing processes, global activism, and collective identities is not finished. These are complex relations and it may prove difficult to find conclusions that can be generalized from the three cases studied. Yet, the richness of the various experiences in these three organizations is shedding some light on complicated concepts and their interrelations.

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