Transnational Uncivil Society Networks: kleptocracy's global fightback against liberal activism

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ABSTRACT
What is the global social context for the inser tiofn kleptocratic elites into the putatively liberal international order? Drawing on cases fro omur work on Eurasia and Africa, we sketch a concept of 'transnational uncivil society' whicwhe contrast to 'transnational activist networks' (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). While the lra dtteenotes the liberalising practices of global civil society, the former suggests a specific se orife clientelistic relations across borders which open space for uncivil elites. This distinction maanties a growing line of conflict in global politics. These kleptocrats eject liberal activ isfrtosm their own territories and create new spaces to whitewash their own reputations and b tuhieldir own transnational networks. To do so they hire political consultants and reputatioann magers, engage in public philanthropy, and forge new relationships with major global institountis. We show how these strategies of reputation-laundering are neither illicit nor marngail, but very much a product of the actors, institutions and markets generated by the libenratel rinational order. We compare and contrast the scope and purpose of civil and uncivil socineetytw orks, we explore the increasing globalization of Eurasian and African elites as oan certed strategy to distance themselves from associations with their political oppressiond a kleptocracy in their home countries, and recast themselves as productive and respected cpooslimtaons.

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Introduction

In 2008 the Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cooperation (UNESCO) established the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences for 'improving the quality of human life'. The prize was funded by a multimillion-dollar donation from Equatorial Guinea's long-serving President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who has ruled the oil-rich West African country since 1979. Following the prize's announcement, international civil society groups vigorously protested the award, highlighting Obiang's poor human rights record and the country's extreme corruption and acute income inequality, efforts that led to the award's freezing for four years. One representative from the anti-corruption watchdog Global Witness argued bluntly that, 'what Unesco is doing is laundering the reputation of a kleptocrat with an appalling human rights record' (Palmer, 2010). But despite this public campaign, and internal opposition expressed by the organisation's Director General, in 2012 UNESCO's executive board went ahead and began to award the prize, though Obiang's name was removed from the official award (Erlanger, 2012). This small victory for activists may lose sight of the bigger picture: the larger aim for kleptocrats is not that of global branding but the creation of transnational networks of affluence and influence.

This episode provides evidence of a countervailing force against transnational activist networks (TANs) in contemporary global governance. On the one hand, it points to how the transnational advocacy campaign for the Obiang prize sought to improve the image of a ruling kleptocrat and did so through the actors and institutions typically associated with promoting international civil society. On the other, it demonstrates more traditional clientelistic practices in the appointment of Obiang's son Teodorin – himself subject to money laundering charges in the USA and France at the time – as Equatorial Guinea's ambassador, the patronage of the prize itself and the contracting of the private sector to handle the controversy which ensued (Smith, 2012). This intertwining of advocacy and clientelism by authoritarian regimes points to new empirical forms of what we term 'uncivil society', which challenge our notions of global civil society and transnational activism.

Much of our understanding of TANs remains guided by the ground-breaking work of Katherine Sikkink and Margaret Keck. In *Activists Beyond Borders* (1998) the authors identified the principled action of NGOs and their transnational allies as a distinct vector in international relations, one with the potential to disrupt and change the practices of unwilling state governments in areas such as promoting political and social rights, protecting the environment, and campaigning for progressive causes on a global scale. Though this formulation was itself an intellectual product of the peak of Western-sponsored civil society groups in the 1990s, Keck and Sikkink's work has continued to be influential, stimulating like-minded scholars to explore how networks of committed actors have pushed transnational civil society and advocacy (Price, 2003). Subsequent research has shown that TANs are driven by a number of other strategic and material considerations, not just their principles, while recent contributions have drawn attention to a growing global backlash against NGOs and their activism, including governments now restricting funding and even banning some groups and their political advocacy altogether (Dupuy et al., 2016; Hopgood et al., 2017).

By contrast, transnational networks of kleptocrats, their professional enablers, and their allies in foreign states are a feature of International Relations which have been largely overlooked and almost entirely untheorized. The Obiang episode is by no means exceptional, for it points

to two distinct trends in global governance. First, such examples support the findings of wider comparative studies that Western-backed civil society as a driver of social change and political influence continues to recede from its peak, as NGOs are challenged by new restrictive anti-NGO laws, association of Western donors with 'foreign interference', and rising illiberal norms, such as 'traditional values' among domestic publics (Cooley, 2015). Meanwhile, governing elites, family members and connected regime insiders continue to broaden and deepen their own robust ties to international institutions and global actors to promote an international image of themselves as global philanthropists as opposed to autocrats, kleptocrats or oligarchs – what we call 'reputation-laundering' (Cooley and Heathershaw, 2017). These practices entwine Western democracies, their elites, service industries and public institutions with elites from autocracies. Their transnational networks connect supposedly domestic political spaces, create political influence, business relations and reputational effects across borders, and shape some of the most controversial political conflicts of our time, including those relating to foreign interference in the 2016 and 2020 US presidential elections.

In this paper, we build upon our identification of these increasingly influential 'Transnational Uncivil Society Networks' (TUSNs) to analyse the shifts currently underway in the ecology of globalization. Advancing from findings from our research on Eurasia and Africa (Cooley & Heathershaw 2017; Soares de Oliveira 2015a, 2022)," we argue that these strategies of reputation-laundering are neither illicit nor marginal, but very much a product of the actors, institutions and markets generated by the liberal international order. We also explore TUSNs empirically in their Eurasian and African forms, noting regional variations in common themes of global networking and reputation laundering. In the first section we delineate the concept of TUSN across five aspects: actors, mechanisms, practices, spatial politics, and effects. We then bear this out empirically with a diverse set of cases and two sources of qualitative data. The second section focuses on the actors, mechanisms and practices and compares two cases of networks centred on the kleptocracies of Uzbekistan and Angola, charting the TUSNs which connect them to various centres of business and politics. We show how these elites have cultivated robust ties in the West, even as their government sought to fight off Western criticisms of democratic and governance practices. In the third and final section we utilize data from the 2018 Wealth Report published by the London-based luxury real estate consulting firm Knight Frank (2018) to consider the spatial politics, effects and regional distinctions of Eurasia and Africa. The report includes a survey of over 500 wealth managers and private bankers to 50,000 High Net Wealth Individuals (HNWIs), worth reportedly about $3 trillion, broken down by their region of origin (Knight Frank, 2018: 77).

Theoretical Contours: from TANs to TUSNs

The nebulous concept of 'global civil society' has advanced considerably since the publication of Keck and Sikkink's *Activists Beyond Borders* over twenty years ago. We note three particular steps forward which serve as premises for the paper. First, global civil society is a place of normative contestation. It is no longer a domain set aside for liberal norm diffusion but also illiberal counter-movements (Bob, 2013; McAllister, 2018). This suggests that transnational civil society and 'uncivil society' – a term we use, for want of a better alternative, to denote the illiberal opponents of activists – are not clearly demarcated from one another in ideational or normative terms (Bob, 2011). Second, global civil society is characterized by formal and informal networks. It is no more, it if ever was, a realm composed of organisations which are distinct from states and economies but a domain where supposedly domestic actors

are transnationally assembled under the forces of globalization (Sassen, 2005; Ong and Collier, 2006). Putatively private economic actors serve as the adjuncts and intermediaries of state power, even of the greatest powers (Farrell and Newman, 2019; Grynaviski, 2018; Judge, 2015). Third, these networks of global civil society are the products of power relations. They are overlapping transnational networks – policy, legal, economic – and central to 'how the elite is constituted as a political agent' (Henriksen and Seabrooke, 2020: 12). Rather than TANs simply challenging territorial sovereignty, they are contesting spatialised sovereignty regimes which may themselves be integrative or globalist in form (Agnew, 2005). Where authoritarian or weak state contexts are part of transnational networks, these ties often take on a clientelistic form as 'transactorship' (Wedel, 1999) or 'transnational clientelism' (Hönke, 2018). Both terms denote gatekeeping and patronage relations between elites, multinational corporations, and their local partners, both state and non-state.

In light of these three currents in the literature, we make three analytical moves with respect to global civil society in order to identify the characteristics and explore the scope of TUSN: 1) in its non-liberal or "uncivil" forms, 2) its integration with economies and states, and 3) its clientelistic mechanisms. The relevance of these three moves is underscored in our regions of focus: post-Soviet Eurasia and postcolonial Africa. Patronal politics or 'kleptocracy' dominate the structure of relations within Eurasia, as both academic and non-academic researchers have demonstrated (Hale, 2014; La Porte, 2017; Burgis, 2020). Just as postcommunist transition of the 1990s was a project of transnational capital accumulation (Belton, 2020; Dawisha, 2014; Wedel, 1999), today's clientelistic dynamics extend into elite relationships across borders where dictators recruit public and private allies overseas to increase their control of business and politics at home (Cooley and Heathershaw, 2017). Clientelism is also a key dimension of African politics and international relations, as established by a large literature (Bayart, 2000; Clapham, 1996; van de Walle, 2001) and resource-rich countries such as Angola and Nigeria having experienced acute kleptocratic governance (Soares de Oliveira, 2007, 2015a). This includes moving money offshore, forming transnational business partnership to the exclusion of potential rivals, targeting their political opponents in exile, accessing hard-to-access social goods, such as high-value real estate and education, and laundering their reputations through public relations campaigns and philanthropy (Cooley et al., 2018). It is these socio-economic and reputational practices that draws uncivil elites and their professional enablers into battle with the activists identified by Keck & Sikkink.

We revisit these literatures to draw stylized distinctions between the TANs and TUSNs which we identify in our research. Inducing transnational uncivil society from the late Soviet context of Eurasia (though also see the historical overview in Glasius, 2010), we adapt Stephen Kotkin's (2010) use of the term to refer to the actions of Communist elites and bureaucrats who lost formal positions of privilege but often retained informal influence through the authority and networks formed in the late-communist period (also Wedel, 1999). These global networks were fostered in the late-Soviet era as the privileged cadres of the Brezhnev generation sought to access global markets and access foreign currencies by leveraging their sovereign status during the openness in the Gorbachev period immediately prior to 1991. For Kotkin, 'uncivil society' was a passing phenomenon of the early post-socialist period as the *nomenklatura* dug in to protect their vested interests. Here we expand this concept spatially and temporally to describe the *global networks that elites, their professional enablers, and their foreign political allies forge to consolidate their domestic political power and launder their monies and reputations overseas*.

This definition is quite apart from how 'uncivil society' is typically and unhelpfully presented in the literature. Our definition is not normative, in terms of uncivil society's putative illiberalism, nor does it emerge from its organizational or tactical differences from TANs, which Clifford Bob, in his study of the transnational networking of like-minded right-wing and conservative groups, effectively demonstrates are overwrought (Bob, 2011). We refer to the driving individuals as 'uncivil elites' or, occasionally, and in keeping with the term popular among TANs, 'kleptocrats'.[1] In turn, uncivil elites functionally extend their personal and sometimes regime-based power and influence across borders though networks of transnational actors that include philanthropic institutions, pliant members of foreign governments or international institutions, and enabling professional service-providers (usually Western), such as lawyers, lobbyists, public relations specialists and wealth managers. Accordingly, individual members of these networks may not identify as "authoritarian" or even as "illiberal" political actors, but, in the course of their service position or contractual relations with other networks agents, may assume critical functions that help uncivil elites to successfully exert influence and recast their public reputations.

As we will demonstrate below, these networks sometimes co-opt liberal agendas for instrumental ends and mimic TANs in some of their behaviour. They are a political form which cannot be reduced to the public or private sector (although it may include putatively public or private actors), is not directly violent, extends across borders and which deliberately presents itself as civil society in terms of the activities it undertakes (Price, 2003: 580-581).

Contrasting Networks: Primary Actors and Purpose

Our stylized understanding of transnational uncivil society rests on five conceptual comparisons with TANs. Firstly, the two types of networks differ in terms of their primary actors. According to Keck & Sikkink, TANs may include, but are not limited to, social movements, domestic civic organisations and intellectuals, international NGOs, international organisations, foundations, journalists and the media, and sympathetic governments, or specific government agencies or legislatures, that are eager to partner and pursue a particular social agenda (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 9).

TUSNs also include many of these 'third sector' actors. However, these are secondary and often contracted by the primary actors: the transnational networks of public and private entities that facilitate kleptocracy. According to a recent definition employed in the *Journal of Democracy*, 'kleptocracy is a system in which public institutions are used to enable a network of ruling elites to steal public funds for their own private gain' (Walker and Aten, 2018: 20). Uncivil elites are empowered to gain from the system through their political connections and status and by a lack of institutional oversight and accountability. Accordingly, kleptocracy is not just a sum of individual corrupt acts, but also the set of institutions, networks, and norms, both domestically and transnationally, that facilitates and structures such activities. A critical aspect of any such system is how global actors and institutions establish networks to effectively co-mingle ill-begotten gains with legal funds, services, and activities. Key to this process is the use of anonymous shell companies, through which funds can be concealed and transferred into assets and bank accounts in jurisdictions, usually Western, where their value will be legally protected (Findley et al., 2014).

[1] We also use 'politically exposed person' (PEP, a legal term) and 'high net-worth individual' (HNWI, a financial industry term) when these terms are found in our data.

What is missed, then, by most international assessments of corruption or rankings is the structured manner in which uncivil elites rely on the global services of intermediaries that include the professional enablers who help to disintermediate the shady origins of funds and convert them to spendable and protected assets (Cooley and Sharman, 2017). Wealth managers, company providers, accounting firms, and international bankers devise and structure the management of assets. Second citizenship managers and lawyers navigate the various jurisdictions and requirements to acquire passports and second citizenships. Brokers acquire desired luxury residences and goods, while lobbyists promote their interests and standing in the policy arenas of third countries. Public relations managers actively maintain the reputation of uncivil elites and patrol their media profiles and mentions. While their economic practices are internationally obscured, TUSNs enhance the prestige of 'uncivil elites', recasting their public image to emphasize their international activities and global philanthropy. Their purpose is defined by 'a political relationship of univocality and the subordination of difference to a central authority or vision' (Koch 2022a: online first).

Mechanisms

TANs and TUSNs also contrast in their mechanisms. These mechanisms derive from the nature of the relationships between actors. As Avant et al. note in their groundbreaking account of how global governance functions, 'it is not the type of actor but the *character of relationships'* that is key (2010: 3). In TANs, global networking allows domestic activists and NGOs to effectively leverage transnational allies in their domestic advocacy campaigns. The 'boomerang effect' (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 12-14) occurs when domestic groups, initially stymied by recalcitrant governments, then mobilize international partners, such as NGOs, international organisations, and sympathetic states to externally pressure their governments, usually through international shaming tactics, to enact change – e.g., all child soldiers should be banned (Carpenter, 2014). The analytical counterpart to the 'boomerang theory' is the 'spiral model', also dependent on heavy external pressure, which describes a multi-stage sequence of how states come to be socialised into accepting the politically disruptive agenda of advocates, usually human rights champions (Risse-Kappen et al., 1999). Sikkink (2005) herself recognised these temporal and spatial complexities in her later work with three further forms of 'dynamic multilevel governance' to add to the boomerang effect.

These advancements in the transnational activism and global governance literature nevertheless remained committed to a formal ontology of individuals, civil society, and states (Weiss and Wilkinson, 2014; Tarrow, 2019: 61), where the relevant relations are 'among governors and between governor and governed' (Avant et al., 2010: 3). By contrast, transnational uncivil society adopts a different ontology of global politics and presupposes a different set of relations, more diverse and contested than those of global governance (Adamson, 2005). While TAN coalitions pressure initially unresponsive states to enact social change for a putative public good, a TUSN works in the linkages between patrons and clients for uneven but reciprocal private goods. These relationships may begin as contractual, in the limited sense of purchasing professional services in the global marketplace, but over the long-term are likely to become clientelistic as each party gains greater knowledge of the 'grey' and illegal behaviours of the other. For example, uncivil elites may seek to manipulate global governance mechanisms that might otherwise hold them accountable, such as the extractive industries transparency initiative (EITI), by forging clientelistic relations with civil society and service providers (Furstenberg, 2018).

While clientelism is typically understood as 'specific contractual performance' at the national scale (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007: 7), it can also be extended to the transnational scale where the laundering of monies and reputations by uncivil elites takes place. Such *transnational clientelism* pertains to the 'discharging of order-making to brokers and intermediaries via an asymmetric distribution of benefits and co-optation' (Hönke, 2018: 110). Hönke, with Terray (1986) contrast the formal, 'air-conditioned' politics of transnational activism and corporate social responsibility projects in African mining ventures with the informal 'veranda politics', created by behind-the-scenes transnational clientelism. TUSNs extend from the veranda to air-conditioned spaces where they can launder their monies and reputations, engaging in what Tsourapas has called 'transnational co-optation' and 'transnational legitimation' (Tsourapas, 2021: 629, 631).

Practices

Third, TANs and TUSNs differ in terms of their social practices. While TANs name and shame governments that deny universal rights or violate international norms, TUSNs seek to launder the reputations of uncivil elites. We define reputation laundering as the process of 'minimizing or obscuring evidence of corruption and authoritarianism in the kleptocrat's home country and rebranding kleptocrats as engaged global citizens' (Cooley et al., 2018: 44). Three types of reputation laundering practices are enacted through these clientelistic networks.

The first is *philanthropy.* Critical studies of philanthropy have increasingly observed how charitable giving often takes place according to the conservative agenda of the powerful (Ghiradaradas, 2019). For TUSNs, such philanthropy includes funding and promoting domestic charities and foundations, partnering with international organisations, awarding international prizes, and funding cultural organisations and educational initiatives to cultivate a certain image of their country, capital, company, or selves (Koch, 2018). Similarly, donations by uncivil elites and their foundations to prestigious universities or scholarships can be earmarked for purposes that ignore politics altogether (Cooley et al., 2021). Given the considerable number of HNWIs in Eurasia and Africa, could not their philanthropic activities– even if undertaken for self-interested reasons– themselves effectively support TANs and more than balance out the activities of these TUSNs? Although not all Eurasian and African HNWIs can or should be considered 'uncivil elites', we can reasonably assume that most remain politically connected, precisely because of the predominantly clientelistic, if not kleptocratic, nature of states in both regions. For example, delving into the political associations of the five Kazakh citizens that made *Fortune*'s 2018 list of global billionaires, we would find that two are close presidential relatives, one a former presidential Chief of Staff, and other two close political allies and heads of mining and energy conglomerates (Forbes, 2018). Where African and Eurasian HNWIs are 'oppositionist', such as Boris Berezovsky or Mukhtar Ablyazov, they frequently have gained their wealth and status through their prior formal and/or informal positions in the regime of power in their home countries. In both Africa and Eurasia, it is political power or a connection to those in power, often familial, which enables access to opportunities for accumulation. For HNWIs, loss of political access almost always results in a loss of access economic opportunities.

In fact, recent data about HNWI philanthropic practices suggests this is not the case and that Eurasian elites refrain *altogether* from supporting TANs. The Knight Frank (2018) survey of wealth managers, helpfully broken down by their clients' region of origin, identified seven possible categories of philanthropy: education, the arts, public health, the environment, disaster relief, animal welfare, job training, and social issues. The latter is described as promoting social

issues and equality of rights. The leading four areas of global philanthropy are education, public health, the environment and the arts. As Table 1 shows, HNWIs from Russia/CIS tended to support most causes at rates similar to global averages. The biggest standout in these data is the figure indicating that zero HNWIs from Russia/CIS are deemed likely to support work on social issues/human rights. This compares with 37% in North America, 18% in Africa and a global average of 22%. Several factors could explain this complete lack of interest in supporting social issues and political rights in Eurasia. One may be the restrictions imposed on groups promoting social rights in Russia, which have included the 'foreign agents law' (2012) and 'undesirable organisations' law (2015) that criminalized dealings with certain Western-sponsored rights promoting groups (Skokova et al., 2018). Second, human rights groups, even local ones, are now irrevocably stigmatized, explicitly associated with the West and fears of unwanted sovereign infringement and geopolitical influence (Hartnell, 2018). Third, some Russian and Russified elite cultural may prefer funding direct causes that include children's charities and other social service providers that do not engage in advocacy targeted at the state (Schimpfössl, 2018; Mersianova et al., 2015). Indeed, even as it has restricted certain types of rights-based NGO activity, the Russian government has tried to encourage NGO activities in approved areas, such as children's charities and disability rights (Skokova et al., 2018). Furthermore, supporting the arts appears to reflect a belief that newly-rich Russians and ex-Soviets see themselves as rightful inheritors of the intelligentsia and nurturers of cultural capital (Schimpfössl, 2018: 112-118). Whatever the reasons, it seems clear that Eurasian HNWIs and ordinary citizens actively avoid funding groups that promote the advocacy causes most commonly associated with TANs. The practice of philanthropy works through a spatial politics of opening up elite spaces to Eurasian elites for private gains.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Table 1: Philanthropic Preferences of HNWIs, by Region: "What Philanthropic Causes are your Clients Most Likely to Support?"[2]

Philanthropic Causes	*Africa*	*Asia*	*Austral-Asia*	*Europe*	*Latin America*	*Middle East*	*North America*	***Russia & CIS***	**Global Average**
Education	58	66	44	44	50	64	63	***44***	**54**
Public Health	24	38	56	49	40	28	56	***56***	**43**
Environment	27	38	22	57	40	24	32	***33***	**34**
The Arts	6	11	69	47	10	20	34	***44***	**30**
Disaster Relief/ Emergencies	21	23	16	10	15	16	15	***11***	**16**
Job Creation/ Training	30	27	3	16	5	16	7	***11***	**14**

[2] Adapted and compiled from Knight Frank, *The Wealth Report 2018*, p. 83.

Animal Welfare/ Conservation	18	7	13	13	5	8	12	***11***	**11**
Social Issues (Equality/Human Rights)	18	19	41	20	15	28	37	***0***	**22**

In contrast, Africa HNWI philanthropic choices seem more aligned with those of HNWI elsewhere and there is no flagrant gap regarding social advocacy, as in the case of Russia and CIS. It is noteworthy that despite the significant growth of African philanthropy in recent years, the scholarly literature on the subject is almost non-existent, so major trends remain unclear. Although rules about foreign funding of local organisations (and activities of international NGOs) have faced restrictions in several African authoritarian states, the focus on health, education and job creation reflects real needs of many African societies, but also the desire to stay aloof from political matters. The exception here is the arts. While there are high profile exceptions, especially in South Africa, Nigeria, and Angola (as in the case of Isabel dos Santos highlighted below), the arts are residual in the philanthropic preferences of African HNWIs (this contrasts with the private acquisition of artworks, where African collectors are increasingly active, which may herald philanthropic ventures in the near future). More generally, few African HNWIs have a sustained record of long-term philanthropic work similar to, say British-Sudanese entrepreneur Mo Ibrahim. While firm conclusions are difficult on account of the dearth of empirical work as well as the diversity of African practices (Mati, 2017), philanthropy appears more peripheral to the legitimatization practices of African HNWIs than is the case with their Eurasian counterparts.

A second type of normative practice – *reputation management* – is more aggressive and targeted. It constitutes 'running an aggressive image-crafting and public relations campaign' (Cooley et al., 2018: 44-45). London's thriving private intelligence market is full of firms, staffed by former state intelligence and security officials, offering for-fee services to conduct intelligence-gathering and influence-shaping operations on a global scale. They offer services to kleptocrats of all regions. The London-based PR Bell Pottinger was finally disgraced and disbanded, after 30 years of image-polishing autocrats, including Augusto Pinochet of Chile, Belarus's Alexander Lukashenko, and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (Segal, 2018). But Bell Pottinger was merely a notorious tip of a very large iceberg. As an industry, reputation management brings together lawyers and private investigators to prevent scandal and defame both the uncivil elite's rivals and the journalists and activists who seek to investigate and potentially expose their corruption. What activists denote as 'strategic lawsuits against public participation' (SLAPPs) are also increasingly deployed in the UK to tie civil society and media organisations up in lengthy and uncertain court procedures which effectively stifle the free speech necessary for advocacy campaigns (Williams et al., 2020).

While the first two types of normative practices are defensive, the third is more offensive: *image crafting*. This is the selective and instrumental deployment of liberal norms often against broad-based rights agendas. The norm dynamics literature has identified the proliferation of 'norm antipreneurs' and 'competitive entrepreneurs', who seek to contest or discredit liberal entrepreneurs (Bloomfield, 2016). However, TUSNs appear to be less concerned with pushing back against liberal norms and more engaged in highlighting the superficial success of elites and their kleptocratic regimes. For example, this is frequently done by publicly touting reforms that are validated by achieving improved performance in global indices produced by international rankings and ratings agencies. Angola's campaign to increase its influence in Portugal after the latter's recession following the 2008 financial crisis ranged from outright

acquisition of companies and banks to the co-optation of influential members of the Portuguese elite (Ferreira and Soares de Oliveira, 2019; Verde, 2014), both through direct payments and indirect support (Soares de Oliveira, 2015; Costa et al. 2014). A dramatic case of how this works from Eurasia was the influential multi-billion-dollar Azerbaijan laundromat operation that targeted European lobbyists and politicians, including even the European Parliament's international election monitors (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 2017; Transparency International, 2017). Such practices can even extend beyond TUSN and into the realm of 'transnational repression' when their practices involve the systematic surveillance and extra-territorial coercion of exiled political dissidents and journalists (Tsourapas, 2021: 623-629).

Spatial Politics

Fourth, while both TANs and TUSNs are transnational in form, they differ spatially. TANs seek to open autocracies to the influence and advocacy of liberal social forces, while TUSNs seek to open up democracies to uncivil elites. According to Keck and Sikkink, TANs actively promote and connect a wide range of similarly principled international and domestic actors in a network without territory or hierarchy located largely in the third sector. They argue that this networking is facilitated by their commonly held principles and beliefs, but also the 1990s advent of new digital technologies that significantly lowered the costs of conducting the 'informational politics' necessary to enable transnational communication, investigate and define of social problems, and mobilize campaigns (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 9-10, 19-20).

However, authoritarian actors also work to accelerate time and compress space (Koch 2022a). Given the imperative to blend the political, economic, and social aspects of their activities, TUSNs forge networks across similar types of actors as TANs: international organisations, NGOs, think tanks, and local charities. However, these networking activities are mainly facilitated by global service professionals that uncivil elites contract to help facilitate this networking and image-crafting. Like their counterparts that assist with the laundering and co-mingling of funds, these service professionals offer perfectly legal services that seek to globalize the reputation of their clients and create space for them to reside, work and socialize in foreign democracies.

Thus, professional intermediaries are the critical nodal points in these TUSN networks. Grynaviski defines intermediaries as 'actors with political power owing to their position between societies' (2018: 18). Their political power is produced by the spaces they create between centres of power: 'the power of betweenness' (Grynaviski, 2018: 2) from wielding power in autocracies and maintaining their lives and dealings in democracies. These actors populate the nodes of networks of business and finance, education and culture, property and status. For 'uncivil elites' these democracy-related goods are difficult to access and require the assistance of professional intermediaries. For example, opening up elite private schools and universities to their children is a key task (Page, 2021). Their work, 'comprises a web of interrelated practices that go beyond the economic realm to encompass various social-networking and political techniques', including 'securing the right for the kleptocrat to reside overseas', as well as accessing education and professional networks for their family members and key allies (Cooley et al., 2018: 45). Thus, intermediaries work to close structural holes between uncivil elites and western metropolitan centres by passing the former through, or circumventing, the due diligence processes faced by them in law as Politically Exposed Persons (PEPs). Such practices have the effect of spatialising authoritarianism, making it 'something

found in all political contexts, which are bound to be characterized by multiple overlapping practices of government—liberal and illiberal' (Koch 2022b: 4).

The role of these intermediaries is vitally important in supporting three important globalizing trends for uncivil elites from Eurasia and Africa as they build their TUSNs. First, uncivil elites globalize their personhood by *enacting sovereign rights* to move to or reside in the West through one of three means. They often enter diplomatic service, which brings provides rights of residency and the personal benefits of diplomatic immunity. Prominent examples from Central Asia include: both Gulnara Karimova and Lola Karimova-Tillyaeva; the diplomatic service of President Nazarbayev's later estranged son-in-law Rakhat Aliyev as Kazakhstan's Ambassador to the OSCE in Vienna; and President Rahmon's first and third daughters Ozoda Rahmon and Rukhshona Rahmonova who worked respectively in the Tajik embassies in Washington, DC and London before taking on more senior appointments in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the case of African elites, long-term connections to the West mean that Western residency or even citizenship is broadly diffused amongst them, if with significant country-specific variations. At the same time, the use of diplomatic passports by members of the elite of some African countries, even while entirely unaffiliated to the diplomatic service, is widespread. The result is a dual-track strategy where Western residency/citizenship can be invoked for their intrinsic benefits as well as protection from the regime at home in case of a status reversal, while the use of diplomatic status continues to wield global protection.

Second, transnational uncivil elites secure citizenship or foreign residence through a prior spatial practice: participation in an *investor visa or second passport*. For example, according to data released by the UK Home Office, from 2008-2020, out of 12,649 investor residences awarded to foreign nationals under the Tier 1 program, a total of 54% went to Chinese and Russian investors combined with Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Egypt, Ukraine and Turkey other prominent countries of origin (Nesheim, 2021). Law firms and other professional services companies now offer bespoke citizenship-by-investment support, preparing documents for submission. A study of the program by Transparency International UK subsequently noted that 'substantial amounts' of corrupt wealth had been laundered through these countries through the program (TI, 2015). Despite this, Chinese, Kazakh, Turkish and Russian applicants all had below-average rejection rates of less than 7% over the period 2008-2020 (Nesheim, 2021). African elites already possessed significant, long-term links to Western countries, and especially to former metropolises. It is common for elites in Francophone Africa (especially Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Gabon) to possess a French passport or French residency, or for Angolan elites to hold Portuguese citizenship. In October 2020, the European Commission began legal action against Cyprus and Malta for 'selling' EU citizenship (EC, 2020). The expansion for the market for citizenship in recent years has led to the acquisition of new passports, especially associated to offshore financial centres (Surak, forthcoming).

Again, it is necessary to explore a regional variation here. The Knight-Frank (2018: 82) data suggest that Russian/Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) HNWIs are the most likely of all geographic groups to own second passports and to establish residences abroad. Eurasian HNWIs are more likely than not to already hold a second passport or nationality (58%) and to be actively consider acquiring an additional one (50%). 45% of those surveyed indicated that their clients are considering emigrating overseas, more than double the global average, with Switzerland, the UK and Monaco the top three destinations of choice. By contrast, African elites' answers to all three questions puts them slightly below the global average yet the UK remains a top destination. Indeed, the UK emerges as the leading destination of choice for permanent emigration for HNWIs of all regional backgrounds, and the US is a top destination

for all but HNWIs from Russia and CIS. This may reflect an over-representation of Anglophone and/or UK- and US-based companies in the Knight Frank survey.

Third, elites who have fallen out of favour with ruling regimes have secured *political asylum* in the West, on the grounds that they would likely face political persecution should they return back to their home autocracies. Prominent exiles include Kazakhstan's former Prime Minister Akezhan Kazahegldin and Maxim Bakiyev and the son of former Kyrgyz President and strongman Kurmanbek Bakiyev who fled Kyrgyzstan after street protests toppled his regime in 2010. After the end of her father's rule in Angola, Isabel dos Santos permanently left Angola to reside between Lisbon and London, two cities where she had longstanding ties. By early 2020, the pressure exercised by investigations, and especially the Luanda Leaks, led Dos Santos to move to Dubai, an increasingly common strategy for elites facing legal troubles in sub-Saharan Africa, although as of 2022, she still lives in London part of the year.

Fourth, the right to reside is typically accompanied by the *acquisition of real estate abroad*. Acquiring luxury real estate functions as a store of value, a possible vehicle for money laundering, and a means to enhance social prestige. Due diligence requirements in the leading global real estate markets for disclosing purchasers are relatively lax, with brokers in the United States, France, Canada, and Switzerland not obligated to either ascertain the beneficial owner of real estate buyers or to report all-cash transactions passing through them (Cooley and Sharman, 2017). In the UK, there is little evidence that agents perform the necessary checks on PEPs (Heathershaw et al 2021). The stability and liquidity of these markets make real estate investments a perceived reliable store of value, while all these markets legally allow purchases via Limited Liability Companies and offshore vehicles which exempt purchasers from capital gains taxes (if from an offshore entity) and conceal the identity of beneficial owners (Fernandez et al., 2016). Indeed, in the 'superluxury' markets of London and New York, networks of real estate brokers and lawyers who cater to the socio-cultural preferences of overseas clients, including from Eurasia and China, play a critical role in attracting continued investments from these areas and providing ancillary services, such as assisting with schooling placements or residency requirements (Fernandez et al., 2016: 2450).

The Knight Frank survey provides some indications that, as with second citizenships, Eurasian HNWIs also are more likely than their regional counterparts to acquire overseas real estate for both residence and investment purposes. Eurasian HNWIs (3.5), along with those from the Middle East, (4.0) rank at the top of total primary and secondary residences (not for investment purposes), and 39% expressed plans to purchase homes outside of their home country in the coming year. When asked about overseas real estate investments, 71% of Eurasian HNWI indicated that they have such assets in their portfolios, almost double the global average of 38%. The world-leading rates of luxury real estate investment by Eurasian HNWIs requires explanation. One possibility is that kleptocracy emerged in these states relatively recently, with independence in the 1990s followed by oil, gas**,** and commodities booms. It is the 'first generation' of Eurasian elites which are most prone to conspicuous consumption and the fear that the power of their family and its networks will not last. This is borne out by the volume of property purchases by PEPs from resource-rich Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. Networked sovereign elites and their business allies are also more likely to defeat anti-corruption actions brought against them by foreign governments. Despite remarkable similarities in the two cases, the exiled Zamira Hajiyeva from Azerbaijan lost her fight against an Unexplained Wealth Order (UWO) brought against her property by the British government while the incumbent Dariga Nazarbayeva and her son Nurali Aliyev, assisted by the London

law firm Mishcon de Reya, won theirs, severely damaging the UK's much-vaunted UWO system (Mayne & Heathershaw, 2022) These cases suggest TUSNs working on behalf of sovereign elites are far more likely to secure global citizenship for them than those professionals contracted by exiles.

Effects

Fifth and finally, TANs and TUSNs differ most dramatically in terms of their intended effects on sovereignty and regime security. TANs erode the sovereignty of the state, and particularly those governed by authoritarian regimes, by introducing global governance actors and networks to advance a supposedly universal set of largely liberal and progressive values. However, as the more recent literature on TANs has shown, they also include illiberal and reactionary 'countermovements' including the transnational gun rights lobby analysed and coalitions of conservative religious groups (Bob, 2012; McAllister, 2018). Sovereignty erosion and regime challenges, therefore, are not a matter of ideological or normative content ('liberal cosmopolitanism' or ideas of world government). By contrast, TUSNs seek to protect their own exclusive national sovereignty and regime authority at home, while eroding popular sovereignty in overseas liberal democracies by securing the right of residency and nurturing clientelistic ties and influence.

Cumulatively, these networks of elites, foundations, and private service professionals enhance the authority and legitimacy of uncivil elites, helping to blunt actual advocacy campaigns of TANs and rebrand them as 'global citizens'. Indeed, the interaction between these two sets of networks on a given issue often helps to set global narratives and frames (see figure 1). For example, when Kazakh government security forces fired upon oil workers who were demonstrating in the western city of Zhanaozen in December 2011, officially killing 14 protestors, it prompted two transnational campaigns: the first was a classic TAN campaign among human rights groups and advocates to demand an international investigation and accountability of the Kazakh government; but the second was an aggressive reputation laundering campaign by a TUSN that included Kazakh elites and their overseas allies and enablers. In correspondence sent to high-ranking EU officials in the incident's aftermath, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair– who had been contracted as a political advisor by the Kazakh government – justified the Kazakh government's decision not to permit an international investigation and provided advice to President Nazarbayev on the content of his invited address at Cambridge University (Michel, 2016).

Figure 1: Transnational Activist and Uncivil Society Compared: Analytical Assumptions

	Actors	**Mechanisms**	**Practices**	**Spatial politics**	**Effect**
TAN	Global activists; Local activists; Social Movements; NGOs	Transnational activism (Boomerang effect; Spiral model; Dynamic Multilevel Governance)	i) Claiming moral authority ii) Naming and shaming autocrats iii) Liberal norm diffusion to autocracies	*Creating non-state spaces within autocracies* International actors open up closed national	*National sovereignty challenged and elites held to account*

				spaces to become transnational	
TUSN	Sovereign elites; Private sector intermediaries and agents; Foundations and trusts	Transnational clientelism (enabled by professional intermediaries)	i) Purchasing moral authority (philanthropy) ii) Reputation management iii) Image crafting in democracies	*Creating space for uncivil elites in democracies* National actors access closed international spaces to become transnational	*Globalized elites empowered and challengers subordinated*

Two cases of transnational uncivil society networks

We illustrate some of the main themes of this paper by sketching out two comparable TUSNs both surrounding the daughters of then sitting presidents in Uzbekistan (Gulnara and Lola Karimova) and Angola (Isabel Dos Santos). Both amassed considerable power and wealth because of business connections enabled by their familial access to power and both actively contracted with enablers to recast their reputations as global philanthropists. In each case, we detail the actors and practices involved and bring out the spatial politics of authoritarian insertion. However, the mechanisms and effects of each network are more difficult to ascertain as it is precisely the exposure of these – often by TANs – that TUSNs seek to avoid. Indeed, both cases also show how the TUSNs built by these PEPs clashed with TANs seeking to expose their corrupt dealings, resulting in a significant reversal of the domestic and international status of these PEPs, now criminalized by the new dispensation. This speaks to a methodological challenge of studying TUSNs: that it is only in their partial or complete failure that actual cases become fully visible to empirical researchers.

Uzbekistan's Presidential Daughters

Firstly, we identify the networks cultivated by the two daughters of President Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan's first president whose repressive rule spanned Uzbekistan's first 25 years as an independent country. Karimov's governance was characterized by unrelenting repression, most notably the decision in May 2005 to instruct Uzbek security services to open fire on street protestors in the eastern Uzbek city of Andijon which led to hundreds of deaths. Uzbekistan under Karimov was characterised by attempted economic autarky, including currency inconvertibility, and an attempt to isolate Uzbekistan from its immediate neighbours and the world. During this time Karimov's first daughter, Gulnara Karimova, took full advantage of her political status and foreign-based contacts and networks to establish a vast formal and informal business empire, including the opaque conglomerate that was involved in the country's major energy deals.

However, starting in 2012, Karimova was dramatically implicated in a series of bribery scandals involving foreign telecommunications companies which had sought access to the Uzbek market. The companies, which included the Swedish-Finnish company Teliasonera, Russian- MTS and Dutch Vimpelcom, all reached settlements with the United States Department of Justice totalling $2.6 billion for violations of the Foreign Corrupt Practices act (United States Securities and Exchange Commission, 2019). SEC filings and investigative

reports revealed that the schemes collectively funnelled over $1 billion in bribe payments to Karimova through a group of close associates linked to offshore intermediaries and overseas banks in Latvia, Hong Kong and New York (OCCRP 2015). Karimova's overseas assets and real estate acquisitions in Switzerland and France were subsequently frozen by overseas courts, her diplomatic status as the country's representative to the UN in Geneva was revoked, and she was placed under house arrest in Uzbekistan while her associates were convicted of corruption and her business holdings were seized by the state. This dramatic downfall appears to have occurred with the approval of her father (Cooley & Heathershaw, 2017: 119-128).

Less known, but also illustrative of the TUSN phenomenon, has been the transnational activity of Lola Karimova-Tillyaeva, the younger daughter, who was married to Uzbek businessman Timur Tillyaev and estranged from her scandal-hit sister (Dell and Norton, 2015). An investigative report into the couple's Dubai-registered company SecureTrade found that its three main trading partners were opaque Scottish Limited Partnerships and that in "2013 and 2014 alone, 127 million dollars…was channelled through offshore bank accounts in the United Arab Emirates and Switzerland, through a complex financial scheme" (Bird et al., 2017). The funds were allegedly deposited in banks in the UAE in Switzerland, and also used to partially offset the purchase of a personal jet, luxury villa in California and a Los Angeles perfume boutique.

After Gulnara Karimova's arrest, Karimova-Tillyaeva emerged as a leading public spokesperson for the first family, zealously defending her father's rule and legacy and promoting herself as Uzbekistan's leading cultural ambassador and philanthropist both home and abroad. Karimova-Tillyaeva's overseas portfolio is saturated with classic global governance positions and activities. She served as Uzbekistan's ambassador to UNESCO in Paris from Uzbekistan from 2008 to 2018, and as president of Uzbekistan's Gymnastics Federation from 2005 to March 2018. Her family has acquired multiple luxury residences overseas, including a castle-style mansion in Beverly Hills called Le Palais that was purchased in 2013 for $32.74 million and was identified as the most expensive purchase in Los Angeles that year (Pinnacle List, 2013).

Philanthropy is a prominent part of Karimova-Tillyaeva's public profile. Following the death of her father, she is now concentrating on promoting the charities 'You Are Not Alone Foundation', The National Centre for the Social Adaptation of Children (NCSAC), The Harmonist, and the Islam Karimov Foundation. According to Karimova's website, which is replete with professional portraits of the glamorous Karimova-Tillyaeva, 'her flagship charities work with disadvantaged children and she also champions environmental causes. Fostering interethnic harmony through promoting cultural understanding is of paramount importance to her' (Karimova, 2021). Karimova-Tillyaeva frequents annual film festivals in Cannes and Venice and are now involved in documentary production and artistic commissions through The Harmonist, an organisation that campaigns to raise community awareness about water conservation, sanitation and hygiene. In a *Vanity Fair* feature on the charity, Lola Karimova-Tillyaeva was first introduced as UNESCO ambassador and philanthropist, but a few days later the online article was edited to note her family's ties to human rights abuses (Grinnhill, 2017). The Harmonist also commissioned French artist Marcos Lutyens to a 12-meter-tall aluminium tubing sculpture designed to reflect the urgency of water issues, but, according to a New York tabloid, has had little success finding a venue to display the work (Johnson, 2017).

In addition to these acts of philanthropy, Karimova-Tillyaeva has also engaged actively in reputation management. In 2011, she sued French online publication Rue89 for libel, objecting

to an article written by Augustin Scalbert, in which she was referred to as 'a daughter of a dictator'. The article's headline– 'AIDS – Uzbekistan cracks down at home but puts on show at Cannes'–accused Karimova-Tillyaeva of 'whitewashing' her country's image in the West, pointing to how she had organized a charity event to raise awareness about AIDS 'Uzbekistan 2020', while in Uzbekistan an activist was jailed for authoring a book (with the support of UN) on HIV prevention (Getty Images, 2009). The distinguished event attendees reportedly included royals, celebrities and actors, at least one of whom was alleged to have been paid a large fee by an agent to attend the event (Demytrie, 2011). On July 1st, 2011, the French court acquitted Scalbert and Rue89 of all charges. Despite Tillyaeva invoking character witnesses, including by a member of the European Commission's liaison office in Tashkent, to vouch for her reputation, the case backfired as it drew attention to the human rights violations in Uzbekistan and the court found the use of the word 'dictator' in reference to Karimov to be warranted (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Following the court's decision, the European Union denied that it had provided €3.7 million in funding to a charity linked to Tillyaeva and reportedly removed from the website of its liaison office in Uzbekistan a listing of that charity as "the key partner/main beneficiary" of an EU grant (Vogel 2011). These reputation laundering activities were perhaps less about illiberal norm diffusion than crafting Uzbekistan's image as a modern and normal state. But these TUSN practices faced resistance from TANs and investigative journalists.

Isabel dos Santos, Africa's Richest Woman

Isabel dos Santos, the daughter of oil-rich Angola's former President Jose Eduardo dos Santos and Africa's richest woman, is another HNWI who has cultivated her own TUSN. Born in the former Soviet Union during her father's exile in the early 1970s, Dos Santos' coming of age coincided with the end of the Cold War. At this stage the MPLA, Angola's ruling party since independence, abandoned Marxism and embraced capitalism and a form of electoral authoritarianism. In 2002, the party emerged victorious in the country's long civil war. In short order, a major oil boom and a strategic partnership with China gave Dos Santos, now in control of Africa's third largest economy, vast resources and the political space to make choices about national reconstruction without donor interference (Soares de Oliveira, 2015a). Despite a ubiquitous language of broad-based development, the president and ruling party theorised the need for building a capital-owning 'national bourgeoisie' which provided the rationale for concentrating the benefits at the top of the regime's political and military structure. Oil prices collapsed in 2014, and the oil-based economy remained one of the least diversified in the world.

The building of Dos Santos's vast wealth is coterminous with Angola's era of crony capitalism that flourished during the post-2002 reconstruction decade. After her education and early work experience in the UK, Dos Santos returned to Angola in the late 1990s. Her initial business interests – a luxury nightclub and a waste disposal company – soon mushroomed into every major sector of the economy, and would within a decade encompass telecommunications, banking, diamonds, real estate and cement, among many others. Her businesses consistently benefited from state-supported credit and she was a beneficiary of new opportunities (e.g., the liberalization of telecoms) and paired investments by Angolan state enterprises at home and abroad as well as being the non-negotiable partner with foreign investors. While Dos Santos strenuously claims to be a self-made businesswoman who did not benefit from political connections (famously extolling her young self's business sense to the *Financial Times*: 'I sold chicken eggs when I was six'), this was an untenable statement even before the current scrutiny (Burgis, 2013; Freedberg et al., 2020). Her business interests were premised on the resources and political support of the Angolan state, but soon spanned the globe (Pitcher and Rodrigues

Sanches, 2019). Its centrepiece was Portugal, where she became one of the major foreign investors. Through two holding companies, she acquired stakes in the leading telecoms and oil groups in the country as well as two of its major banks and in myriad other prestigious firms. She was courted by politicians and businessmen and benefited from flattering treatment in Angolan-owned Portuguese media. In addition to these clientelistic ties she also contracted top-tier professional services firms. Her interests were upheld by her attorneys at PLMJ, one of Portugal's top legal firms, as well as Uri Menendez, a leading Spanish law firm (Liz, 2020). Top consulting firms McKinsey, Ernst and Young and the Boston Consulting Group also worked for Dos Santos' companies. According to *The New York Times*, PWC acted as her 'accountant, consultant, and tax adviser' (Forsythe, 2020).

Dos Santos's craving for international respectability led to intense efforts at reputation management. Much of this was business-centred and aimed at obfuscating her political connections and recognising her status as a 'normal' businesswoman, but philanthropy came to play a growing role. As the president of Angola's Red Cross from 2016 to 2018, for instance, she often articulated messages of social concern, and her speeches invariably broach matters of female empowerment. However, the aspect of philanthropy most associated with Dos Santos is the arts. Her role as a patron of the arts was inherited from her husband, the Belgian-Congolese businessman Sindika Dokolo. Until his death in a diving accident in Dubai in October 2020, Dokolo was the owner of the largest collection of African modern and contemporary art, as well a major collector of African traditional art and Western art. Through his Dokolo Foundation, part of this collection was shown in prestigious venues, such as the 2007 Venice Biennial. In 2015, Dokolo was given the gold medal of the city of Porto, where he was expected to establish his foundation headquarters (Sousa, 2020). The title of his *New York Times* obituary, 'Crusader for the return of African art', attests to his high profile in the art world (Sandomir, 2020). Dos Santos was invariably present at Dokolo's art-related activities and this constituted a major entry point to international networks of respectability.

These efforts appeared successful for a long time. Until circa 2012, Dos Santos kept a low media profile, but had long been a densely networked presence in international elite circles. The raising of her profile led to her participating at Davos and Africa-related business conferences, and she embraced the university circuit, with invitations including the LSE and Oxford University (she spoke at the LSE in 2017 but cancelled her Oxford presence on account of her fourth pregnancy). Dos Santos has deployed a wide range of professional frames in her speaking engagements. Contrary to most other Angolan elites, she is multilingual and particularly at ease in the Anglo-American world, having been educated at St Paul's School for Girls and Kings' College London and having worked at PWC. In her speeches and conference appearances, she articulates a broadly pro-market and private-sector friendly agenda, seeking to define a space for African entrepreneurs in the global economy, regularly deploying her status as an 'African woman' to highlight both her achievement and the many obstacles she claims to face (e.g., Balobun, 2020). Dos Santos has also invoked race as a purported motivation behind criticism levelled against her in the West, lamenting on Twitter the "prejudice" and "racism" of Portuguese critics whose approach harks back to "the time of the colonies" (Dos Santos, 2020). This illustrates the extent to which transnational uncivil society networks are non-ideological in their instrumentalization of ostensibly liberal norms of empowerment and equality. As was the case with the Obiang Prize mentioned at the start of this article, the postcolonial signifiers of third wordlist, South-South solidarity can also be invoked, however hypocritically, to deflect criticism and fortify networks.

Isabel dos Santos's star has faded after her father's exit from power in September 2017. His

successor, President João Lourenço, quickly unleashed a so-called fight against corruption which disproportionately focused on the former president's family. By November 2017, Dos Santos had been fired as CEO of Sonangol, Angola's national oil company and one of the largest firms in Sub-Saharan Africa. While other members of the Dos Santos clique managed to placate the new president by genuflecting to him and repatriating some assets, Dos Santos's unapologetic and even adversarial tone, especially on social media, contributed to further deterioration in relations with Lourenço. Criticism of her oligopolistic (in some sectors, monopolistic) role in the Angolan economy and investigations of her tenure at Sonangol culminated in an Angolan asset freeze in late 2019.

In January 2020, revelations about her worldwide business interests, including close relations with reputable service providers, emerged in the Luanda Leaks based on hundreds of thousands of documents pertaining to Dos Santos's businesses (Hallman et al., 2020). The ICIJ exposed a global network of offshore companies from the USA to Malta and from Hong Kong to Mauritius, as well a vast network of service providers, including top banks, management consultants and legal firms, that were central to Dos Santos's operations. This investigative effort by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) has led to an asset freeze in Portugal (hitherto, with London, one of Dos Santos's home bases) and US sanctions that bar her and her immediate family from accessing the United States (Fitzgibbon, 2021). Sensing the changing winds, Dos Santos had already shifted many of her assets to Dubai in 2019 and allegedly travels on her Russian passport (Soares de Oliveira, 2020). Her massive wealth notwithstanding, she is now a diminished figure, though President Lourenço's deep unpopularity and Angola's continuing economic troubles makes it hard to speculate about the regime's trajectory and the duration of Dos Santos exile. This trajectory perfectly illustrates the extent to which the network of actors, clientelistic mechanisms and reputation laundering practices of TUSNs emerge from control of a sovereign state and how these can fast erode when that scaffolding is removed.

Conclusions

This paper has identified Transnational Uncivil Society Networks as a formation distinct from both the ideal-type liberal TANs of Keck & Sikkink (1998) and the conservative countermovements (Bob, 2011; McAllister, 2018). TUSNs emerge from dynamics of clientelism and are made distinct by their form of spatial politics: extending the power of an authoritarian elite into the territory and authority of a liberal democracy. Both public and private sector actors combine in reciprocal but hierarchical relations of patrons and clients. These clients, often professional intermediaries based in liberal democracies, facilitate philanthropy, 'reputation management' and attempts at performing modernity and globality. Their ultimate objective is the creation of globalized elites who claim sovereign power at home while being enmeshed in transnational networks overseas. The effectiveness of TUSNs in achieving these goals, the specific activities of intermediaries within these networks, and the outcomes for sovereignty and geopolitical competition remain a subject for future research.

We have also gone beyond concept formation. In a recent paper, Henriksen and Seabrooke conclude that, 'we need firm empirical studies of what elites actually drive transnational policy networks, how policy agendas emerge, and how elites influence them' (2020: 13). It is increasingly apparent that transnational civil society is a domain of contestation, not just between different liberal articulations of globalization and conservative ripostes, but where transnational uncivil society networks defend unquestioned sovereignty at home while exerting

influence and burnishing their reputations in liberal democracies. The practices and mechanisms of such spatial politics, enabled by professional intermediaries, are found in multiple residences and citizenship rights and buttressed with formal posting (often carrying diplomatic immunity) and very public philanthropic acts and reputation laundering events. TUSNs are a global phenomenon, as illustrated by common features visible from Angola to Uzbekistan. However, the Knight Frank data point to regional variation and a 'first generation' effect in former Soviet Eurasia.

Finally, in that the spatial politics and effects of TUSNs extend beyond personal benefits to political aims, the concept offers a distinct intervention on the global forms of authoritarian and kleptocratic power. Crucially, it takes us beyond the Them and Us framing that is so common in the study of autocracies, as TUSNs, critically, do not just involve actors who identify as authoritarian or their agents. Most intriguingly, these two types of networks are increasingly engaging one another as anti-corruption and human rights TANs target money- and reputation-laundering by members of TUSNs in their activism while TUSNs act against transnational activists through private investigators, the issuance of INTERPOL warrants, regional policing mechanisms, and the courts (Cooley & Heathershaw, 2017). However, the lines of contestation are transnational networks, not borders. As Nathalie Koch remarks, 'the creative energies which these actors employ to realise their authoritarian ambitions are staggering' (2022a, online first). This mixing of private and public across borders and the considerable advantage in material resources of TUSNs, suggests that the battle between sovereignty-challenging and sovereignty-enhancing actors has only just begun.

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