Power to the People?

(Con-)tested civil society in search of democracy
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Preface

This volume is based on the conference *Power to the People? (Con-) Tested Civil Society in Search for Democracy*, held in Uppsala, Sweden, March 23-24, 2010. The conference was the first in a series of four yearly conferences, aiming to explore the formation of civil society internationally and its relation to democratisation and development. As such, it forms part of the project *Outlook on Civil Society*, which is a cooperation between Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation.

Over the past decades, civil society has been considered increasingly important to socio-economic development and in political mobilisation, perhaps especially so in developing countries. This is partly an effect of neo-liberal reforms that have decreased state responsibility in certain economic as well as political issues, instead increasing the role of not only private actors but also non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, the democracy reforms of the last decades and the heightened focus on human rights have strengthened the political agency of civil movements and organisations, which often have turned into driving critics of precisely the lack of democracy in governance. In an era of globalisation, non-governmental organisations, social movements, and other forms of civil organizations have extended their contacts across national borders, in a process promoting the creation of transnational civil networks. Many are the hopes that this vitalisation of civil society will strengthen societal development in a democratic direction, with increased popular participation.

*Outlook on Civil Society* aims at advancing the Swedish research front on civil society in developing countries, and at strengthening research-based knowledge about civil society among Swedish actors within international development cooperation. Furthermore, the project strives to
be a bridge-builder between these two different spheres of expertise, and provide real possibilities for mutual exchange.

During this first conference in our series, we explored the differences in how civil society is constituted in the various regions of the world and the implications such differences have for the ways people strive to achieve political change, especially in the context of present late neo-liberal era.

The two-day conference attracted about one hundred participants from all continents – researchers, development practitioners, policy makers, activists and students – who gave rich and comparative perspectives on the conference theme in presentations and discussions.

The articles in this volume are edited versions of the keynote presentations at the conference, as well as short versions, sometimes abstracts, of all papers presented in the eight parallel sessions that were held. Each of the sessions is introduced by its chairperson.

We are proud and happy to be able to offer to our readers this broad collection of explorative articles, depicting and discussing the complexities of civil society formation across the world.

Uppsala, December 2010

*Mia Melin and Heidi Moksnes, editors and project co-ordinators*

**Note**

1. The project is based at the Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development at Uppsala University and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. It is funded by Sida between 2009 and 2013. The formal project name is *Civil Society in International Development: Research and Practice.*
Introduction

Heidi Moksnes

During the last few decades, ‘civil society’ has acquired an increasingly heavy load of expectations to carry. The presence of a strong civil society is hoped not only to strengthen political participation and democratisation, but also more generally to promote positive social change. Such expectations govern the design of policies and programs, not least in international development cooperation. With the present volume and the conference that preceded it we are raising questions about the concept of civil society. Does it really have universal bearing? Or is it a Western concept expressing mainly Western ideals?

‘Civil society’ is commonly imbued with a series of normative assumptions linking the notion both to the protection of human rights and to democratisation. People’s participation in civil society is regarded as the exercise of their civil and political rights to freely form associations, freely express their opinions, to pursue their interests, etc. Civil society groups are also expected to exert pressure on the state to grant and protect these and other rights.

Furthermore, the ideal civil society is considered to promote democracy by manifesting civic engagement, having internally egalitarian and transparent structures, promoting democratic ideals, and by standing free from state influence. Civil society groups are also expected to promote democratic state structures by demanding transparency and accountability of governments, and by pressing for popular participation in political decision-making on different levels.

It is important to note that notions and expectations of civil society commonly differ between liberals and people from the left. Liberals, in the line of de Tocqueville, often emphasise the role and capacity of civil society to function as a counterweight to the state and its expected drive towards authoritarianism. With a vibrant civil society, citizens are able to form a shared identity and bonds of solidarity, enabling them
to resist state encroachments on their fundamental liberties. To further limit the domain of the state, neo-liberals hold that civil society, together with market actors, should take over functions that formerly were state responsibility, such as service delivery.

On the left, emphasis has been rather on the capacity of civil society – in the form of social movements and organisations – to strengthen the positive potential of the state by pushing it towards reforms that increase social equality and substantive democracy. Moreover, civil organisations are described as contesting the definition of rights and to whom they should apply, extending the definition to include social, economic and cultural rights, such as the right to difference for minorities. However, critics from the left, in the tradition of Marx as well as Gramsci, have argued also that civil society is a sphere of conflict. They point out that there are important differences between groups within civil society, reflecting varying resources and sometimes colliding interests, such as those between social classes, or women and men, where privileged groups may come to dominate the arena.

In spite of such differences between liberals and the left, the two strands still coincide in holding out the potentially positive capacity of civil society for popular civic mobilisation and for countering repressive or self-interested states. In this volume, the authors explore the conditions under which such expectations on civil society may or may not be well-founded. How do people actually go about pursuing their interests in different places across the world? This question implies an investigation of the very form of relation between the state and the people living within its territory.

Arguably, the notion of civil society depicts a relation between state and people that is constituted in a specific way. First, it implies that people regard themselves as political subjects in relation to a state, and as autonomous individuals, carrying certain rights, which they demand from the state and to some extent expect the state to give. That is, they regard themselves as ‘citizens’. ‘Civil society’, then, is constituted by such citizens, in the sphere between the individual and the state. Commonly, the notion also entails a special form of relation between individuals within society. In an ideal civil society people engage in horizontal networks to
promote shared concerns. They are expected to act freely, without constraints from the state or other individuals (whether family or religious leaders), and to form associations that bridge divisions based on gender, religion or ethnicity.

This notion is modelled from a historically specific condition: the emergence of the modern European/Western nation-states and the new form of relationship that evolved between people – and with the state – within the urban population, especially of the middle and upper classes. In contrast to the rural communities and their webs of social and moral obligations, these urban residents acquired a social life with more room for individual interest; by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies described as a difference between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. ‘Civil society’ imagines this kind of individuals and interaction, but generalised and accentuated with idealised expectations.

However, defining civil society in this way excludes a considerable array of the ways people throughout the world organise themselves and their concerns. Especially in societies where the state has little to offer in terms of social security systems, services, or protection – whether due to lacking resources, interest or armed conflicts – people rely on their own safety nets and means to promote their well-being. Thus, networks of kin, communal structures, or patron-client bonds are often fundamental building blocks of society. While definitely constituting a sphere between the individual and the state, these forms of organisation are usually not considered ‘civil society’. Regarded as too communal, fluid or hierarchic, they are rarely held to manifest a form of civic engagement that can promote positive social change. As a consequence, there is little attention paid to this sphere of people’s lives. The theoretical as well as practical problems that this narrow and normative use of the concept raises is discussed by several authors in this volume.

Notably, these organisational forms commonly – and increasingly – co-exist with, or are integrated with, forms through which people do turn to the state for various concerns, defining themselves as its citizens and as holding certain rights. However, since the structure and dynamics of states differ highly over the world, so do the form and the degree to which people engage with them. This, in turn, affects the formation of the state.
As many scholars have noted, the state is not separate from (civil) society, but formed through the way various groups interact with it, the aspirations those groups have, and the state’s response to those interests and demands, as well as the measures it takes to restrict and control. In this interaction, some groups, or regions, have more influence over the way the state is formed than others.

Civil society itself – however we define it – and its constituents, the ‘citizens’, are partly or largely constituted through their form of interaction with the state, and the ‘rules’ of this interaction. What kinds of demands are responded to by the state, at its various levels and through its various agencies? And how should these demands be expressed in order to be effective? Through violent public manifestations, alliances with political parties or strong men, or by forming NGOs with international donor support? And what kinds of social formations and demands are not listened to, or even repressed? Unions? Religious groups?

Several of the contributions to this volume look at the implications such differences have for the expectations the status of citizenship is imbued with, and the ways people strive to achieve political change. The authors investigate what forms of social formation are promoted, or discouraged. Furthermore, they look at the consequences for democratic civic participation and influence on decision-making.

Differences in perceptions of civil society are in part related to experiences from different regions. In the United States – as discussed by Lars Trägårdh – there is a tradition of regarding civil society as a counterweight to the state, ensuring that the state does not expand its claim or sphere of command. This perception, he argues, contrasts significantly with the experiences and discourses of the Northern European countries, for example Sweden, where a strong welfare state co-exists with a broad-based and vital civil society.

In Latin America, civil movements have been active drivers in the change from highly authoritarian and repressive states to more democratic regimes. This has inspired scholars to analyse how people, through different forms of social mobilisation, claim and diversify the public sphere, whereby also previously marginalised groups constitute themselves as rights-bearing citizens, demanding recognition and democratic participa-
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In this volume, Evelina Dagnino addresses this development and the different forms of participatory democracy that have developed in various Latin American countries, but also the neo-liberal restrictions on actual civil society influence. The broadened notions of citizenship employed by social movements on the continent are further discussed in the papers of the session on Latin American *ciudadanía*.

In Asia, as shown by Nandini Sundar, social scientists discuss the variety of interests represented by different actors within civil society. In spite of the highly diversified continent, the categories of actors are similar to those found in Europe and elsewhere, many promoting democratic change. However, not all civil society actors hold democratic aspirations. This, as noted by Sundar, sometimes results in the *state* representing the more progressive party. The papers of the session on religious discourses in Asia discuss specifically whether religious adherence is blocking or promoting democratic change, exemplifying with different Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian organisations.

For the Arab World, the history of the emergence of ‘civil society’ is perhaps particularly complex. Hamdi Hassan provides a critical analysis of how the colonial formation of Arab and Middle Eastern states, including today’s authoritarian and coercive state rule, defines and restricts the space for civil associations. Describing both pro- and contra-democratic forces within civil society, Hassan concludes that there are definite potentials for Arabic civil society to promote democratic change, but little actual prospects “for the time being”. The experiences of civil society actors to counter authoritarian rule are further investigated in the papers of the session on the role of Middle East civil society in democratisation.

In Africa, where the most forceful civil society actors some decades ago consisted of the anti-colonial nationalist movements, many of the present civil society actors find themselves struggling against the inheritors of those movements, which today exercise authoritarian state rule. In his article on Zimbabwe, Amin Kamete shows how civil society organisations may openly defy and challenge such authoritarian rule. Today, civil society is commonly associated with non-governmental organisations, financed by – and dependent on – international donors, and choosing to participate in state provided arenas to exert some degree of influence. Duncan Okello
discusses the challenges such engagement entails for the organisations in their strivings to accomplish democratic change. He also notes that the engagement with states and donors has locked civil organisations in a position of ‘non-partisanship’, inhibiting broad political mobilisation and ambitions for effective political influence. The variety of African civil formations and the influences on political governance are further elucidated by the papers within the session on African governments and civil society.

The papers of the four last sessions of the volume discuss more thematic concerns relating to civil society, outlined in the introduction to each session. Thus, one session explores the presence of contradictory interests within social society, with examples from different countries. Another session addresses how such contradictory interests are partly defined by gender, and discuss what scope there is for women to strengthen their political agency by engaging in civil organisations. The next session examines the highly normative expectations embedded in the notion of civil society, and whether or not certain social attachments can be defined as ‘uncivil.’ The papers of the last session discuss civil society actors engaged in international development cooperation, and the influence donor demands have on local and national civil organisations.

In all, the volume offers broad regional comparisons, country-specific case studies, and in-depth analyses on how to understand the varying ways civil society is formed. Together, the contributions depict the immense width of how people engage politically, outside the state and political parties, to pursue their concerns. However, and perhaps surprisingly, the contributions also make evident striking similarities across the world. This, of course, reflects the increasing transnational exchange that takes place between collective social actors, influencing not only the formulation of discourses and strategies, or the organisational format, but also the very agendas and aims. Moreover, the similarities reflect the increasing homogeneity of how states are governed, politically as well as economically, furthered by the governance models promoted by multilateral banks and donors within development cooperation. The increasing ‘ngo-isation’ of civil society actors on all continents is an evident outcome of all these processes.
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‘Civil society’, thus, does appear to have significant global bearing today. Furthermore, while civil groupings certainly have different objectives, the striving for democratic change is now a goal found across continents.

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Contested notions of civil society

Lars Trägårdh

The recent rise to prominence of the concept of ‘civil society’ is related to a broad set of challenges to national democracy and the welfare state, both from above – the fall of communism, globalisation, the European Union, the dominance of neo-liberalism – and from below – modern individuals and collectivities less inclined to defer to authorities, experts and elites. This has entailed a structural transformation that sometimes is described as a move from government to governance (Taylor 2005; Trägårdh 2007). Representatives of the state – elected officials as well as civil servants – have increasingly sought to govern in cooperation with civil society actors, ranging (using the wide definition utilised in this paper) from traditional unions, new social movements, foundations, and voluntary organisations to national business organisations, multinational companies, and transnational non-governmental organisations, NGOs.

For some, this shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ embodies the hope of erecting new political opportunity structures that will allow for more points of entry for community interests. For others, however, the reference to ‘governance’ is a rhetoric, which “dissolves notions of power and agency…” and is even “the burial ground of accountability” (Taylor 2005, p 3, quoting Newman 2001 and Perry and Moran 1994; Rhodes 1997). Yet, while governance has competing interpretations, it is important not to lose sight of the shared contemporary context for this debate. The concept of civil society, such as it is most commonly used in the academic literature as well as by activists and practitioners, is firmly embedded in what has been called an ‘Anglo-American narrative’ on state-civil society relations.

In this theoretical and normative tradition (Somers 1995a, 1995b), civil society is associated with civic and communitarian virtues such as altruism, charity, volunteering, philanthropy, religion, non-profit organisations, and a host of activities deemed to serve the common good and providing public benefits, such as education, healthcare, and social
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welfare. The state tends, by contrast, to be viewed with suspicion as a threat to the autonomy of civil society and the freedoms and liberties of the citizens. In a logic that follows from this binary and oppositional conception, it is also argued that a large public sector will ‘crowd-out’ civil society based initiatives and that such a ‘colonisation’ by the state constitutes a threat to the vitality and survival of civil society.

A core purpose of this paper is to challenge the universal applicability of this conceptual narrative by showing that such an understanding fits poorly with several of the countries in the world that exhibit the most vibrant civil societies – the Nordic ones, and particularly Sweden. Indeed, in these countries large civil societies co-exist not only with a large state and public sector, but also with close and deeply interconnected relations between the state and civil society that go well beyond the kind of dynamic captured in theoretical notions that assume an oppositional or competitive dimension, such as ‘crowding-out’ or ‘colonisation.’

To account for this empirical fact this paper instead puts forward a ‘neo-Hegelian’ theory of state-civil society relations as an alternative to the dominant Anglo-American account. On this neo-Hegelian view, civil society is certainly seen as legitimate and important, but it is less tightly linked to unselfish, altruistic and communitarian virtues. Instead, civil society is first and foremost conceived of as the arena, in which individuals and groups seek to advance particular political and private interests, satisfy needs and desires, and to realise hopes and ambitions. It pictures state-civil society as a dynamic, interactive, and productive process, rather than as a counter-productive zero-sum game.

The premise here is that ‘civil society’ is a concept that is powerful precisely because it is always normatively and ideologically loaded and never politically innocent. A preliminary purpose of this paper is, then, to lay bare the extent to which the central notions that inform the promotion of the ‘non-profit sector’ as well as the critique of the (welfare) state are ideologically embedded in the Anglo-American theoretical narrative. The analysis then proceeds by elaborating an alternative account that takes its departure from Hegel’s analysis – while also making a few new distinctions that align his theory with the historical experience of the Nordic countries (accounting for the ‘neo’ in the notion of ‘neo-Hegelian’).
Sweden’s particular historical experience is examined in more detail in order to provide an empirical account of the nature of the links between the state-civil society nexus and contemporary political culture. The paper ends by making a few theoretical reflections based on the analysis of the Swedish case that serve to flesh out this account of the neo-Hegelian theory of state/civil society relations.¹

The idea of civil society: Historical roots and ideological legacies

Hegel and a range of other Enlightenment thinkers are now often acknowledged as important in laying the groundwork for modern thinking about civil society. They were reflecting on the crisis of that time, one that was associated with the breakdown of the old feudal regime that simultaneously challenged the political, economic and social order of things. With the emergence of the modern market society and more democratic political regimes, a space opened up for political pluralism and new forms of economic and political interest organisations. At the same time, the collapse of the Old Regime also created new social tensions, throwing many individuals into a state of uncertainty and creating a need for associations that provided new forms of collective identity as well as social insurance against the vagaries of the dynamic but risk filled market society. This rich associational life came to fill the space that existed in the new age of the nation state, between the individual, who was the basic unit in liberal political and economic theory, and the nation, which was the new fundamental collective unit, replacing the feudal structures.

Yet to understand the current zeitgeist – and hence ultimately why we have to present Hegel’s ideas as challenging rather than providing a basis for current ways of thinking – we need to look at much more recent events and sources of ideas. One point of origin was the politics of the cold war, or to be more precise its endgame. Dissidents in Eastern Europe deployed civil society as their rallying cry in the struggle against the communist state in countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia. In this reading, civil society was conceived of as the realm of ‘authentic’ human relationships, while ordinary politics tied to the state – including the welfare state – was seen as always tending to corrupt natural community and threaten liberty. This is a legacy that still resonates in post-communist Eastern Europe,
where citizens appear relatively inclined to trust the market’s capacity to ensure freedom and prosperity and in civil society to provide community and social security, compared to their Western counterparts.

On the other side of the Atlantic, a similar analysis was launched by Peter Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, whose 1977 book *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* – relaunched in 1996 with an explicit reference to ‘civil society’ in the title – was one of the first and most seminal elaborations of a principled critique of the welfare state (Berger and Neuhaus 1977, 1996). Berger and Neuhaus argued that the welfare state had undermined the institutions of civil society such as the family, the neighbourhoods, churches and other faith-based institutions that traditionally had provided a sense of community as well as a measure of security in times of trouble. In their view, the growth of the welfare state disempowered already poor and disadvantaged people further by making them dependent on the state.

The emphasis on the crucial role that voluntary associations played for economic prosperity, political vitality, and social community was not limited to conservative critics of the welfare state, however. Operating in the Tocquevillean tradition, many American academics and public intellectuals of a more left-of-centre stripe celebrated civil society and the ‘habits of the heart’ formed through civic engagement (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton 1985, 1991; Etzioni 1993; Lasch 1991; Wolfe 1989; Putnam 2000). A third point of origin for the concept of civil society was the launching, or re-launching, of the concept by politically left-leaning intellectuals in Europe and the US who operated within a neo-Marxist tradition. Scholars such as Jürgen Habermas (1989, 1996), Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato (1992), John Keane (1988a, 1988b), and Michael Walzer (1991), to mention only a few, worried about what Habermas described as the increasing colonisation by the state of the ‘life world’ of civil society. They tended to see in the so-called new social movements a hope for an invigorated civil society, capable of revitalising and strengthening democratic political culture from below.

In this tradition, we do, in fact, encounter Hegel. Cohen and Arato’s magnum opus refers to Hegel’s ground-breaking nineteenth century analysis of state and civil society. However, they significantly departed
from Hegel’s model in one key respect. Whereas Hegel distinguished between only two spheres, namely the state and civil society, Cohen and Arato chose to develop a three-sphere model in which the market too was conceived of as constituting its own sphere. This was consistent with their Habermasian anxiety that civil society as a ‘life world’ was facing two threats; market forces on the one hand and the colonising state on the other. However, this was a move that also brought their analysis into measurable harmony with the politically more conservative interpretations coming from Eastern European dissidents and American communitarians.

To be sure, Cohen and Arato were far from promoting the a-political or even anti-political visions of civil society that were common among conservatives. Nor did they subscribe to the kind of unbridled anti-statism that characterised right-wing interpretations of the idea of civil society. Rather, they envisioned civil society as a sphere of citizen action and grassroots movements and as an active Habermasian public sphere. They were not hostile to the universal provision of social rights such as healthcare through the organs of the democratic state. However, purging the sphere of civil society of the troublesome market, which was marked by the morally dubious pursuit of profit and self-interest, left Cohen and Arato’s definition of civil society – the family, the voluntary associations, social movements, and public forms of communication – free of the odours of the market society and thus more easily romanticised in terms of community, social movements, and ‘positive’ political and collectivist values.

From this point of view, it is symptomatic that in the Anglo-American world, civil society is often treated as synonymous with the so-called non-profit sector, that is, a sector defined specifically as distinct from the market. It is a definition that corresponds with the Internal Revenue Service tax-code, which provides significant benefits and privileges to independent entities that do not distribute profits to owners. The most privileged, the so-called 501(3)(c) organisations, are religious institutions and organisations that are devoted to charitable work; the least favoured are those associations that engage in political advocacy or in other ways promote self-interest.

In the Hegelian scheme, on the other hand, civil society is the sphere in which private interests, needs, and desires play themselves out. Inspired by his reading of Adam Smith, Hegel embraced the market as a legiti-
mate, necessary, and ultimately positive force for enabling the private pursuit of gain, pleasure, and self-expression in addition to its laudatory aggregate effect on societal wealth creation. At the same time, however, he argued that the internal contradictions of civil society, including poverty, atomistic individualism, and social disorder, could never be resolved by civil society itself.

This is a vision of civil society that stands in sharp contrast to the communitarian reading that has come to dominate in the more recent past. Instead of ascribing to civil society social virtues such as voluntarism, altruism, communitarian impulses, non-profit economic imperatives, freedom and liberty, etc, Hegel had a far more cold-eyed view of civil society. By retaining the market squarely within civil society, Hegel made clear that political parties, unions, voluntary associations, and even what is today called non-profits, ultimately were vehicles for asserting a particular interest, not the common good. They were not there simply to ‘do good,’ they did not embody some kind of different moral logic or rationality that set them apart from for-profit businesses. And this was as it should be – a necessary dimension that had both positive and negative effects.

Because civil society, in spite of its capacity to create wealth and promote private interest, could never resolve its internal contradictions, Hegel also emphasised the crucial role of the state. Only the state could promote and safeguard a greater purpose of rationality, by which Hegel meant the “unity and interpenetration of universality and individuality” (Hegel 1991, p 276). Thus, for Hegel the state was not a threat to individual freedom; quite the contrary, it was only through membership in the state and through the superior rationality of the state that the highest form of individual freedom was made possible. In concrete daily life, this merging of individual freedom and the state’s universalist rationality, was mediated and realised in what Hegel called the ‘corporations.’ These were the various associations that individuals, otherwise isolated as atoms in the market system, joined to pursue common interest. In the very act of joining, the individual began the journey to transcend self-interest, forge a social identity, and begin to contribute to the welfare of society as a whole.
This Hegelian stress on the unfolding of the progressiveness of civil society–state dynamics is notably absent from all of the more recent traditions that I have discussed above. The conservative, communitarian, and Habermasian lines of thinking can ultimately be seen as all to some extent working within the “meta-narrative of Anglo-American citizenship theory” (Somers 1995b). This is a conception that understands civil society as an autonomous entity, consisting of self-organising free associations and a free press, bonded through the common law and a carefully circumscribed representative government. Civil society is, on this account, prior to and distinct from the state, which always represents a threat to the liberty of the citizenry. In this narrative the state is always seen as harbouring a potential for domination, intervention, regulation, collectivism, and positive law imposed arbitrarily from above. In so far as there is a state that is acceptable from this perspective, it is what Somers calls a ‘de-institutionalised state,’ a state that remains subject to popular sovereignty and does not usurp powers that belong to the ‘people’ but remains reined in firmly within the confines of contract law, laissez-faire economics, and liberal democratic institutions. However, even in this relatively benign form, the state is always “on the brink of being a source of tyranny,” as Somers put it (Somers 1995b, p 259).

This understanding of state–society relations does not easily harmonise with Nordic political cultures and traditions. By contrast, our neo-Hegelian formulation of the ideal social order is one that ‘fits’ far better with the actual structure of Nordic societies and their political cultures, and in many ways constitutes a better theoretical account of the actual ways in which state-civil society relations have been configured historically.

If ‘non-profit organisations’ (churches, charities, foundations, etc) constitute the bulk of contemporary American civil society, in Sweden and the other Nordic countries membership-based organisations with an internal democratic structure and often a more or less explicit political purpose have been dominant. Interestingly, a massive support from the state has been significant in both the United States and in the Nordic countries. However, by setting different conditions for this support, the state has structured civil society in radically different ways. In the US, the support has to a great extent been provided indirectly through tax privileges and exemptions as well as rights afforded individuals and
corporations to deduct gifts to charities from their taxable income. The purpose has been to safeguard the autonomy of civil society and keep the state at arm’s length. In a Scandinavian context, on the other hand, organisations have received direct monetary support, which, however, has been made conditional on the associations adhering to an internal democratic structure as well as to purposes that have been consistent with the values of a democratic society. These differences are rooted in the political culture more broadly speaking, and we will now turn to the values and practices that inform this structuring of civil society in the case of Sweden.

The paradox of Swedish political culture: State and civil society in Sweden

The Swedish political tradition is marked by a seemingly mysterious paradox. On the one hand, many historians have emphasised the early emergence of a modern, centralised state since the 16th century. Indeed, Sweden is at times viewed as one of the first and most fully realised examples of an absolutist state, one that served as a model for Prussian and Russian state builders in the centuries that followed. On the other hand, Sweden is also often celebrated as an open, democratic society in which citizens enjoy easy access to political leaders and the political process.

The notion that Swedish political culture is particularly statist has shown itself to be an enduring one, not least among critics of Sweden. In his controversial book *The New Totalitarians*, Roland Huntford developed this thesis to its extreme conclusion (Huntford 1971). Viewing Sweden as the incarnation of Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Huntford castigated the Swedes, who he deemed to be “not quite of the West”, for their “worship of the State” (p 14). To be sure, they possessed the trappings of constitutional democracy, “but they do not have democracy in their hearts,” according to Huntford (p 347). Rather, he went on: “they have a preference for government by bureaucrats rather than by politicians” (p 9) and like true denizen of a Brave New World, they do not even suffer under the rule by central administration, rather “they love their servitude” (p 348). Most serious academics would not go as far as Huntford, of course, but ever since the 1950s, leading Swedish political scientists, from Gunnar Heckscher in the 1950s to Bo Rothstein in the
1990s, have described Sweden as a ‘corporatist’ state, even though they would carefully distinguish Swedish ‘democratic’ corporatism, however statist, from its fascist cousins (Heckscher 1946; Rothstein 1992).

In marked contrast to this conception of a state dominated society stands another equally potent and deep-rooted conception, that of Sweden as a quintessential popular democracy. At times, this essentialist narrative about Swedish national identity has rivalled even English and American ‘exceptionalism,’ the self-celebratory tales of being the ‘chosen land’ of democracy and freedom. The unique status of the Swedish peasantry – which never suffered under feudalism – would be emphasised, along with long-standing traditions of rule of law, local self-government, and personal freedom. Building on a tradition going back to the father of modern Swedish history, Erik Gustaf Geijer, it was in the 1930s and 40s common to depict an unbroken tradition that linked legendary peasant leaders from the distant past to popular movements of the 19th century and the breakthrough of modern democracy in the 20th.

From this perspective, what scholars like Heckscher and Rothstein describe as corporatism is instead conceived as a particularly vibrant form of participatory and deliberative democracy, in which the free associations, not least the unions, the cooperative movement, and the employers organisations, co-govern Swedish society in close but free cooperation with the representatives of the state. Indeed, the liberty of Swedes was the result of centuries of struggles by ‘the common people’ – peasants and workers – to keep at bay the threats from above, from the aristocracy of the past to the capitalist upper class of modern times. Another Swedish political scientist, Hilding Johansson, who was a contemporary of Heckscher, calls this “a democracy of popular movements, or associative democracy” (Johansson 1952, p 244). Rejecting the label ‘corporatism’, Johansson emphasised that: “In Sweden the organisations are free and self-governing. Primarily they pursue their own purposes and seek to safeguard the interests of their members. The cooperation with the state is voluntary” (ibid).

Whether one wants to conceive of modern Sweden as a closed, state dominated society or as an associative democracy, in which the state is almost nothing but a set of open institutions, where free associations negotiate with
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each other under the helpful and neutral guidance of state representatives, is to a great extent a matter of political taste. But beyond political rhetoric, the two perspectives are not incompatible. Empirically speaking, both Heckscher and Johansson appear to be right. Sweden scores comparatively very high when it comes to measures of trust, social capital, and membership in voluntary associations. At the same time, there is no doubt that the Swedish state plays a major role in the affairs of the land, or that taxes and public sector spending is very high.

What is also clear is that the case of Sweden appears to undermine the idea that the struggle between state and society is a zero sum game – that a strong state will typically undermine popular self-organisation and democratic governance, and that a large public sector stands in opposition to a vibrant civil society. Symptomatically, until very recent times, coinciding with the introduction of the civil society concept, the words for ‘state’ and ‘society’ were often, if not usually, used as synonyms. The simultaneous presence of an exceptionally large public sector and an unusually vital civil society in Sweden thus poses an interesting and important conceptual and theoretical challenge with serious political and policy implications.

Conclusions: What is at stake?

We are now in a position to draw a few tentative conclusions with regards to what I call a neo-Hegelian conception of state–civil society relations. A few important principles that seem central to particularly the Swedish inflection of this neo-Hegelian social contract include: (1) the importance of key values and practices that focus on individual autonomy and social equality; (2) how these have been secured through an alliance between state and individual; (3) that this moral and political logic focused on notions of autonomy and equality also characterise Swedish civil society organisations; and (4) that civil society and the state are linked in a network of ongoing governance structures – the system of commissions – that allow state and civil society to co-govern in a comparatively cooperative manner that is consistent with the neo-Hegelian theory of state and civil society. The key, in terms of democratic governance, then becomes not the extent of strict separation of civil society from the state,
as in the Anglo-American account, but rather the character of relations *between* civil society and the state.

In this perspective, it appears that what is at stake in choosing one conception of civil society over another turns on one’s normative view of the role of the state and civil society in general, and the welfare state–civil society nexus in particular. One danger is that by romanticising civil society and exaggerating its capacity for moral, political, social and economic reform, one neglects the crucial role of state. The role of the state, in the Hegelian account, is precisely to act as a representative for the broader, universal interest, on the one hand, and to manage the negative consequences of an otherwise dynamic and productive market society, on the other. A more modest view of the potential of civil society does not mean, however, that the role of civil society is unimportant. On the contrary, the need for a critical counterweight to the state will never go away, nor will the need for associations that address the need for collective identity, social insurance, and political and economic interest. In the final analysis, what we need in the real world are elements from both the Hegelian and Anglo-American ideal typical conceptions of civil society.

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Civil society in Latin America: Participatory citizens or service providers?

Evelina Dagnino

It is already commonplace to mention the elusive, confuse, incomplete, elastic character of the concept of civil society. This is a revolving problem, and some authors have tried to formulate proposals for its solution:

What is important about the civil society debate is not that one school of thought is proved correct and others exposed as false, but the extent to which different frameworks can generate insights that lead to more effective action (Edwards 2004, p 7).

Less usual, though, is to call attention to how many of these attributes result from the fact that civil society has become such a powerful and instrumental political tool, and has been incorporated into a number of different political projects and discourses, receiving, in the process, a variety of different meanings. As many other politically valuable ideas – such as citizenship, participation and the very notion of democracy – civil society is extremely permeable to normative, political drives.

Most theoretical constructions of civil society, I would argue, imply, more or less explicitly, conceptions of what politics and society should look like. An alternative to this would be to recognise that different understandings of civil society are always in dispute, and that the utmost we can reach is “clarity about the different understandings in play” (Edwards 2004, p 3). The multiple versions of the civil society idea cannot be understood without consideration of those normative conceptions. At the level of political debate, it is even more clearly seen how these versions rely on and constitute elements of broader political projects, always in dispute. This is especially true in Latin America, where intellectual and political debates are intimately inter-twined.
As in other parts of the world, the idea of civil society became prominent in the continent’s political vocabulary in the context of struggles around democracy. From the mid 1970s onward, civil society came to be seen as the most important source of resistance against oppressive states in countries under military dictatorship, such as Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay; and under authoritarian regimes such as those in Mexico, Peru, and Colombia. The re-establishment of formal democratic rule and the relative opening up of most political regimes in Latin America did not remove the importance of civil society, contrary to what some ‘transitologists’ assumed (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986). Instead, it reinforced its centrality in the building and deepening of democracy, both theoretically and practically. Since 1990, the meanings of civil society have multiplied under the divergent influences of neo-liberalism and emerging left-leaning governments in some parts of the continent, the first trend consigning civil society to the realm of ‘third-sector’ service-provision, and the second opening up new possibilities for participatory democracy.

Ideas about civil society in Latin America have to be understood within the context of striking levels of inequality, and political societies that historically have been unable or unwilling to address this problem; high levels of cultural heterogeneity, especially in countries with large indigenous populations; the predominance of informal markets and endemic poverty; and a façade of liberal democracy that is characterised by an enormous distance between political elites and institutions, and the great mass of Latin America’s population. ‘Populist-developmentalist’ arrangements of the kind that have been implemented in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico have tried to bridge this distance through the control and subordination of social organisations, in order to guarantee political support and governability.

For some authors, these contextual characteristics imply that Western conceptualisations of civil society do not hold in Latin American societies (Zapata 1999), and critical and innovative approaches have been developed across the continent in close collaboration with new experiences of civil society engagement, such as participatory budgeting. As elsewhere in the world, the prominence of these ideas stems from the perception that civil society is a potent force in building an effective democracy, a
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perception that has not escaped skepticism but remains alive across Latin America after more than thirty years. This article examines these various understandings of civil society and explores the factors underlying their diversity.

Civil society: Homogenous or diverse?

Resistance against authoritarianism was able to achieve a relative unity across different social interests in many Latin American contexts, but unity soon disappeared after the return to democratic rule, revealing the inherent nature of civil society as a field of different and conflicting views. These differences still tend to be ignored in political discourse, where civil society is often seen as a macro-political subject, in some cases merely replacing older ideas about ‘the people.’ The widespread and persistent tendency to see civil society as the home of democratic virtues, and the state as the ‘embodiment of evil’ (Dagnino 2002), which clearly made sense under authoritarian rule, has been reinforced by the influence of leading theorists such as Habermas, Cohen and Arato. Their tripartite models, in which civil society and the life-world are sharply distinguished from the market and the state, contributed to this sense of separation. Habermas’ emphasis on communicative action as a privileged logic of civil society, and the risks of its colonisation by both states and markets, helped to confer legitimacy on the demonisation of the state.

The affirmation of civil society was also related to “a return to the values of an ethical life and social solidarity at a moment when the market becomes an irreversible element” (Pinheiro 1994, pp 6-7). Leftist sectors, heavily affected by the failure of ‘real existing socialism’, did not immediately react against this mythical view. Instead, they transferred their allegiance to social movements that emerged in the context of resisting authoritarianism, and that were considered, rather indiscriminately, the new ‘heroes’ of social transformation (Krischke and Scherer-Warren 1987). The presumed connection between associational life and the ‘good society’ is clear in this respect; its premise is that the values of that society rest on the shoulders of ordinary people who organise and associate with each other to defend them. As a generalisation about Latin America, or indeed any other place for that matter, this view is not defensible. Arato
himself recognised that “the unity of civil society is obvious only from a normative perspective” (1994, p 21).

The recognition of the heterogeneity of civil society is important not only in theoretical terms, as a field of conflict, but is also evident in empirical terms across the continent. From the paramilitary organisations of Colombia to market-oriented NGOs or entrepreneurial foundations in Brazil; from corporatist trade-unions in Argentina to indigenous movements in Bolivia and Ecuador, or to youth gangs such as the ‘maras’ in Peru, associational life varies enormously. In Venezuela, for example, ‘civil society’ has been appropriated by the middle class, and in President Hugo Chávez’s discourse, the term has a pejorative meaning when used to refer to the privileged sectors of society. “For this reason, the poor have rarely identified with the term civil society, much less felt represented by the middle and upper classes” (García-Guadilla et al 2004, p 13). In Brazil, after years of neo-liberal rule, ‘civil society’ has marginalised social movements and is increasingly restricted to denote the world of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), itself an extremely heterogeneous field (Teixeira 2003). This heterogeneity is exemplified in the role played by NGOs in Colombia, considered by President Uribe as serious adversaries, and in the insistence of ABONG, the Brazilian Association of NGOs, to resist the homogenising denomination of ‘Third Sector’ in order to affirm its own political identity.

Even when empirical research began to be undertaken on civil society in Latin America, it concentrated on assessing the size and levels of associational activity, assuming that a quantitative expansion meant favourable results for democracy (Avritzer 2000; Scherer-Warren et al 1998; Santos 1993). Only recently has empirical research turned its focus to unveiling civil society’s heterogeneity (Dagnino 2002; Panfichi 2002; Olvera 2003; Gurza et al 2005).

Civil society and the state
Civil society and the state are always mutually constitutive. In fact, the kind of relationships that are established between them represent a crucial dimension in the building of democracy. In the 1980s and 1990s, most theoretical efforts to conceptualise civil society in Latin America were
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predicated on the need to affirm, not just its importance, but its very existence. In an academic and political landscape dominated by a ‘statist’ conception of politics, rooted in the developmentalist/populist tradition, the affirmation of ‘another space’ of politics and of other actors who were entitled to participate in those spaces was a key concern, and an emphasis on separate spheres played a central role in that effort.

For similar reasons, Latin American social movements placed strong emphasis on their autonomy vis-à-vis the state and political parties, reacting against the control and subordination to which they had long been submitted. This strategic emphasis has often been interpreted as a rejection or a “turning their back to the State” (Evers 1983). In fact, however, the state in Latin America has always been a mandatory interlocutor for social movements and other civil society organisations, even during the harsh times of authoritarianism.

Although they still predominate, the simplistic tone of these views has been increasingly contested in Latin America, in both theory and in practice. The emergence of more complex approaches to civil society is in part a response to the concrete difficulties encountered in deepening democracy, which always implies an intricate interplay of forces and struggles across diverse actors and arenas. Simplistic views also created frustration, disappointment and disenchantment among civil society activists when the high expectations they had raised failed to be translated into reality (Olvera 1999). Academics expressed the same reactions in an analytical wave that decreed the ‘death’ or ‘crisis’ of Latin American social movements.

At the theoretical level, alternative analyses of civil society took their inspiration from Gramsci and others in order to contest the false dichotomies of these dominant, homogenising approaches. The Gramscian notion of civil society as a terrain of conflict and, therefore, of politics, included an integral relationship with the state, without which the central notion of hegemony would make no sense. This framework has been used in several countries since the beginning of their anti-authoritarian struggles, where the role played by civil society in the destruction and re-creation of hegemony was paramount to its embrace by the Left as an appropriate basis for the struggle for democracy. “Well familiar with
‘frontal attack’, the Left had to learn how to conduct a ‘war of position’ and the multiplicity of trenches it implies” (Dagnino 1998, p 41).

The notion of hegemony as a framework for analysing civil society and its relationship to the state was reinforced by the gradual ascension to power in several countries of progressive and/or leftist forces that, in many cases, represented political projects formulated by or originating in civil society itself. The Workers’ Party (PT) in Brazil is the most significant case. Emerging in 1980 from trade unionism, popular movements, progressive sectors of the Catholic Church and a few intellectuals, the Workers Party began its electoral trajectory in 1982 and gradually widened its access to government positions; from municipal administrations, to state governments and finally, in 2002, to the Presidency of the Republic. In other cases, such as the creation of the Partido Revolucionario Democratico (PRD) and the election of Mayor C Cárdenas in Mexico City in 1997, and that of Alejandro Toledo in Peru in 2001, the articulation between politicians and civil society militants raised expectations and opened up more room for rethinking their relationship, in spite of subsequent, less positive developments. The movement of individuals in both directions intensified in many countries, with activists joining governments and politicians seeking civil society support. This pattern has been clear in the elections of Presidents Tabaré Vasquez in Uruguay in 2004, Evo Morales in Bolivia in 2005, and Correa in Ecuador in 2006.

Civil society and participatory democracy

The emphasis on the articulation of civil society and the state found expression in a whole variety of experiments around participatory democracy that developed throughout the continent, from the 1990s onwards. The nucleus of these experiments was the need to deepen and radicalise democracy in response to the limits of liberal, representative models as a privileged form of state–society relations. Plagued by a resilient ‘crisis of representation’ as a result of the exclusive and elitist nature of liberal regimes and their incapacity to tackle deep-seated inequalities across the continent, it was clear that representative democracy needed to be complemented by participatory and deliberative mechanisms that could increase popular participation in decision-making (Santos and Avritzer 2002; Fals Borda
1996). When they translate to a central focus on equality, citizenship and rights become powerful components of democratisation, activated through public spaces that enable greater participation in the formulation of public policies that are oriented toward this goal (Santos and Avritzer 2002; Murillo and Pizano, 2003; Ziccardi 2004; Caceres 2004).

These spaces are forums for deliberation and co-management, implying more-or-less-formal institutional designs and sets of rules, and directed towards producing decisions of a public nature. The state’s presence in them distinguishes these experiments from Habermasian views of the public sphere. Civil society and public spaces are two distinct levels that correspond to the “socialization of politics” and the “socialization of power” (Coutinho 1980). Public spaces are spaces in which conflict is both legitimised and managed.

Brazil has been the pioneer in institutionalising spaces like these within the frame of the 1988 Constitution, which provided for direct participation by civil society. Management Councils in several policy areas are mandatory at the municipal, state and federal levels, with equal representation from civil society and the state (Tatagiba 2002). The Participatory Budget process installed in Porto Alegre in 1989 under the Workers’ Party Administration has been adopted in many cities in Latin America and increasingly in other parts of the world (Santos 1998; Avritzer 2002). The results of these experiments vary greatly, but, in some cases, they are proving to be reasonably effective in enabling government and civil society to take joint decisions, in spite of their limits and difficulties.

It is not surprising that most of the initial theorising on participation in Latin America has circulated around the Brazilian experience. The existence of the Workers Party and of a dense and diversified civil society has allowed for significant reflective creativity through joint debates over an extended period of time, involving activists, party members and academics. The same conclusion applies to the concept of citizenship, which has been significantly redefined by Brazilian theorists and activists since the mid-1970s, and which has also made important inroads into Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina and Uruguay. Even in Chile, where notions of citizenship were strongly influenced by the early rise of neo-liberalism, a lively debate has ensued (De La Maza 2001).
Advocates of participatory democracy envisage a role for civil society that rejects its traditional ‘self-limiting’ character in order to engage with political activity and move beyond the strict separation from the state that characterises the original Habermasian approach (Habermas 1986). These more radical visions define participation as shared decision-making with the state, thus departing from the idea that civil society should refrain from political power and limit its actions to influencing those already in authority. Tarso Genro, once Mayor of Porto Alegre and subsequently Brazil’s Federal Minister of Justice, has articulated the awkwardly-named notion of ‘non-state public spaces’ to describe these experiments (Genro 1995). For Genro, these spaces – simultaneously materialised in and inspired by the experience of participatory budgets in Porto Alegre – enable civil society to penetrate the state in order to make it more responsive to the public interest, thus breaking the state’s monopoly over decision-making. This model obviously requires a willing disposition on the part of the state to share some of its power, and relies on a strongly organised civil society. Such conditions are comparatively rare in Latin America, which is why the Brazilian experience has proven difficult to replicate in other contexts. Furthermore, the autonomy of both partners in this relationship is crucial. Santos (1998, p 491) sees citizens and community organisations, on the one hand, and the municipal government, on the other, as converging “with mutual autonomy. Such convergence occurs by means of a political contract through which this mutual autonomy becomes mutually relative autonomy.” Along the same lines, Oliveira (1993, p 6) calls this process “convergent antagonism”, emphasising that such relationships are not a zero-sum game. In spite of their sometimes convoluted formulations, these ideas are important attempts to deal with the reality of state-society relations, a question that is often ignored even by analysts of participatory democracy.

The incorporation of participation by civil society in the constitutions of most Latin American countries is evidence that these concepts have been widely accepted, at least in theory. Between the early 1990s and the early 2000s, nineteen countries included some provision for citizen participation in their legal-institutional frameworks, seventeen approved mechanisms of
direct political participation, and fourteen constitutions provide for public spaces with state and civil society representation (Hevia 2006).

Participatory experiences have proliferated across Latin America, marked by a great diversity in their forms, expressions, qualities and results, and producing important demonstration effects through which one country learns from the experiences of others. This process has intensified with the growth of continental networking among social movements, NGOs, academics and political parties. The most obvious example is the remarkable spread of participatory budgets, but others include the Mesas de Concertación in Peru (regional roundtables); the Auditorías Articuladas in Colombia (state-society partnerships in the oversight of public contracting, the execution of public works, and the accountability of state agencies); the already mentioned Conselhos Gestores de Políticas Públicas in Brazil; the Consejos Autogestivos in México (self-management councils in protected natural areas), and many others. These experiments show that alternative forms of ‘citizen politics’ are possible, but they are limited in temporal and spatial terms, as well as in their cultural and political effects, especially when gauged against the expectations they have raised.

**From civil society to third sector: The impact of neo-liberalism**

Neo-liberal interpretations of civil society in Latin America stand in sharp contrast to participatory democracy. Although neo-liberalism is associated with liberal, representative democracy, at its core is the notion that the state and its relationships to society have to adjust to the demands of a new moment in the development of global capitalism. This impulse defines the internal logic that structures the neo-liberal project. It does not offer a diagnosis of society in which a concern for democracy is central. Instead, its goals are to adjust the economy by taking down barriers to international capital, removing any obstacles to the operation of ‘free’ markets, and extending market principles as the basic organising principle of social life. In this framework, states that are characterised by their large size, inefficiency, excessive bureaucracy and/or corruption find new routes to more efficient forms of action and the optimal use of scarce resources (Franco 1999). In addition to the privatisation of state enterprises, this process involves the transfer of the state’s
social responsibilities to individuals, civil society groups and the private sector. Furthermore, the search for efficiency also works to legitimise the adoption of the market as the organising principle of social, political and cultural life, transforming governments into service providers and citizens into clients, users and consumers.

How have these ideas translated into conceptions of civil society, participation and citizenship in Latin America? From a neo-liberal perspective, the role of civil society is two-fold. On the one hand, it should supply the state and the market with information on social demands in order to increase efficiency. On the other, it should provide social organisations with the capacity to execute public policies that are oriented toward the satisfaction of these demands. Thus, civil society is conceived in a selective and exclusionary way, recognising only those actors who are able to carry out these tasks.

These ideas have been put into practice in powerful ways, recon-figuring civil society through the accelerated growth and expanded role of NGOs; the rise of the so-called ‘Third Sector’ and of entrepreneurial foundations with a strong emphasis on redefining philanthropy in business terms; and the marginalisation (or what some refer to as the crim-inalisation) of social movements. The overall result has been a reductive identification of civil society with NGOs or the Third Sector. Latin American governments fear the politicisation of their engagement with social movements and workers’ organisations, and instead seek reliable partners who can effectively respond to their demands while minimising conflict.

This shaping capacity of state action is visible in what has been called the “ngoization” of social movements (Alvarez 1999), not only in terms of their organisational structures and behaviour, but also in their political practices. Attracted by the opportunities offered by the state to engage in the execution of public policies, few social movements have been able to retain both their independence and their involvement in other kinds of political action. The Landless Movement in Brazil (MST) is one of the few that has.

Under neo-liberalism, participation is defined instrumentally, in relation to the needs derived from the ‘structural adjustment’ of the economy and the transfer of the state’s social responsibilities to civil society and the
private sector. For members of civil society such as NGOs, participation means taking on the efficient execution of social policies, even though the definition of those policies remains under exclusive state control. Participation is thus concentrated in the functions of management and policy implementation, not shared decision-making (Teixeira 2003). The reform of the state that was implemented in Brazil in 1998 under the influence of Minister Bresser Pereira (who introduced the principles of the ‘New Public Management’) is very clear in relation to the different roles of the “strategic nucleus of the State” and of social organisations (Bresser Pereira 1996). The former retains a clear monopoly over decision-making.

All over the continent, the very idea of ‘solidarity’, whose long history is rooted in political and collective action, became the motto of neo-liberal versions of participation. As part of a broader move to privatise and individualise responsibilities for social action, participation is relegated to the private terrain of morality where an emphasis on volunteer work and ‘social responsibility’ (of both individuals and firms) becomes dominant. Along the same lines, the definition of the common or public good dispenses with the need for debate between conflicting views, replaced by “a set of private initiatives with a public sense” based on the moral thesis of “caring for the other” (Fernandes 1994, p 127). The ‘public’ character of the Third Sector and NGOs has been increasingly questioned on the grounds that they “lack the transparency and accountability in terms of finances, agenda, and governance necessary to effectively perform their crucial role in democratic civil society” (McGann and Johnstone 2006, p 66).

In this framework, associational life loses its public and political dimensions. In fact, Third Sector advocates and activists insist on emptying it of any conflictive or even political connotations (Franco 1999; Fernandes 1994). For these advocates, the replacement of civil society by the Third Sector would remove any sense of “systemic opposition to the State” (Fernandes 1994, p127). Thus, “[T]he notion of civil society, and the critical field belonging to it, lose their meaning and only cooperation remains, under a new homogenizing guise. The main effect of this change is the de-politicization of the state–society relationship, with the question of conflict disappearing from the scene” (Dagnino, Olvera and Panfichi 2006, p 22).
Neo-liberalism also redefines citizenship according to its own guiding principles, diluting exactly that which constitutes the core of this notion, which is the idea of universal rights. The way in which the meaning of citizenship is watered down can be seen in several dimensions of the neo-liberal project.

First, social rights, which were consolidated in some countries, in spite of the precarious nature of the Latin American welfare state, are now being eliminated, seen as an obstacle to the efficient operation of the market. Second, in the management of social policy, the conception of universal rights as an instrument for constructing equality is replaced by targeted efforts directed toward those sectors of society considered to be ‘at risk.’

Third, citizenship is pushed into the arena of the market and a seductive connection between the two is established. To become a citizen increasingly means to integrate into the market as consumer and producer (García Canclini 1995). In a context where the state is progressively removed from its role as the guarantor of rights, the market is expected to step in to offer a surrogate space for citizenship.

Fourth, when social policies are transferred to civil society organisations, philanthropy and volunteer work, citizenship is both identified with and reduced to solidarity with the poor and needy. Those who are the targets of these policies are not seen as citizens with the ‘right to have rights’ but as needy human beings who must be taken under the wing of private or public charities.

These ideas have been implemented by neo-liberal governments throughout the continent with the heavy support of international agencies. After the pioneering Fondo de Solidaridad y Inversión Social (Solidarity and Social Investment Fund, or FOSIS) was created in 1990 in Chile – “especially tailored for NGO involvement” (Foweraker 2001, p 18) – a number of similar agencies and programs materialised in the 1990s in Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela and elsewhere. In Brazil, during the eight years of the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Comunidade Solidária, the agency in charge of social policies, became a powerful think-tank, which was extremely effective in developing and disseminating this framework (Almeida 2009). These efforts have not been able to hinder the deepening of both poverty and inequality in most
countries during the same period, but the number of NGOs multiplied geometrically, as did the growth of Third Sector employment (Salamon and Sokolowski 2004). The processes of decentralisation that have taken place in most countries at different levels have contributed to this process through so-called ‘partnerships’ between local governments and NGOs, but have also made possible a range of more participatory, democratic and creative interactions between civil society and local governments.

These different forms of civil society participation coexist in Latin America, and their respective predominance obviously depends on the power correlation between neo-liberal and participatory democratic projects in the different contexts. This is also true in Brazil, although during Lula’s government (2002–2010) there has been a significant increase in participatory public spaces, especially at the national level. Differently from partnerships with the Third Sector, those spaces allow for wider representation of different sectors of civil society and state agencies, which can discuss, negotiate and build consensus in order to formulate public policies in different areas, in spite of existing limits and difficulties. In addition, social policies, which had been heavily based on those partnerships during the previous Cardoso’s neo-liberal government through its Comunidade Solidária, assumed centrality as a state responsibility.

Conclusion

These different conceptions of civil society coexist in a more or less tense relationship, according to different national contexts and historical processes. Other relevant dimensions that help us understand this diversity have not been discussed here, including the weight and role of political parties (either as competitors or supporters of civil society’s political actions), and the role of organised crime as providers of alternatives to civil society organisations among the popular sectors.

Recent political processes that have taken left-leaning forces into state power seem to indicate that the dominance of neo-liberalism may be losing ground in the continent, although this does not necessarily represent a commitment to civil society or deliberative participation. In fact, in some of these cases, such as Venezuela and even President Lula’s
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Brazil, the presence of strong leaders committed to the popular sectors can, in fact, act as a deterrent to effective participation. In others, like Bolivia, the strong and relatively autonomous organisation of indigenous movements may serve as an antidote to this tendency.

In any case, the current condition of Latin America makes the centrality of the relationships between state and civil society even clearer. The extent to which civil society is seen as entitled to a share in decision-making, and the extent to which conflict is seen as legitimate and public spaces are provided for its management, seem to be the crucial questions on which the future of civil society will hang across the continent.

Notes
1. The notion of political project is being used here to designate the beliefs, desires, interests, worldviews and representations of what life in society should be, which, in more or in less structured forms, guide the political action of different subjects. See Dagnino 2002, 2004 and Dagnino, Olvera and Panfichi, 2006.

2. For a detailed account of the debate on citizenship in different Latin American countries see Dagnino, 2005, as well as the special issue on this theme in Latin American Perspectives (30) 2, 2003.

3. As, for example, the new National Conferences on Public Security and on Culture.

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Civil society and
democratic change in Asia

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This article is divided into two sections. The first part maps civil society in Asia, exploring the range of non-governmental actors which exist, and which contribute to the struggle for democratic change or obstruct it. While civil society is a useful locus to explore this contest, given that it is internally divided, we need to analyse constituent elements separately for their relationship to the state, and for their democratic potential. The state is not a neutral actor, standing high above these contending agencies, but actively intervenes in the very constitution of these agencies as well as in social movements. We must keep in mind too, that sometimes progressive states may falter before regressive societies, ie the locus of democratic change must be looked for not only in civil society but also in the state. The second half of the article focuses on India, attempting to show, through one particular case study, the prospects and problems for democracy.

Part I: Mapping civil society in Asia

The term ‘civil society’ has been defined in several ways: the most common understanding is of civil society as an intermediate sphere between individual/family and state, though the exact ingredients of this sphere vary (see Kumar 1993; Calhoun 1993; Chandoke 1995). For Hegel, for instance, the bureaucracy and corporations were part of civil society as against the ethical state. A political economy approach locates civil society in the sphere of property and thereby class, as against the claimed universalism of citizenship in the political sphere (Marx 1977). For Tocqueville, civil society was a space of voluntary association which replaced primordial community; properly speaking, it was the base for political society, defined as government of the people (see Kumar 1993). For Gramsci, civil society
was the arena where consent was elicited rather than coercion exercised, but in either case it was not separate from the state (Anderson 1977); while for Habermas, civil society is represented by the public sphere, where deliberation and reason, rather than ascription or inherited ideas dominate (Calhoun 1993).

There have been several debates over whether the concept of civil society and related concepts, such as human rights, are applicable outside Europe, though neither Europe nor Asia are homogenous entities (see Schak and Judson 2003; Bruun and Jacobsen 2000). In Asia, government regimes vary, as in Africa and South America, with most countries having formal democracies, but some also under military dictatorships (Myanmar, formerly Pakistan), and one party rule (Singapore, China). The level of freedoms that define democracy – for instance, the separation of powers, freedom of press, the nature of fundamental rights – also vary widely within the continent. Many of the states have been victims of colonial rule, though how this has impacted their polity and civil society varies widely.

Among those who question the applicability of civil society outside Europe, Partha Chatterjee (2004, 2008), makes the distinction between a rule bound civil society consisting of citizens, who are mostly middle class and culturally equipped to use the law and claim their rights, and a ‘political society’ consisting of governed populations, who have to use politics rather than law to negotiate claims to subsistence, which are given to them as ‘concessions’ rather than rights. However, this formulation has been widely criticised (see among others in the same issue of *Economic and Political Weekly*, Baviskar and Sundar 2008). Some of the most significant political movements today are precisely over the legal recognition of the rights of the poor. In any case, it is not clear that civil society as an autonomous sphere of rational debate existed even in bourgeois Europe (see Eley 1992; Fraser 1992); and much of the current debate in Europe and America over the burqa and veiling, though couched in terms of separation of church and state or individual choice, simultaneously betrays primordial anxieties about immigration, and is deeply informed by Christian discourses (see for instance Asad 2003; Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002).
As I show in this article, the institutions that make up civil society are equally found in Asia – what differs from country to country is the manner in which they interact with each other and with the state.

Is it possible to clearly demarcate civil society from the state?

For my purposes, I shall use the term civil society to designate all organised non-state actors, who occupy a sphere between the individual and the state, with the caveat, of course, that their relationship to the state varies widely; indeed, some of these so-called non-state organisations are set up or promoted by the state, in part to re-organise or dis-organise civil society. Much research has gone into showing how colonial governmentality shaped identity (see Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993; Cooper and Stoler 1997), and social movements founded on these state-generated categories and/or identities are then in turn posed against the state or against other groups in society. Take, for example, the demand for reservations or quotas in government jobs in India by various castes and tribes, or the Bhumiputra category generated by the Malaysian state (see Nesiah 1997). Many of the practices we think of today as customary, and which would therefore belong to the civil society side of the divide between state and society, such as customary law in India or \textit{adat} in Indonesia, were framed by colonial policies of indirect rule (see Sundar, 2009; Peluso and Vandergeest 2001).

Further, the state itself is not a homogenous entity, and one faction of the state may mobilise society against other factions of the state. In Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Thailand, for instance, some political parties extend into social movements which are pitted against the military regime. The Pakistan People’s Party, for instance, came to power on a pro-democracy platform, and has to continuously struggle to establish civilian rule against the military and intelligence services, even though it is in power. In Thailand, the red shirts were supporters of the deposed President Thaksin Sinawatra, who represented one faction of the state against the other (Abisit Vejjajeeva, who came to power through a coup). There are also parties like the \textit{Bharatiya Janata Party} in India, which when in power often mobilised its mass fronts, like the \textit{Vishwa Hindu Parishad}.
or the Bajrang Dal, to carry out actions that it could not openly do itself – such as attacks on educational and cultural institutions, or even something like the pogrom of Muslims in the state of Gujarat in 2002. In either case – whether the target is another wing of the state, or groups in society – what is clear is that there is a chain of connections between parties in power and organised social groups, which call into question a sharp distinction between states and civil society.

The role of civil society as promoter of democratic change ‘from below’ is not always as evident as some would argue. The legacy of anti-colonial struggles has meant that many states have been a progressive modernising force, compared to conservative populations. Examples here are the Baathist state in Iraq, Nasser’s Egypt and Nehru’s India.

People’s movements or social movements are not always agents of progress or democracy, and some in fact may be both civil and uncivil. Civil society is not always civil (see debate between Alexander 2008 and Turner 2008). For instance, the LTTE (the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) while standing for the legitimate aspirations of the Tamils against the indifference of the Sri Lankan state, also had fascist characteristics, and snuffed out opposition. Groups like the Taliban, which are clearly patriarchal and regressive in their ideology, also have the support of young people for whom the Taliban represents an avenue for social mobility as against the tribal elders (Abou Zahab 2010). The same kind of unemployed youth may join the progressive ‘Naxalites’ (Maoist guerillas) or the dangerous Hindu right wing organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, depending on whose area of influence they find themselves in. Some of these organisations are in fact so powerful that they constitute almost parallel states in their areas of influence (like the LTTE in Sri Lanka, the Maoists in Nepal, before the peace accord) (Gellner 2007; Trawick 2007).

Adherence to law per se cannot be the hallmark of whether any group is legitimately part of civil society or not, or even tell us anything about whether such a group or movement stands for democratic change. After all, the Red Shirts formally broke the law in Bangkok through their barricades, but they were protesting against a government which itself could be considered illegitimate, having seized power in a military coup. In countries with inherited traditions of colonial law, which criminalise
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many ordinary activities (including access to the forests for firewood and other necessities), privatised rivers, and took away people’s community resources, people have to break the law on an everyday basis for subsistence. On the other hand, there are also a range of mafia and right wing vigilante groups who break the law. The difference lies not in the degree of law-breaking but with who has impunity (N Sundar, 2010).

Types of associations

Many scholars focus on associational life as defining civil society, and by extension, on the voluntary nature of associations as against more traditional forms of social organisation. A higher degree of social capital or trust among members of a society, Putnam argued, led to better development outcomes (see Putnam et al 1993; Portes 1998; Fine 1999 on the social capital debate). However, as I show in this section, most distinctions based on tradition vs modernity, voluntarism vs ascription, etc fail to capture the complexity and range of associations that make up civil society in Asia. In trying to see which organisations and institutions are involved in democratic change, we need to go beyond outward appearances to see what they actually do and which functions they fulfill in society.

Voluntary vs ascriptive. In terms of the work of welfare or representation that associations do for their members, voluntary associations like trade unions – especially if certain trades are dominated by members of one language, ethnicity or background – may not be all that different from associations that are more openly based on primordial or ascriptive relations, like caste associations. In India, caste associations provide scholarships, hostels etc; much like young immigrant associations in China or Malaysia.

Formal vs informal. Formal versus informal is another way in which associations are often categorised. Thus, one has formal associations like political parties which have membership and organisational structure, and informal networks, developed through the Internet, for example, where both engage in political action. Sometimes organisations which appear to be cultural also play political roles – such as actors’ fan clubs in the South Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, which mobilise votes for the actors-turned-politicians (see A Sundar 2010).
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*Legal vs secret.* Legal associations, like business chambers, and secret clubs, like the mafia, both have business links with political parties, and influence policy, not just in Asia but across the world.

*Religious vs secular.* Religious cults, eg the Sufi cults of Pakistan, or the Falun Gong in China, may look traditional, but are actually modern in terms of ideas of equality, individual self recognition, and the way in which they address needs created by anomie in society. Equally, communal organisations (the Hindu chauvinist *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, the terrorist *Lashkar e-Toiba*, the Taliban, or Buddhist associations in Sri Lanka), may use revivalist language, but are modern in their goals, methods, and technology. In many cases, their aim is secular political power, not religious betterment.

*Civil society actors*

Asian civil society has a wide range of social actors. These include: labour unions, social movements, some of which grew out of the legacy of anti-colonial movements and some which are more recent, like the new environmental movements, the gay rights movement etc; professional bodies of lawyers, architects, journalists, students, and others; NGOs; transnational civil society; media; and political parties. I will go through each of these types of social actors in turn.

*Bourgeoisie actors.* In the Marxist understanding, civil society was bourgeoisie society – the realm marked by property relations. Even by liberal definitions, industrial associations, chambers of commerce, corporate lobbying firms all play a major role in influencing state policy. Private industry has varying degrees of dependence on the state, and in many states, the first impetus for industrialisation came from states, who built the required infrastructure for private industry to operate. Economies like Japan and South Korea obviously have different relations between industry and state, as compared, say, to China or India (see Chibber 2003; White, Howell, and Xiaoyuan 1996). Industry is not necessarily rule bound – the case of the Bhopal industrial disaster is the most egregious example – and while the full scale of sweetheart deals between government and industry is not available to the public gaze, there is sufficient evidence that this is a common occurrence.
All over Asia, what one sees is struggles between workers and industry, as many of these economies are powered by low cost labour, often feminised, who work in mass industrial production centres for Western consumption (Lee 2007; Klein 2001; Ong 1991). Many of them are not unionised; though some unions like those in South Korea represent powerful political forces. Across Asia, one also sees a range of social movements against the exercise of Eminent Domain by the governments to acquire land for industry.

**Social movements.** Common histories of anti-colonial, anti-imperial struggles inform Asian solidarities represented by the Bandung conference and the Non-aligned movement. Being largely peasant economies, peasant insurgencies have also been a marked feature of the social and political landscape, not just in China, but also in India (Naxalite movement), the Philippines, Malaysia (where there was a communist movement and emergency between 1948 and 1960), Bangladesh, and so on. As against these older peasant movements, which focused on land reform, there are also new Farmers Movements which include a focus on issues like genetically modified seeds, the prices of credit and commodity, agricultural markets etc, such as the Thai Farmers Alliance Movement, and the **Bharatiya Kisan Union**.

While environmental movements may have specific local genealogies – eg in community methods of conservation – there is no doubt they became prominent since the mid 1970s onwards, working against industrial pollution, whaling, deep sea fishing etc, as well as for forest protection, for example (see Persoon and Kalland 1998; Greenough and Tsing 2003). Another phenomenon that goes back to the 1970s is the rise of the Women’s Movements – whether in India, where they protested against dowry, rape law, and now for representation in Parliament, or in Pakistan, where women protested against Sharia laws, or Afghanistan, where RAWA is a significant civil society actor. In Sri Lanka, women’s groups have taken up the question of militarisation and the plight of women caught in conflict (see for overviews Jayawardena 1986; Mohanty et al 1991).

The Human Rights Movement is again one that is found everywhere in Asia – whether in China or Iran or South Asia – and is directed against arbitrary detentions, extra-judicial killings, torture and so on. Some
organisations, such as the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, have enormous standing in society; parallel to, if not more than, the Indian National Human Rights Commission, which is a government body.

Finally, each country has its own sectors of civil society which are strong. For instance, the student movement is vibrant in South Korea, and much less so in other parts of the continent; ethnic nationalities are voicing demands in Burma along with the pro-democracy movement there; Iraq has a strong clerical reform movement and so on.

Professional associations. Apart from social movements, there are also professional bodies which play a significant role in bringing about democratic change. These include the Lawyer’s Movement in Pakistan, which protested against the removal of the Chief Justice; or journalist associations to protect press freedom. In Sri Lanka, journalists were in serious danger during the war, with some like Lasantha, the editor of the Sunday Island in Sri Lanka, even being killed. Civil society intermediaries often play a significant role during conflict – for instance in Nepal, writers and elder statesmen helped to negotiate between the government and Maoists.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs). NGOs range from small organisations, which perform service delivery, to others which are almost as powerful as states themselves, eg the Aga Khan Foundation, or Action Aid, given their cross-country presence (see P Sundar 2010 for a comprehensive discussion of NGOs and foreign aid).

NGOs have different social bases, some originating in radical social movements, while others are professional associations set up for a particular purpose. There are also GONGOs, government NGOs, set up by the government to counter existing NGOs, or to perform some service better than the government can itself perform. Some NGOs are outlets for corporate social philanthropy, while others are small locality based organisations who draw their money from members. NGOs perform a variety of roles: advocacy and/or service; membership services such as women’s thrift societies, faith based groups or groups like Alcoholics Anonymous; research, documentation, innovation, and so on.

Transnational civil society. It is impossible to speak of democratic or even policy change across Asia without bringing in the role of the World
Bank and other transnational agencies. Large foreign donors, such as the Ford Foundation, the McArthur Foundation etc, have played a significant role in the politics of Asian countries (see for instance Gordon 1997). In determining democratic change, people are faced with multi-layered sovereignties. Local choices, including what to grow and how, are shaped by larger discourses of the World Trade Organization, while in some countries, like Afghanistan and Nepal, humanitarian agencies dominate the agenda (Randeria 2007).

**Media.** The media not only transmits information; it creates social perceptions and even frames popular ideas of what constitutes democracy. As such, the media is one of the most powerful actors of change in society across the world (see essays in Sen and Lee 2007; Ninan 2007). While many states in Asia still have state owned media, most also have a wide array of private newspapers and channels. The distinction between state media and corporate monopoly media is often illusory, in that the media also takes its cue from the government, especially in times of war or internal conflict.

The media performs both watchdog functions, eg exposing corruption or other scandals by government functionaries, and diversionary functions which uphold the status quo, through its focus on celebrities, and opinion polls which are slanted to reflect the views of the media owners themselves. In India, a recent scandal with serious implications for democracy was the discovery that newspapers and television channels both sold news space at election time.

As against corporate media, however, there is also the recent phenomenon of insurgent media. This includes blogging and twitter. China’s dissident bloggers like Han Han have used this medium to good effect; while in the Iran elections, twitter played a major role in mobilising people to protest against what they saw as electoral fraud. Regular email list serves, google groups etc also play a major role in disseminating information and views; though, given that the reach of these technologies is still limited to mostly urban areas, its role as a change agent is still a bit limited. Social networking sites like Facebook and Orkut bring together diverse communities. New technologies also have the potential to bring together hitherto unserved communities. Mobiles and community radio
can now be used to connect small rural communities to provide their own news, which will diminish the power of major corporate organisations and focus on the local issues that matter – education, health etc. At the same time, however, the over-fragmentation of the news sphere will take away the imagined communities that constitute the nation, and there is a danger that such parochialism will work against democratic change in the long run.

*Political parties.* Political parties – which have vast memberships – must also be recognised as serious political actors. As mentioned before, there are multiple political parties – some of which represent the interests of the poor (e.g. the Red Shirt Movement in Thailand); some of which represent fundamentalist religious interests (*Jamaat-e-Islami* in Bangladesh); and some of which claim to be more national in scope (e.g. UMNO in Malaysia, Congress in India etc).

To sum up so far, one finds more or less the same range of actors in civil society in Asia as in Europe or other parts of the world. Institutionally and organisationally, there is nothing unique about Asia that would require a different theoretical perspective. To understand the process of democratic change, one would need to map the balance of forces within any one country at a particular point in time.

In the following section, I give a brief overview of the situation in India to illustrate this point.

**Part II: Civil society and democratic change in India**

A casual trawl through the Indian newspapers in the opening years of the 21st century reveals that the acquisition of land by the government for private companies or for special economic zones is high on the agenda for public debate. While the investor mood is bullish (Timmons 2007), the numerous electronic listserves that flood one’s inbox with ‘progressive spam’ provide a countervailing sense of siege at the takeover of people’s means of livelihood and shelter. Reports of farmer suicides, urban slum demolitions, the introduction of Foreign Direct Investment in retail threatening to push out millions of small shopkeepers, the handing over of forest land to private companies, the privatisation of rivers and so on, appear to add up to a growing attack on the poor. In many places, this onslaught is met with resistance, and pushed through with police force.
News of the arrests, beatings and injuries suffered rarely finds its way into the local or national newspapers or television channels, except when deaths are involved, and even then, it barely makes the front page before disappearing into the oblivion of the Indian judicial system.

Economic differentiation appears to be growing despite official claims of a fall in the percentage of people below poverty line: anywhere between 20–80 percent of Indians are below the poverty line in 2010.¹ The middle classes, on the broadest estimate, comprised 26 percent of the population in 1998–99, though what level of consumption this cohort is able to sustain is not clear (Sridharan 2004). On the other hand, the national newspapers report the globally acquisitive abilities of Indian companies and the fact that India has the highest number of billionaires in Asia (Madhavan 2007).

Positive features for democracy

Given this context, what are the positive indicators for Indian democracy? The bedrock is a strong tradition of constitutional democracy which has held together, despite major setbacks like the Emergency between 1975 and 1977 when basic freedoms were suspended (see Austin 2000; Guha 2007); the aspirations for social justice which have led to a constant churning in the polity, including the rise of new parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party that represents India’s former untouchables and is in power in the largest Indian state of Uttar Pradesh; and an active citizenry and various civil liberty groups which try to hold the state accountable for its excesses. India’s diversity is its greatest asset – India has 4,693 communities, 415 living languages, and several religions – and its experience in holding all of these together far predates the European Union. Its growing economy and large diaspora also means that there is a great deal of global interest in investing. Technologically, the spread of communications has had an unprecedented effect, giving power to even small trades-people to identify a market.

Negative trends for democracy

As mentioned above, the gravest danger to Indian democracy is the growing economic inequality; the emphasis on procedural democracy,
as represented by elections regardless of the substantive content they deliver for people, and regardless of whether the votes were bought with money or manipulated by paid news. Another worrying feature is the rise in vigilantism, and outsourcing of the control of law and order by the government, as represented by the Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh started in 2005, which aimed at flushing out Maoist guerillas and in the process burnt many hundred villages; and the state protection given to the Bajrang Dal and other lumpen groups, which have attacked artists like M F Hussain, who is India’s best known painter. State sponsored communal massacres, as in the notorious Gujarat pogrom of 2002 in which about 2000 Muslims were killed, and the poverty and discrimination faced by Muslims across India are worrying factors. The lack of justice, as for the victims of the pogrom against Sikhs in 1984, or the failure to rehabilitate the victims of the Bhopal industrial disaster is another major drawback. Terrorism is both a reaction to this, and an independently worrying phenomenon, as manifested in the attacks in Bombay in November 2008. Ecological threats – drying up rivers, water scarcity, deforestation, unchecked mining, and hyper consumerism – are also major threats to democracy.

Why the standard sociological model of urbanised citizenship does not apply to India

In the standard sociological narrative that grew out of 19th century sociology (Marx, Weber, Durkheim), urbanisation leads to anonymity and equality; cities are the space of liberation as against villages, where community is cloying. Furthermore, the conditions for European citizenship, held as a model, were created by the mass welfare state. This, however, does not apply to India in the 20th or 21st century, since most jobs are in the informal sector; and of the formal sector, 2/3 of the jobs are in government service. The overlap between high caste and formal sector employment is robust, while the unorganised urban poor get jobs through personal caste, kinship or village networks. Since most work is in small scale units, leading to patronage relations, work or employment cannot be the sphere for self-worth or one’s claim as an equal citizen.
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New sources for citizenship, identity formation and democracy:
Nationalism, regionalism and class

Despite this inequality in work, people are increasingly feeling themselves citizens of a common country. In India, we now have the coalescing of the stages of early industrialisation and a late ‘knowledge economy’. Technology and communications, especially television, have created new imagined communities around the nation, but have at the same time also strengthened regionalism and parochialism. One example of this is the singing contest, Indian Idol, where regional passions run high over their candidate. The Indian idea of nationhood is thus in symbiosis with regionalism, not against it; and it is the creation of linguistic states which have held the nation together rather than caused its breakup. The demand for new states, like the demand for Telengana, is thus an important part of the movement for democratic change in India.

Recent victories and defeats for civil society

In recent years, civil society actors have registered a number of gains through mass mobilisation and lobbying with the government. These include the Right to Information Act 2005, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, and the Right to Education Act, 2009. However, the launch of Operation Green Hunt in 2009, ostensibly to finish Maoist guerillas, but in practice aimed at crushing all manner of democratic dissent, is a major setback for Indian democracy.

As always in India, both the present and the future remain contested, and civil society is simultaneously in conflict with and in partnership with the state to bring about democratic change, and to take on other actors in civil society who have other visions of the nation.

Note

1. The economist Jean Dreze (2010) writes: “At least four alternative figures are available: 28 percent from the Planning Commission, 50 percent from the N.C. Saxena Committee report, 42 percent from the Tendulkar Committee report, and 80 percent or so from the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS).
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Civil society and democratisation of the Arab world

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The literatures and debates on civil society raise several questions about the changing forms and potential role civil society may play in the discourse of democratising state–society relation. In this context, civil society could be viewed as a form of active political society that constitutes an independent and distinct domain between the individual and the state. Therefore, in analysing civil society in the Arab world we should identify the social forces that are included in civil society and explain their relationship to the state. It is asserted that democracy and democratic culture have been difficult to establish in this region of the world. As much as it is important to explore the varieties and strength of social movements and their role in consolidating the intervening space between public and private sphere, it is imperative to highlight the historical experience and socio-economic settings of the Arab region.

Arab societies cannot be understood apart from their historical transformation: demarcation of state boundaries by the colonial powers; the Zionist movement and the rise of the state of Israel; the frequent intrusion of the superpowers on the side of regional actors; and the nature of its political and economic relations with the West.

By the same token, while the international system and great powers stipulate the setting and often function as catalysts for political development in the region, it is as crucial to place the underlying factors that can lead to change within their regional framework. It follows that critical understanding derived from these particular circumstances are necessary to enable us to understand the political processes in the Arab world.

The aim of this paper is to briefly highlight the Arab political discourse and the historical context whereby the modern states came about. Thereafter, some of the problems in promoting civic and democratic culture
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in Arab societies will be elaborated upon. Finally, we will examine how social movements can help to loosen the grip of political regimes and transform Arab states into democratic and legitimate organisations of domination. It has to be emphasised, however, that I am not putting forward prescriptions for civil society to achieve democracy; rather, it is an attempt at illustrating the complexities of the debate on Arab civil societies and democracy and, by the same token, highlighting the richness of the history of these societies.

The Arabic world of politics

In liberal democracies, politics are seen as the playing out of a set of ideals that people seldom encounter in the real world. The concept of the state is one such abstraction (Turner 1994, pp 23). The ideal-type Western modern state was historically grafted on to the culturally coherent ethno-religious or ethno-linguistic political entities called nations (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991). Further, in liberal democracies, abstract values serve as the basis for formation and regulation of political as well as civic institutions in the state. The political systems are organised and function in accordance with a defined set of rules, and society is sanctioned by a secular contract, embodying human-made laws that provide rules and legitimise authority (Turner 1994, pp 24).

Organising principles: Family and kinship

The organising principles of Arab societies, on the other hand, are embedded in a concrete social context where the family and the network of kinship are the Archimedean point to which individuals always relate. Even the idea of political action originating with the individual is regarded as alien, since it implies that the social environment in which he or she is supposed to act has been disregarded. Thus, in the Arab world the prime social values and moral responsibilities in both the private and the public domain are still located in the family and its kinship extension (Barakat 1993).

There are great variations between Arab states as regards natural resources, geography and even historical experience, including exposure to the West and colonialism, but since the creation of modern states following
the advent of Western colonialism, the manners by which Arab leaders govern have displayed a striking conformity, making their roles in practice so alike as to be interchangeable. This is the case irrespective of their title of sovereignty – marshal, president, amir, or king – and despite the fact that they have different personalities and have no common denominator that links them as regards background or education. Thus, with their outright authoritarianism, and also by making great efforts to resist democratisation, all Arab leaders are equally intent on using religious symbolism to gain legitimacy (Karawan 1992; Hinnebusch 1992).

The emergence of states in the Arab world on the ruin of the Ottoman Empire from 1918 and on could be characterised by the failure to develop modern nation-states with mature political structures. During this period, Arab states monopolised power not only through the penetration of civil society and through coercion, but also by preventing the emergence of autonomous socio-political groups. The establishment of genuine political parties and independent trade unions were prohibited. Allowed, instead, were the rise of informal and, at times, semi-official pressure groups based on extended families, tribes, religious functionaries, extended families of the new middle class and house trade unions (Hijazi 1980).

Civil society in authoritarian structures

An important feature of the Arab state came into being by the penetration of civil society and the transformation of its institutions – educational, cultural, religious – that have become mere extensions of state apparatuses. For example, under Egypt’s three military rulers, the officers’ corps has become almost a separate caste, living in their own enclosed world of subsidised housing and recreational facilities, just as political independence led to modern-day institutionalisation of families and social networks of tribes and religious or ethnic constellations. Contentious voices also resonate because the exclusionary structure of governance does not reflect the diversity of the population. Contrary to popular images, Arab societies are not homogeneous in ethnicity or religion (Hassan 1999).

Gerber (1987), inspired by Barrington Moore, elaborates a series of hypotheses about the significance of the Ottoman rural structures, particularly the absence of a major landed aristocracy, for the nature of
modern states, social transformation and revolutions in the Middle East. The absence of a landed upper class in the region up to 1900, and the weakness of this class when it finally did emerge, explains the absence of a coherent basis for the development of a democratic polity. The introduction of the Land Property Law in 1894 in Egypt is a case in point. The law was too arbitrary and lacked the time and space to develop and create a landed class equivalent to that of feudal nobility in Europe. This might explain the speed in implementing the land reform that was put forward by Nasser on July 1961.

The meaning of the state in the day-to-day life of ordinary Arabs, and its absence in the discourse of politics, is important in this context. While the Arabic Maghreb countries are relatively homogeneous in religious terms, and while the state does not necessarily contradict with ethnic origin (ie, Arab and Berber) and religion, the Mashreq (the Arab world from Egypt eastward to the Arabian Peninsula, Syria and Iraq) is highly heterogeneous. Many diverse ethnic and religious groups inhabit the state with unmistakably parochial communal loyalties that are often in conflict with the loyalty demanded by the state. Thus, the projected image of the Arab regional system is one of bewildering complexity (Hermassi 1987).

Every political crisis in the Arab world reveals the fragility of the state and its incoherent political institutions. The establishment of the state of Israel, the expulsion of the Palestinians, and the persistent military conflicts in the region all have contributed to a widespread siege mentality and belligerent political discourse. Perhaps most importantly, Western cultural symbols, modes of production and social values aggressively penetrated the Arab world, seriously challenging inherited values and practices, and added to a profound sense of alienation.

Within authoritarian cultures, where the political system is immersed in patron- klientalism and coercive interrelationships with the population, individuals who may be alienated by the state seek to find refuge from oppressive political structures. In such circumstances, Robert Putnam (1993) asserts, it is usually difficult for people to pursue the impossible dream of cooperation in the absence of social capital, the most effective precondition for civic engagement and cooperation for mutual benefit. Civic engagement is an emanation from the social and human capital of
the society that ultimately becomes a personal attribute of individuals within the same society. As such, people are capable of being socially reliable, simply because they are implicated in these norms and in the trustworthy civic networks within which their behaviour is internalised and ingrained (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984). Further, Putnam (1993, p 187) argues:

Stock of social capital, such as trust, norms, and network, tend to be self-enforcing and cumulative. Virtuous circles result in social equilibria with high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement, and collective well being. Defection, distrust, shirking, exploitation, isolation, disorder, and stagnation intensify one another in a suffocating miasma of vicious circles.

Thusly viewed, authoritarianism is in part the result of both the kind of state-led economic development that occurred from the 1950s until the middle of the 1970s, and of the resilience of old classes, the adaptability of the new middle classes, and their consequent ability to thwart state policies. After all, authoritarianism cannot escape the logic of politics; on the one hand, where an authoritarian state is poorly institutionalised and enmeshed in clientelist relations with the society it governs, the imperative of political survival will significantly subvert political reforms. What makes these states unique are the ways these regimes penetrate their societies to implement policies and their ability to buffer their societies against pressures from regional and international systems. Following this logic, the Gulf States are a case in point: oil wealth has undoubtedly served to buffer the external pressures on regimes’ political capacity. The ruling families have been able to justify their existence and project support to their legitimacy by insuring that oil wealth has benefitted the populations.

The civil society, one could argue, became with time increasingly ineffective in shaping and formulating the state’s policy choices. The UN Development Program’s Arab Human Development Reports in the last few years, which have analysed what remains the only substantially unchanged region of the world, is a paragon of virtue. These reports illuminated in a chilling detail, as was stated in the 2002 report, the “deeply rooted shortcomings of the Arab institutional structures” that hold back human
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development in the era of globalisation. They pointed further to the ‘freedom deficit,’ gender inequality, low levels of health care, education and information technology usage, and high unemployment that indicate clearly that the Arab world lags far behind the pace of global change.

The state as the embodiment of family and kinship

In Arabic political thought the term state, *dawla*, signifies a certain type of patrimonious institution that exercises power and authority delegated by a supernatural entity, Allah. Against this background and except for works on law and ethics, the state was discussed in a political context only as an abstract locus of order and disorder and, more importantly, as a God-given *fait accompli*. In the writings of Muslim scholars such as Ibn Khaldun, *dawla* refers to the continuity of power exercised by a clique of successive sovereigns. In Arab/Muslim history rulers have always exercised exclusive power (Hassan 1999). The conception of the state as an organisation of domination over a given territory had not existed. Rather, *dawla* essentially connotes a political body with three main components: a ruler, his troops, and a bureaucracy exclusively related to him.

What must be stressed is that *dawla* is distinct from society at large and from what has come to be known in modern times as the civil society (Al-Azmeh 1993). Arab societies have lacked independent urban centres, an autonomous bourgeois class, and a Weberian bureaucracy with legal liability, personal property and a cluster of rights which embody bourgeois civic institutions. Without these institutional and cultural elements, there was nothing in Islamic history to challenge the dead hand of the despot. Social structure in Arab societies has been characterised by the absence of a network of institutions mediating between the individual and the state. It was this social vacuum which facilitated the circumstances in which the individual was often deprived of any protection against arbitrary rule. The absence of civil society explained the failure of capitalist economic development and political democracy (Turner 1994).

The colonial formation of Arabic nationhood

In the Arab world, the nation-state came about as a deformed creation of Western colonial policies and their direct control over non-Western
societies. Following independence, their status as nation-states meant no more than membership in the UN. In reality, they had yet to build, as required by the theory, a truly sovereign state and ‘national’ society out of a myriad of linguistic, cultural and religious pluralities operating within their newfound states (Sheth 1989). The emergence of a common nationhood through civil society and citizenship in Arab societies involved a messy process of continuous manipulations among different ethnic groups with complicated relationships permeated by religious and historical bitterness due to the deliberate Ottoman policy of favouring the Sunnis in the state administration. The classical way to solve this problem has always been that the family or the group that holds the economic resources and political power bribes others, who are smaller or weaker (Hassan 1999).

The oil wealth has not been used to create a self-sustaining industrial society; instead, a society of corrupt rentiers, who over time have become more and more radicalised Islamist, has emerged. Luciani and Belblawi (1987) used the term ‘rentier politics’, whereby regimes use the state’s wealth to bribe a part of their society and to purchase the support of allies in order to strengthen their power base at home. The Gulf states are a case in point: oil wealth has undoubtedly served to buffer the external pressures on regimes. The ruling families have been able to justify their existence and project support to their legitimacy by insuring that oil wealth has benefited the populations (Mitchell 1999).

At the regional level, this policy is pursued to buy the goodwill of rivals, which often are stronger regimes. But, when religious, ethnic and historical enmities are deep and economic growth is slow, the classical (and often practised) pattern is to rely on dictatorial solutions to the problem of social, political and economic development. In the face of it, the bulk of investment in the rich Arab Gulf states in development has yielded a vulgar display of malls, half-built prefabs, and sterile plazas. The patina of the oil boom is cracking badly. By locating the state above and away from society, a new type of statism has been contrived. It has a pronounced clan-based, dynastic or military-dictatorial character. States could quickly integrate into the international system, but they would just as quickly destroy their own ‘would be’ social order (Sheth 1989; Springborg 1989).
Since 1970, many Arab regimes have remained in power and have created solid organisational structures around them, though one could only agree with Luciani (1990, p xiii) that "the state is a house of cards, its stability more apparent than real". Despite the pan-Arab vocation of Arab states, it is ironic that they pursue a remarkable policy of isolation that "makes it difficult to cross an inter-Arab border, to call another Arab city by telephone, to get a work permit here, an export licence there, and a travel visa to almost everywhere" (ibid).

The weakness of civil constellations and the lack of democratic public sphere that balance the overwhelming presence of the Arab and Middle Eastern societies have given the state and regimes a free hand to marginalise great sectors of their populations. Moreover, the state overwhelmingly dominates the economy, leading to a structure best described as state capitalism preventing private enterprises (al-Naqeeb 1987).

**Arab states and the use of coercion**

In many Arab countries, the state ensures its continued rule through the use of coercion and terror. Migdal (1988) argues that this is the legacy of colonialism that has had disastrous effects on the civil constellations in the Middle Eastern societies. Moreover, the resilience of primordial arrangements in the rural areas that could challenge the state for social control is another worrying moment. These regional families and clans were more able than distant bureaucrats to meet the daily needs of the rural poor and could not only ignore central authority but also manipulate state bureaucracies to enhance their power, thereby further intensifying the climate of conflict.

Politics and power relationships within such states are defined by kinship and the regulation of social relations, governed by values, such as reciprocity and loyalty. Identity and loyalty are determined by one’s place in a tightly knitted and vertically structured social network, and it is the control over that network that guarantees the power basis for the political elite and the holder of power. Within this political order, where kinship is the principle that organises political relations and determines identity, control over means of production is central to political authority (Barakat 1993; Sharabi 1988; Al-Azmeh 1993). Furthermore, in Arab
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societies, individual action is sanctioned and legitimised through two closely related premises, namely the God-given law and the immediate social network (usually kinship) that encloses the individual (Barakat 1993; Sharabi 1988; Ajami 1981).

For this reason, it is crucial at this point to make a distinction between political and societal institutions in their concrete manifestations, and to separate government from state. The famous declaration ‘L’etat c’est moi’ has extraordinary political implications in the sense that leaders essentially are disguised in a modern facade of power interrelationships, as is aptly noted by Clifford Geertz (1980, p 20):

Structure after structure – family, village, clan, class, sect, army, party, elite, state – turns out, when more narrowly looked at, to be an ad hoc constellation of miniature systems of power, a cloud of unstable micro-politics, which compete, ally, gather strength, and, very soon over-extended, fragment again.

Since leaders can hardly create the current of events, they usually seek to float and ride with the tide and steer themselves on its track. Political actions, it is asserted, are quite often decided on the basis of imprecise knowledge and assumptions of a hypothetical quality. The actors can never take account of all the factors entering into any given situation, nor can they ever know all the results after action has been taken. Thus, politics deals with both the contingent and the unknown. Political solutions are temporary at best, irrelevant at worst.

But, in a modern world where the rationality of Western interests (or the so called globalism) dictates the power on others unilaterally, Arab societies today exist in a state not only of social but also of political turmoil, in which the entire social life – the body politic, economic and cultural activities – is changing more in reaction to external influence than due to processes and mechanisms within the society itself. The state emerges as an artificial entity that becomes disarticulated in the face of any political crisis (eg, Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia and Sudan to mention only a few). Politics becomes the reign of coercion and a direct administrative intervention by regimes, rather than rule through mutual consent. The state itself becomes the embodiment of a civil group, based
on a social web of family, cousins and friends (Al-Azmeh 1993; Hassan 1999; Ajami 1981). Such circumstances constrain the choices open to the elite by limiting the knowledge necessary to formulate and execute rational political decisions. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that civil society, embattled and defunct, would seek to assert itself against the context in which the state operates.

**Arab civil societies and the prospect for democracy**

The normative confinement on human behaviour such as worldviews, ideologies, political cultures and the way people imagine their commonalities have attracted active and thorough academic attentions. The interest in democratic foundations and prospects, particularly in Eastern Europe, and Latin America has recently focused on civil society and civic culture as the bulwarks against authoritarianism and as a reliable path in pursuit for democratisation.

Putnam (1993) consciously ties this normative sphere and allows greater autonomy to the state and political traditions. He argues that the central principle to understand the democratic political development of a certain civic community lies in the way they practice their social interrelationship over time. If there are vertical and hierarchical social networks (the family and its extension in a primordial sense), it is unlikely that modes of trust, co-operation, reciprocity, and other social interrelationships bridging the separate family units – that which Putnam terms “social capital” – will ever be established. On the contrary, if the social networks are pluralistic, horizontal and extended beyond the family and its extension, then the civic precondition for active and rational social and political life will inevitably emerge. In a situation of deeply rooted insecurity, Putnam (1993) argues, distrust and an atmosphere of suspicion between citizens in the society have become normal conditions of life. In the cause-effect chain, this societal setting makes it impossible for people to participate and cooperate on the basis of common interest, simply because the gain of one individual would necessarily entail a loss for his fellow citizen, in a cynical zero-sum game.

Civic engagement during earlier periods of history encourages not only more societal involvement through incremental adaptation, but also
implicate both the level of economic development that may occur later, as well as performance of governmental and other social institutions. Putnam persuasively shows a vivid and firm connection between the density of civil society in history and the civic culture of the present. His contribution urges us to rethink theories of democratisation and renders the proposition that it is economic well-being that makes political development insufficient. As Putnam (1993, p 157) put it,

... economy does not predict civics, but civics does predict economics, better indeed than economics itself [...] the contemporary correlations between civics and economics reflects primarily the impact of civics on economics, not the reverse.

The Gulf states and Libya are examples par excellence. Moreover, civic traditions not only have remarkable staying power, they are also difficult and slow to change. Thus, there are firm correlations between historical measures of civic traditions and current success with democracy.

By placing a class power model of democracy at the centre of their analysis, Rueschemeyer et al (1992) privilege domestic forces and generate a complex account for shifting regional or international patterns of political change. They stress that economic growth facilitates compromise between capital and working class which, in turn, speeds up the process of democratisation. By the same token, they express considerable scepticism about the prospects of democracy in world regions facing major economic recovery and growth. In the Arab world, however, leaders resort to repression because they cannot extract compliance through primordial institutions and cannot create effective new ones. In the long term, the state’s absolute control and oppressive reaction to popular demands may however run out of esteem and lose momentum and the conditions for liberalisation could begin to ease thereof (Hijazi 1980).

As for the discourse of interrelationships between state and civil society, the latter draws and inherits its distinguished political and societal features from the socio-economic realities; the dispersal of resources, social reforms and power interests that society naturally incorporate. In order to pin down this discourse, two dimensions of the relationship should be investigated: firstly, civil society as an independent and distinct domain of
social relations that embodies a course of action that can enhance political and socio-economic empowerment; and secondly, the paradoxical nature of associational life that often exist within civil society (White 1994).

**Understanding civil society**

In *political* theory, the term is taken to be the sphere of voluntary associations and public communications necessary and essential to avoid the dangers of radical democratic ‘fundamentalism’ and apologetic liberalism (Cohen and Arato 1992). Generally speaking, civil society is commonly taken to consist of those non-governmental civic institutions – such as houses of worship, family, clubs, guilds, and communal voluntary associations – that lie between the body politic of the state and the people within its territory. These prolific networks simultaneously function as the context whereby citizens communicate with the authority and, more importantly, they protect them from political misdeed. The right to private property, absolute sovereignty, and negative/positive rights, which set up the innermost power objects of politics, are all the emanations of the individuals. Yet, they define their individuality purely in their faculty to choose, or ability to act and pursue, or to retain self-preservation. Along this line of thought, the notion of ‘civil society’ is not only fundamental to the definition of political life in modern democracies, but is also a point of contrast between Western societies and those in other parts of the world, where the individual is not constituted as an autonomous entity that chooses and acts freely from social bonds and expectations (Turner 1994; Gellner 1991).

In *social* theory, civil society is a space where state and society interact with one another and allow continuous two-way communication. The achievement of differentiation and plurality in modern social institutions is justifiably taken into account. Social utopias of ‘de-differentiation’ can be avoided by a ‘three-level’ theory of society, where civil society occupies the sphere between economy and the state. The degree of heterogeneity and plurality of a given society not only reflects the extent to which civil society experiences a transformation along modern lines, but also implicates the possibilities of civil society’s ability to create and endure a coherent democratic polity (White 1994, p 388).
For Gramsci (1971), civil society becomes – through Marxian disequilibria – the means to perpetuate the hegemony of bourgeoisie and the engine behind popular mobilisation by the ruling elite. In fact, Gramsci viewed civil society in two intimately interrelated ways. Firstly, he saw it as a way of conceptually analysing the empirical relations between civic institutions and the state in the way they manifest themselves: in organisational (structural) and ideological (super structural) ways. Secondly, he looked at it as a ‘pragmatic’ action in order to prescribe a political strategy and program for the working class and other progressive groups, which Gramsci dubbed the ‘new historic block’ within civil society. Gramsci proposed that civil society be the arena where various social groups and classes struggle to undermine the hegemonic position of the bourgeoisie and prepare the transformation of (or revolution against) the capitalist state. His ‘political strategy’ of labour resistance to the domination of the party-state (as in the case of Solidarity challenging the Polish communist regime) seems to be relevant at this juncture (Keane 1988).

It is also important here to distinguish between civil society as an ‘ideal type’ concept (incorporating the attributes of ‘active rights’, or ‘absolute sovereignty’, or ‘voluntary civic institutions’) and the empirical realities. In reality, the boundaries that separate civil society from the state are usually characterised by opacity. In one case, the state may create civil society (eg, in many Arab states like Kuwait, Syria and Tunisia); in another case, the state may decide the content and form of civil society (as in Egypt). Or, the other way around: civil society may have an essential implication for the pursuit towards liberalisation and democratisation. The latter may materialise simply because the state and civil society are de facto overlapping within the public sphere, thus facilitating the condition for civil society to exert pressures for democracy on the state (Al-Sayyed 1992; Bianchi 1989; al-Naqeeb 1987).

By trying to understand civil society, Cohen and Arato (1992) sought to refrain from the unrealistic assumption of a powerless state, well-being without industrial rights or constitutional frameworks. For them, the concept of civil society contains a new vision of a ‘plurality of democracies’, that is a vibrant Tocquevillian ‘self limiting radical democracy’ consisting of voluntary associations, social movements, a well established
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parliamentary body politic and a public sphere of free communication. Cohen and Arato develop their reconstruction of the theory of civil society in three parts:

Firstly, they situate their civil society within the tradition of social and political theory. Secondly, they use dialectical thinkers who are critical of civil society\(^5\) to develop their own version, in order to demonstrate the insufficiency of different conceptions that incorporate civil society into the state or economy. Thusly viewed, civil society would be the equivalent of the market in the economic domain and of democracy in the political domain. Thirdly, they propose the strengthening of a civil society, lying between the state and the economy, which entails plurality, publicity, legality, and privacy. Cohen and Arato (1992, p 349) further explain (1) plurality: [as] families, informal groups, and voluntary associations whose plurality and autonomy allow for variety of forms of life; (2) publicity: [as] an institution of culture and communication; (3) privacy: [as] a domain of individual self-development and moral choice; and (4) legality: [as] structures of general laws and basic rights needed to demarcate plurality, privacy, and publicity from at least and imaginatively, the economy. Together these structures secure the institutional existence of a modern differentiated civil society.

Arab civil society

Civil society is part and parcel of the socio-economic structure and of the extent to which the institutional representation and coherence of different sectors are varied. The hybrid nature of Arab societies is clearly reflected on the civic institutions. Comprehending the implications of the diversity of associational patterns would give us a clue to the social movements that could facilitate the conditions for democratisation. At this point, the civic institutions whose activities focus on a more tolerant and vibrant democratic society should be encouraged. The movements with specifically political roles contra state authoritarianism, such as pressuring for democratisation, include leftist, liberal and ‘secular leaning’ constellations. However, plenty of those who hamper democracy can be found in organisations based on religious activism or on ethnicity and
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kinship (found mainly in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and the Gulf states). Finally, there are associations – such as trade unions and diverse agricultural associations – that are pacified politically, more or less, or marginalised outside the political system.

The fact that civil society is marginalised and in some cases suppressed or simply destroyed explains the fact that some groups lean to violence as an ideological expression for political demands. There are many factors that contribute to this modern reality in the Arab world. Among the pertinent factors is the undeniably traumatic experience of colonialism, which dismantled the traditional institutions of civil society. The emergence of highly centralised, despotic and often corrupt governments, and the nationalisation of the institutions of religious learning, undermined the mediating role of jurists in Arab societies. Nearly all charitable religious endowments became state-controlled entities, and Muslim jurists in most Muslim nations became salaried state employees, effectively transforming them into what may be called ‘court priests’. In the face of it, Islamism taps into an already distressed social and economic environment.

The most active and powerful opposition and even in some cases the dominant social forces within the Arab world in the last few decades have been the Islamist groups. As such they could have been enlightening forces for democracy and justice against repression and corruption, but literatures produced by Islamist movements follow the same path as the old one, namely, the obsession with family-related matters – sex, dress, segregation of the sexes – rather than with matters of social justice, political freedom or disobedience to tyranny (Ayubi 1991). For the Arab people, this authoritarian political discourse, in which people are denied the means and the possibilities to influence rulers in policy matters, emphasised their inability to resist or even question the tyrannical tendencies of their leaders.

Civil society in Egypt

The social movements in Egypt can be characterised by their organisational heterogeneity. They comprise both pluralist and corporatist features. The pluralist movements are mainly the professional syndicates of journalists, engineers, physicians and the Bar Association. The corpo-
ratists are the trade unions and agricultural associations. Ironically, the ‘corporatised’ social movements began in Egypt as self-governing groups in the 1940s when they were affiliated with the various Marxist groups, while the professional associations began as ‘hybrid’ social groups, made up mainly of middle class, business and religious associations that were directly or indirectly linked to the state (Bianchi 1994).

As for the presence of formerly organised political movements, the special character of civil society in Egypt has paradoxical consequences. It has enabled authoritarian regimes to rule without using high levels of systematic repression or institutional hegemony (unlike the cases of Iraq, Syria, Libya and Saudi Arabia). Yet, it has also thwarted the mobilisation by democratic means of the resources required for a socialist or a capitalist economic transformation. Therefore, Egypt exists in an evaluative deadlock, unable to initiate a genuine process for democratic transformation (Bianchi 1994; Hinnebusch 1992).

Egypt was once described by the prominent geographer Gamal Hamdan as the ‘land of imaginative extremes’. It holds out in this context too; there is a sort of pluralism without frameworks of autonomous institutions. There is freedom of speech, to a certain limit without active political participation. There is increasing economic liberalisation without lessening of the bureaucratic, or judiciary, obstacles to reforms. This is what might explain the paradoxical position of civil society; there is space for it to exist but no room for action (Al-Sayyed 1992; Springborg 1989).

Some might argue that in the absence of stable class formations and with the lack of a coherent working force due to the low level of industrialisation, the prospect of democratic transition is inevitably very limited. It was the working class that provided the most consistent pressures for democratisation in the great majority of the countries that experienced a democratic transformation over the last two hundred years. Whether, in a given country, middle class members were loyal supporters of democracy or not depended on the particular pattern of class relations that existed there.

Institutions do have essential implications in a variety of ways. The Arab states, having neutralised trade unions and pacified workers, seem to follow the prescription of the so-called ‘Chinese model’: seeking
economic development without any genuine political or social reforms. In this vein and against conventional wisdom, economic development can be best achieved within an authoritarian framework. This issue has also been debated, propounded, and, even worse, preferred by leftist groups alongside the regime’s mouthpieces (Hinnebusch 1992; Al-Sayyed 1992; Mitchell 1999).

Indeed, the state in Egypt exists with its variety of civic institutions through the imposition of what Bianchi called ‘ruly control mechanisms’. Unlike social movements that have a decisive role in creating institutional preconditions for a transformation to democratic polity in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere in the Third World, the social movements that constitute civil society in Egypt are not capable of undertaking a radical democratic shift. The civic institutions are disorganised and so penetrated by patron-client ties as to be incapable of aggregating the interest of society vis-à-vis the state.

**Conclusion**

Social movements make a difference, even in authoritarian Arab regimes. When effectively organised for collective action, social movements are endowed with political capital that gives them influence over public policy. In Egypt, the pace of dismantling the ramshackle welfare state built by Nasser was slowed down due to the opposition of organised professional syndicates and labour force, even though it was – and is – hopelessly disorganised and for the main part cowed by the state.

Social movements’ capacity to disrupt strategic industries and provide the regime with important political resources have given certain elements of civil society leverage over regime policy in Egypt, Morocco and Jordan to name only a few (Snider 1988). Islamisation of society and public life has negatively affected Muslims. In many Arab (and Middle Eastern) countries we notice that cultural and social life shifts toward embracing orthodox Islamic values in both public and private spaces. Further, as regimes have forsaken the task of providing systematic educational and employment opportunities to their constituents, the educational system has become an avenue for a large percentage of the rural and urban poor, seeking social and cultural advancement. Though first introduced as an
ideological fig leaf for authoritarian and corrupt regimes in the Middle East, the long-term consequence of Islamisation was to politicise Islam in these countries and reinforce the trend towards religious fanaticism and sectarianism.

Therefore, it is the sorrow state of Arab societies in the last few decades that a work of literature or art can engender and turn the entire state upside down. The assumption of a coherent civil society, moving toward democratisation, would be fruitful only if the constellation of civil society and social movements corroborate this process (White 1994). With the full articulation of ‘the new social movements’, the transformation toward self-limiting democracy can be accomplished in many Arab societies.

It is of great importance, too, to place the public sphere within civil society. The citizen’s right is “rather a political principle involving a new and active relation on the part of citizens to a public sphere that is itself located within civil society” (Cohen and Arato 1992, p 396). Democratisation is usually obtained and brought about through the public sphere, by well-organised working classes. A differentiated and plural civil society is indirectly a prerequisite for democratisation, only if the very same civil society makes up a contingent and vibrant public sphere. This is a task that seems, for the time being, difficult to accomplish in the Arab world, given the dominance of Islamist groups and their reluctance to work with other oppositional forces – let alone that habits of patronage and clientelism still infect all aspects of the state–civil society relations. This being so, the efforts at democratisation are incurably pulled awry.

Notes

1. Moore (1967) argues that the way ‘the agrarian question’ was resolved in each of his case studies is the key to the failure of building a democratic society, as the cases of Germany, China, and Russia demonstrated; or success of democracy, most notably England, France and the United States. The agrarian elite, he argues, remained strong enough to retain labour-repressive agriculture in alliance with a strong state. As he persuasively illustrates in the case of the German Junker, Russia and Japan, the bourgeoisie was weak and dependent on the state, and therefore, fascism was the outcome.

2. Introduced by Lord Cromer, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, as a reward to pro-British elite for their collaboration to overthrow the regime of General Orabi before the British invasion of Egypt in 1882.
3. The Arab *Maghreb* refers to the five countries constituting North Africa: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania and the disputed territory of Western Sahara.

4. In tracing civic tradition several hundred years back in history to illuminate both coercive and material institutional legacies, Putnam finds that regions in Italy with strong civic traditions in the middle ages rose to civic-states in the Renaissance, generated stout measures of civic life around 1900, and helped to make democracy work in present-day Italy.

5. Like Hannah Arendt, Carl Schmitt, Michel Foucault, the early Habermas and Niklas Luhmann.

6. For example in Latin America, the type of party system that became established was crucial for the fostering as well as consolidation of democracy (Rueschemeyer 1992, p 168-169). It had accelerated an effective access of the economic elites and local capital to policy making mechanisms and, thus, had become a part of the body politic.

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We will not be cowed by the repression of the regime since we know that ultimately tyranny never lasts. (Mike Davies, CHRA Chairperson)

On 20 March 2007, in defiance of Zimbabwe’s draconian public order and security legislation, about one hundred Harare residents invaded Town House (City Hall). They denounced the government-appointed commission running the affairs of the city. They called for the commission to “vacate Town House” and demanded new elections. The defiant group was made up of members of the Combined Harare Residents’ Association (CHRA). The chairperson of CHRA said of the spectacular protest (CHRA 2007a):

Today CHRA occupied the steps of Town House to send a clear message to the regime that Harare belongs to us, the residents of Harare. We will continue to demonstrate and hold other peaceful campaigns against the illegal commission until elections are held in Harare. Viva CHRA!

Rationalising this stunt, CHRA reasoned:

The Association has appealed to Parliament for its intervention through submissions to the Portfolio Committee on Local Government, has gone to the judiciary but still the regime has not listened to the concerns of Harare residents. The only option now available is civil disobedience until elections are held.

Surprisingly, this dramatic protest was staged a week after security agents had severely assaulted opposition and civil society leaders for allegedly
defying a police ban on a ‘prayer meeting’; less than a month earlier, government had defied a high court order nullifying a police ban on an opposition rally. Suggesting the perilousness – and maybe foolhardiness – of the defiant act, CHRA boasted, “No one was arrested. Nearly 24 baton-wilding policemen arrived on the scene 10 minutes after the demonstrators had left Town House”. In fact, so strong were fears of a state backlash that CHRA closed its offices for a whole week. When announcing the reopening of the offices, CHRA explained (CHRA 2007b):

This last week was a bit sensitive and our offices were actually not open to the public. There were genuine fears that the police or any members of the National State Security [sic] would pounce on us for our supposed role in the CHRA demonstration at Town House on Tuesday 20 March 2007.

These events illustrate CHRA’s convictions and _modus operandi_, as well as the environment in which it operates. CHRA is a social movement organisation that is unrelentingly calling tyranny to account. This article reflects on CHRA’s spirited efforts to defend the interests of residents against a municipal authority that it believes was ‘imposed’ on residents by a repressive national state. It also lays out a framework for analysis, focusing on social movements and urban governance, and reflects on some emerging issues.

**Social movements, contentious politics and governance**

CHRA is a typical social movement organisation (SMO), here defined as “a complex or formal organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement” (McCarthy and Zald 1977, p 1218). To this end, SMOs actively attempt to implement the goals of social movements (SMs). Dobson (2001) calls SMOs “command posts of the movement”, while Canel (1997, p 211) labels them “the carriers of SMs”. SMOs have “the task of determining the movement’s goals and program, strategy and tactics”. Typically SMOs are formal organisations with a fulltime secretariat, an office, paid staff and/or volunteers. To understand SMOs, it is necessary to take a closer look at some key aspects of social movements themselves.
One of the most celebrated social movement theorists states that social movements are an “invented political form…a distinctive form of contentious politics…that…involve the collective making of claims that, if realized, would conflict with someone else’s interests” (Tilly 2004, p 3). There are two aspects of this conceptualisation that are of interest to the present discussion, namely, contentious politics and collective claim making.

Collective action is the identifying mark of social movements, SMs. Tilly (2004, p 12) notes that SMs are “not solo performances, but…interactive campaigns.” Della Porta and Diani (2006, p 20) correctly insist that SMs are “a distinct social process, consisting of mechanisms through which actors engage in collective action” (emphasis added). It is collective action, itself a result of shared ideas, that is the main characteristic of SMs (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996, p 7). Collective action is a complex process that takes many forms.

The most sensational forms of claim making by social movements is accomplished through contentious politics. According to Tarrow (1998, p 2) “contentious politics occurs when ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontations with elites, authorities and opponents”. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (1996, p 17) trace the genesis of contention to the moment “when people collectively make claims on other people”. What precipitates contention is that the realisation of these claims “would affect those others’ interests” (ibid). Amenta and Young’s equating of social movements to “challengers” (Amenta and Young 1999, p 154) is not without basis. What makes contention really contentious is that it “relies at least in part on non-institutional interaction with elites, opponents or the state” (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 1996, p 18). Relying largely as it does on “extratitutional means of influence” (Gamson and Meyer 1996, p 283), contention makes a mockery of protocol as the claim makers choose to disregard the ‘right channels’. Hence, “collective challenges are often marked by interrupting, obstructing, or rendering uncertain the activities of others” (Tarrow 1998, p 4). It is small wonder that “disruption is the archetypical expression of challenging groups” (ibid, p 96).

McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996, p 2) maintain that collective action depends on the triad of political opportunities, mobilising struc-
tures, and framing processes (cf Goodwin and Jasper 1999). Political opportunities refer to “the structure of political opportunities or constraints confronting the movement”. Mobilising structures define “the forms of organisation (informal as well as formal) available to the insurgents”. Framing processes are “the collective process of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action”. All three factors need to be present for collective action to be possible. Even in repressive political environments, a degree of political opportunity is needed for an aggrieved group to resort to collective action. Even with the best of organisational resources and the most strongly felt and widely shared grievances, the aggrieved group needs to claim some form of political space to make meaningful and sustained collective action possible.

There is a link between social movement organisations, contentious politics and governance. Governance involves relationships and interactions. Some of these interactions are between the governors and the governed, between the powerful and the weak. In the relational practice that is governance, stakeholders with certain advantages can deploy these to maintain and protect their favoured position. Sometimes this involves neutralising threats, which itself may involve stifling the needs and demands of the politically disadvantaged groups. Weak, marginalised and ignored, the politically disadvantaged groups can become “challengers” (Amenta and Young 1999, p 154) when they make claims upon the institutions of governance. They become a social movement if they are able to mount a “campaign”, that is, “a sustained, organised public effort making claims on target authorities” (Tilly 2004, p 3). The importance of governance in these conflicts is amplified by Morrill et al (2003, p 393) who define political conflict as “a form of contentious politics in which challengers contest authorities over the shape and governance of institutionalized systems of power” (emphasis added). In spatial terms, urban councils rank among these ‘institutionalised systems of power’, whose governance is the subject of contention. As carriers of social movements, social movement organisations are the visible force that physically engages the institutionalised systems of power. They are therefore the face of collective demand-making and the instigators of collective action.
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The example of the Combined Harare Residents’ Association

The movement

In 1999, six neighbourhood residents’ groups – some dating back to the 1940s – merged to form the Combined Harare Residents’ Association, CHRA. In 2005, the association’s chairperson asserted that CHRA is “an expression of the growing power of residents’ collective action and…is an effective monitor of the activities of elected councillors as well as municipal officials” (Davies 2005, p 8). In 1999, a Trust was formed and CHRA was registered as a civil society organisation. In 2000, the Advocacy Centre was established as CHRA’s secretariat.

According to CHRA’s constitution, the aim of the association is “to promote and protect the rights and interests of the residents of Harare” (CHRA 2006a). Its preoccupation with urban governance is amplified by its slogan: “CHRA for Enhanced Civic Participation in Local Governance”. Among CHRA’s local governance-related objectives are:

- To represent and support residents of Harare by advocating for effective, transparent and affordable municipal and other services and quality facilities.
- To make representations to and liaise with the Harare City Council, City Councillors, Central Government or any of its ministries, departments or other public institutions concerning matters affecting the residents of Harare.
- To promote and encourage public awareness and participation by residents in local governance issues.
- To do all things necessary to protect and promote the rights and interests of the residents.

It is these objectives that define CHRA’s “core focus”, which is “to develop participatory approaches to local government and…demanding accountability” (Davies 2005, p 9).

CHRA membership is “open to any bona fide resident of Harare upon payment of the membership and subscription fees.” The association has semi-autonomous local ward-based branches with a minimum of twenty registered members. The General Council (GC) manages and controls the affairs of CHRA. The secretariat, headed by the Chief Executive
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Officer, is the implementing arm, and the Management Committee and six other standing committees carry out its affairs.

The organisation has defined seven key programme activities to reach the aims of CHRA:

1. public meetings on topical issues affecting residents of Harare;
2. membership mobilisation;
3. warding public meetings;
4. research into local governance issues;
5. networking with civic organisations that share common objectives with CHRA;
6. development and dissemination of information packages concerning local governance; and
7. challenging violations of the Urban Councils’ Act…and other legislation governing local governance. (CHRA 2007c)

In terms of what Tilly (2004, p 3) terms “social movement repertoire”, the list bespeaks of an ordinary SMO. Its activities cover the gamut of contentious politics that the organisation has adopted since the turn of the century. In the context of Zimbabwe’s socio-political and economic environment, public meetings and the challenging of violations of the Urban Councils Act and other legislation can hardly be non-contentious, especially considering that the state is increasingly being characterised as repressive and intolerant.

National context

CHRA operates in a repressive political environment and an unstable economic situation that has plunged the country into a series of multiple crises since 2000. Zimbabwe’s is a composite crisis that has raised questions on two issues, namely, governance and livelihood. It has been argued that the multifarious socio-political and economic tribulations that have bedevilled the country since 2000 are a result of a crisis of governance (Chikuhwa 2004). Always cited or alluded to in the list of causative misdeeds is economic mismanagement, characterised by endemic corruption and suicidal economic policies. Critics observe a relentless assault on democracy encapsulated in political repression, disregard for
the rule of law, violation of human rights and a fundamentally flawed electoral system that has proved incapable of producing a controversy-free election result since the appearance of a strong opposition political party in 2000 (ICG 2006). These faults are blamed for creating a hostile environment where livelihoods have been severely impaired by, among other vicissitudes, quadruple digit inflation and a persistently soaring cost of living – this in the midst of burgeoning poverty, spiralling unemployment and crippling shortages of basic commodities.

Between 2000 and 2005, there were three national elections whose results were contested by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the main opposition party. Significantly, the MDC contested the very legitimacy of government. The party still views the government as illegitimate, courtesy of ‘stolen’ presidential elections in 2002 (Kamete 2003). Additionally, there is very little faith in public institutions. Key ministries and departments, like the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and Urban Development (MLGPWUD), and the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), are viewed as extensions of the ruling party, ZANU-PF. Some cities, most notably Harare, are run by government-appointed commissions, whose legitimacy, like that of the national state, is contested. Furthermore, critics regard the judiciary as having been seriously compromised. Many doubt the impartiality of the courts (ICG 2006). CHRA described the legal process as “costly, slow, flawed and frustrating” (CHRA 2006b). In any case, government is known to disregard court judgements it does not like and to defy court orders at will.

Of particular relevance to CHRA’s operations is what has been regarded as government’s repressive infrastructure, particularly that restricting the freedom of assembly. The Public Order and Security Act (POSA) restricts public gatherings that are officially described as being of ‘political’ nature. POSA aims to “make provision for the maintenance of public order and security...” (GoZ 2002). It requires four days advance notice to the police for any public gathering, which is defined as a public meeting “held for the purpose of the discussion of matters of public interest or for the purpose of the expression of views on such matters” (GoZ 2002). It gives the police power to prohibit any public gathering they reasonably believe will result in public violence, to disperse such a gathering,
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and to cordon and search any area at any time. Under this legislation, government has recently clamped down on opposition and civil society gatherings, labelling them as a threat to public order and national security. The closure of CHRA offices mentioned in the introduction came in the wake of world-famous suppression of civil society gathering, during which leaders of the opposition and civil society were severely assaulted and/or arrested and detained.

Apart from CHRA, there are other high-profile organisations within civil society whose mandates bring them into direct conflict with the authorities. Among them are: the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), which campaigns for a new democratic constitution; Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CZC), consisting of more than 350 civil society organisations, whose vision is to bring about democratic change; Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) that encourages women to stand up for their rights and freedoms; and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), which aims to foster a culture of human rights. At one time or another, members of these organisations have either been physically assaulted and/or arrested by the security agents.

Local context

The national political, social and economic situation is mirrored at the local level. In keeping with national trends, service levels in Harare have been deteriorating. Roads have been falling into a state of disrepair; water, electricity and refuse collection are increasingly becoming erratic. Health, education and environmental management are plagued by problems. Harare, like all major cities, has since 2000 become “bastions of opposition support” (Maroleng 2005, p 1). In national and council elections, Harare’s electorate rejected the ruling party, and by mid 2002, the ruling party had no democratic presence in Harare. All Members of the national Parliament were of the MDC party, the powerful office of Mayor was won by the MDC, and all but one of the 43 councillors were MDC.

The opposition-controlled councils became fiercely independent and defiant. Obviously playing to the gallery, it publicly countered most central government – which many interpreted as ZANU-PF – moves by
routinely disregarding and/or contesting central government instructions, directives and guidelines (Kamete 2006). The multiple electoral defeats and purported local council insubordination spurred the national state into action as it sought to salvage its dominance in urban politics and rein in renegade councils. By December 2004, Harare’s opposition executive mayor and the opposition-controlled council had been sacked. In their place was put a pliant government-appointed commission, which many critics, including CHRA, regarded as an extension of ZANU-PF. The fact that the commission unhesitatingly does everything central government asks of it has not endeared it to residents who see the hand of ZANU-PF in the running of the affairs of the city.

Contesting the legitimacy of an imposed authority

CHRA has consistently maintained that the government-appointed commission running the affairs of the City of Harare is illegally constituted. In its contention, CHRA cites the law as being on its side; and indeed it is. Section 80(3), of the Urban Councils Act, limits the tenure of commissioners to six months. Section 80(4) requires the holding of council elections before the term of office of the commission is terminated. Based on these legal provisions, “CHRA believes the office of the commissioners to have ended on 9 June 2005” (CHRA n.d.1), six months after its appointment. CHRA’s contention is that “the commission has not fulfilled this requirement” and that this “has serious implications not only for the rights of residents of Harare but for every citizen of Zimbabwe” (ibid).

In a separate legal challenge by the dismissed Town Clerk, in March 2007, the High Court declared the commission illegal. CHRA predictably celebrated the victory and then promptly switched its strategy to demanding that government abide by the court ruling. When it became clear that central government was bent on disregarding the judgement, CHRA announced, “CHRA continues to demand the immediate holding of Mayoral and Council elections in Harare, and the removal of the illegal commission from Town House in line with the High Court ruling” (CHRA 2007d). CHRA further threatened (ibid):
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Failure to heed these demands, the residents of Harare shall continue to: withhold paying any rates to the City of Harare; actively demand their stolen democratic space by engaging in peaceful protests and actions against Makwavarara [the chairperson of the commission] within their suburbs or at Town House.

True to its word, barely a fortnight after the state had demonstrated its readiness to violently suppress protests, CHRA mounted the surprise protest at Town House. Aware of the wrath of the state, CHRA closed its offices for one week.

Claiming space in budgetary processes

CHRA made a sombre analysis of the 2006 budget, prepared by the commission. In its conclusion CHRA showed its stance on the budget by amplifying the negative aspects of the budget such as astronomical increases in rates and service charges.

When the 2007 budget was presented, CHRA did not even bother to analyse it. On 7 January, CHRA (2007d) curtly declared it had:

resolved…to reject the proposed City of Harare 2007 budget and to take any action necessary to express our rejection of the budget and the illegal…Commission. We do so because the commission has no mandate from the residents of Harare to formulate any budget and we demand an immediate return to legitimate governance at Town House.

This statement showed the principled stand of CHRA. The commission was illegal; therefore it did not have the mandate to make decisions, including and in particular, financial ones.

CHRA then advocated a rates boycott, informing residents that they could “safely decide not to pay their rates and still live without any fears from the municipality” before embarking on campaign of a protest (ibid). It drafted a letter of objection against the budget. Residents were requested to individually sign the letter and post it to the acting town clerk, yet another indication that CHRA did not recognise the legitimacy of the commission.
CHRA’s repertoire of tactics

About its tactics on contesting the legality of the Harare City Commission, CHRA (2006c) says:

CHRA will strategically continue to pursue the slow and frustrating court processes for the record, but will back that action with the popular mass mobilisation until we have restored Harare to its rightful owners. We continue to mobilise residents against payment of rates and rentals until there is a legitimate board of city fathers to run our affairs. CHRA says no to the continued re-appointments! Elections Must Be Held Now!

The statement captures CHRA’s *modus operandi*. Included in this repertoire are litigation, advocacy, disruption and information campaigns. Notably all these fall within the realm of collective claim making and contentious politics.

Litigation and advocacy involve working within recognised institutional structures. Litigation, for example, involves dealing with the judicial system. Could it be that CHRA believes that the rule of law is alive in Zimbabwe? However, CHRA describes the strategy as “the slow and frustrating court processes”. Perhaps CHRA is seeking a moral victory, trying to show all and sundry that it has tried the proper channels and they cannot be trusted to deliver. Or could it be that a legal victory is a huge moral blow to its opponents? It could be that CHRA knows that when dealing with fundamental structural issues, the only lasting victory is obtained through institutionally recognised practices.

In its advocacy role, CHRA rarely engages constructively with the commission. The main impediment seems to be the commission’s illegality. Dealing with it may be misconstrued as amounting recognition. In contrast, CHRA has readily engaged with institutions it recognised. For example, it has no qualms about seeking an audience with the national parliament. It did hold a workshop and meetings with the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Local Government (PCLG). In its dealings with parliament, CHRA puts a lot of work into developing a technically sound position, and the recommendations made to the PCLG are always backed by careful research and analysis.
Disruption is the hallmark of CHRA. In its bid to oust the commission, the association threatens with sustained mass mobilisation “until we have restored the city to its rightful owners”. The weapon of choice in this regard is public performance through public protests. The surprise demonstration at Town House is an example of such protests. As noted above, in its contestation of the commission’s legality, CHRA promised “peaceful protests and actions”. In its rejection of the budget, the association said residents would “take any action necessary to express our rejection of the budget” and then protested through a campaign to swamp the local authority with signed individual letters.

CHRA’s other method of disruption was to call for a rates boycott. It is a tactic that has been applied in several cases. The association’s logic is simple: Residents should not pay rates to the commission because it is illegal and everything it does, every decision it makes, and every action it takes lacks legitimacy. Hence, part of the strategy to force the disbanding of the commission and ensure that elections are held is to withhold payment of rates. Similarly, part of the strategy to reject the budget involves not only disregarding the astronomical increases in rates and service charges, but also mounting a complete rates boycott. The argument is that the commission is illegal and has no mandate to prepare the budget, let alone raise revenue.

Information campaigns constitute CHRA’s most visible tactic. Leading this tactic is the issuing of timely public statements characterised by the liberal use of information technology and what Tilly (2004, p 3) calls “pamphleteering”. Notably, CHRA is one of the few organisations in Zimbabwe that have a functional up-to-date website. Through a sustained cyber-campaign, CHRA has been able to not only “promote and encourage public awareness and participation by residents in local governance issues” but also to keep the pressure on institutions of governance as it fiercely does “all things necessary to protect and promote the rights and interests of the residents” as set out in its constitution (CHRA 2006a). Furthermore, CHRA and its branches hold public meetings. Unlike public protests, these are meetings where cool-tempered analyses and discussion take place. It is at these meetings that CHRA rationally reviews issues such as budgets and policies, while providing feedback to residents.
CHRA officials give regular interviews in reaction to issues and lay out their programme of action. These interviews are predictably not solicited by and carried in state-controlled media. Independent and international media as well as websites of like-minded local organisations conduct and carry the interviews. For example on 15 December 2006, two days after the controversial extension of the term of the commission, the website of Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, a network of civil society organisations fiercely critical of the state, carried an interview with Mike Davies, chairperson of CHRA. In such interviews, CHRA projects the image of an organisation on a just crusade. This is accomplished by providing a reasoned, logical, and technically sound analysis that is backed by reference to appropriate legislation.

**Emerging issues**

CHRA’s mandate, crusade and tactics raise questions about SMOs in general, and those operating in repressive environments in particular. The first one is on ensuring good local governance without being tainted with projects of regime change. The Zimbabwean government instinctively labels all its critics as ‘oppositional forces’ bent on ‘illegal’ regime change. CHRA is a self-confessed member of this distinguished group that includes opposition parties, academics, independent media, non-governmental organisations and civil society. The carrying of CHRA’s views in ‘oppositional media’ and the presence of CHRA personnel on sites of oppositional politics, such as demonstrations, is summarily linked to a partisan political project by the state. Interestingly, when CHRA is present on such sites, it consistently uses the occasion as a vehicle for advancing its own agenda such as the dismantling of the Harare commission.

Notwithstanding the state’s ritualistic branding as ‘enemies of the state’ all who disagree with it, question it, or stand up to it, the question should be asked whether it is possible to contend with tyranny without being linked to or implicated in some larger political project.

This issue should be viewed in the context of a tricky practical and ethical dilemma, namely, how to handle tyranny when the loudest noise falls on deaf ears; the greatest public performances have no rousing effect on the target; the soundest arguments count for naught; and even the
sweetest of legal victories end up being hollow. In such cases, one can argue that the ultimate success of a movement’s programme rests on fundamental political and structural changes, including regime change. While it is indeed risky, it may not be wrong for a social movement organisation whose mandate is local governance not to shy away from projects aimed at fundamental changes in national governance.

Another issue has to do with acting on principle as opposed to pragmatic action and flagrant opportunism. CHRA is a locally embedded organisation with a local mandate hinging on local governance. The execution of this mandate involves dealing with the premier local governance institution, which in CHRA’s case is the commission. As McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996, p 14) point out, “the demands of most movements are ultimately adjudicated by representatives of the state”. Apart from being the local state, albeit of dubious legitimacy, the commission is the representative, if not instrument, of the national state. It is therefore the adjudicator of the local demands of the movement. However, because the association does not recognise the commission, it rarely, if ever engages it. In contrast, CHRA has shown a readiness to engage with national institutions such as the courts and parliament.

One could ask if this principled stand is hurting the cause of residents. Understandably, being a state creation, the commission does not have a mind of its own; it owes its allegiance not to residents but to the source of its power, which is central government. Admittedly, it is tricky – and futile – to deal with the commission. But, when standoffs do not pay, there is much to be gained by “revising and expanding repertoires and cultivating new forms of political engagement” (Downey 2006, p 574). Adapting to changing external conditions is what keeps social movements alive and relevant (cf Meyer and Whittier 1994, p 279).

By any standards, despite its radical stance and disruptive tactics, CHRA is a moderate organisation – a characterisation that is confirmed by the association’s numerous references to ‘peaceful protest’. This partly explains why government can afford to ignore it. With CHRA, one notices the absence of “radical flank effects” (Haines 1988; cited in McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996, p 14). McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996) observe that the presence of a radical wing in a movement
can be beneficial. In the presence of extremists within a movement the object of the claims, such as the state, are forced to accommodate the lesser threat by supporting the position of the moderates “as a way of undercutting the radicals”, thereby helping the cause of the movement (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996, p 14).

Conclusion

A typical social movement organisation, CHRA operates in an environment that is not conducive to stable and strife-free relations of governance. There is a confirmed crisis of governance at the national level, and contested legitimacy of governance institutions at the local level. Further, state repression at all levels makes it difficult to engage in contentious politics, which is what characterises CHRA’s approach in its bid to protect and promote the rights and interests of the residents.

Despite the factors working against it, CHRA has managed to mount a sustained challenge as it unrelentingly makes collective claims on centres of authority. It has persisted in the deployment of its double-edged repertoire, namely working within established institutions while at the same time employing disruptive tactics. In Zimbabwe’s system of authoritarian governance, this is a feat in itself. Not only does this require ingenuity and heroic sacrifices, but it also demands a constant reinvention of the movement, considerable staying power and the capacity to stomach disappointments stemming from victories that turn out to be hollow.

It is CHRA’s dealings with the commission, undoubtedly the main local governance institution, which raises fundamental questions. While CHRA has consistently stuck to its principle of not recognising the legitimacy of the commission, it could be asked whether this adherence to principle is hurting the terrain of local governance. It is a peculiar situation where the two main actors in local governance do not engage. There is a clear absence of trust and reciprocity, which – when combined with the issues of legitimacy and the rule of law – make Harare’s governance scene decidedly poisonous. One can therefore wonder whether pragmatism and opportunism, embraced by opponents to CHRS, may not be more advantageous in the long run.
For all its ‘nuisances’, CHRA is a moderate movement. The absence of a radical wing makes CHRA predictable and safe to ignore. Additionally, the state has devised ways and means of responding to the movement’s tactical and strategic repertoires. It is this paper’s contention that CHRA needs a radical flank. The presence of an extremist group with a radical approach and agenda might force the authorities to consider CHRA as having the potential to transcend the bounds of an ordinary irritant. This could see the state bargaining with the moderate elements within CHRA so as to undercut the radical wing. In an environment where the state is notoriously repressive, stubbornly listens to no one, routinely disregards court orders, and impudently scoffs at threats, deliberate selective radicalisation of some sections of the movement may offer the only way to constructively engage, to be heard, and to be taken seriously.

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Tensions in civil society participation in governance and politics in Africa

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In the last 20 years or so, civil society, broadly defined, has been at the vanguard for the struggle for democratic transformation and popular participation in politics and governance. In Kenya, the components of civil society that have taken this role have been the Church\(^1\) (1980s), professional organisations, such as the Law Society of Kenya (1990s), and the NGOs in the 1990s and beyond.\(^2\)

Indeed there is debate as to whether civil society organisations are pluralising agents in the Michael Bratton (1989) sense, or whether they are artificial and inorganic constructs that reproduce the highly negative tendencies of the very state and elite that they seek to change, as has been argued by Stephen Ndegwa (1996). Regardless of where one sits on this debate there are two inescapables: one, that the character of the state determines the nature of the struggle and, two, that there are various ways that civil society actors form their self-image, *modus operandi*, and strategic orientation, even including forms that are not considered ‘civil’.

Civil society struggle for democratic transformation has, for most part, wrapped itself up in the language of political and civil rights. The agitation has been moored rather strongly on the libertarian orthodoxy, which privileges freedom and competition, both seen as the necessary conditions or ingredients for a better democratic outcome. Consequently, the tenor of the debate has centred on promotion of political pluralism, establishment of free and vibrant press, a strong regime of individual rights and so on.

However, pluralism has resulted in unintended consequences that most civil society organisations had neither anticipated nor prepared for; contradictions that promote illiberal tendencies. This is evidenced by the fact that political and media pluralism have also unleashed forces of ethnicity of the malevolent and exclusionary types, which has undermined the very
constitutio nal notions of citizenship and belonging. We have witnessed the rise of what Fareed Zakaria (1997) called illiberal democracy.

Similarly, in circumstances that civil society has been successful in pushing through a democratic transition, it has resulted in life-threatening consequences for civil society itself. This is primarily for three reasons.

Firstly, most civil society organisations have no robust succession plans, and the moment their leaderships get absorbed into government, these organisations face serious survival tests.

Secondly, successful democratic transitions tend to occasion donor shifts from working with the civil society to supporting the new government based on its strong democratic legitimacy. This results in the drying up of funds for civil society, most of whose budget is donor-generated.

Thirdly, successful transitions also create a terra incognita for civil society on both sides of the divide: thus, those that get into government have to learn new ways and fight old establishment as they seek to reform, and those that remain in the civil society have to develop a new way of engagement from confrontation to collaboration without cooptation – a very delicate balancing act.

Sequencing change: The dilemma between agency and structure

One of the major challenges for civil society, in its struggle for democratic transition, has been one of sequencing or balancing between agency and structure, that is, between changing political actors or social systems or institutions. The initial focus was on regime change, though it became quickly clear that the institutional architecture that these regimes were based on created strong incentives for undemocratic behavior even for the new managers of the state. It is for this reason that civil society has, in the second part of its struggle, called for constitutional reforms alongside support for democratically-oriented leadership. And in a political economy that is as incestuous as Kenya’s, where elites straddle both the reform and establishment order rather randomly, a clear identification of who the democratic agent is, sometimes becomes problematic.

It is ironical that for all the investment by civil society actors to accomplish democratic transitions in Africa, where successful regime transitions have occurred, civil society has not yet produced a president: labour
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has – President Chiluba in Zambia; business has – President Muluzi in Malawi; multilaterals have – President Mutharika in Malawi and Sirleaf Johnson in Liberia; academia has – President Atta-Mils in Ghana. The closest civil society has had is President Obasanjo in Nigeria, thanks to African Leadership Forum! This is a far-fetched claim, but it illustrates the point: that energies and time spent on mobilisation for change has not been converted into direct acquisition of political power by civil society. The question is, is this because of lack of ambition or lack of capacity? Does this outcome speak to the much stated ‘superficiality’ of the civil society, its inorganic formations and weak forward and backward linkages in society? Is this ‘inorganicness’ shared by professional associations? Why has public goodwill not translated into electoral mandates? Is civil society, in its current popular notions or understanding, ‘suspended’ or irrelevant to the peoples’ struggles much like the state in Africa?

I think that there are no easy answers to these questions. It however needs to be noted that civil society has exhibited a deficit of ambition and lack of capacity to popularly mobilise for direct political action. Civil society organisations in Africa were founded on the notions of non-partisanship, a useful and strategically understandable rule, both for donors (to manage the possible diplomatic awkwardness) and NGOs (to help remove notions that NGOs were political parties in disguise). However, this ideal of political neutrality has been interpreted rather too rigidly and for most part unhelpfully for the interest of the larger cause. Non-partisan purists and priests have undermined civil society ambition and capacity to mobilise, even when there was demand for it. The supplication at the feet of ‘neutrality’ even when clear political choices are available has not served the political career and objectives of civil society well. It is the media equivalent of balance even in nakedly morally clear circumstances such as genocide. This inability to ‘cast your lot’ has partly contributed to the non-emergence of civil society candidates as viable electoral options.

Civil society has sometimes behaved like lovers of the bull fight, those who support the sport without supporting the matador. And they have always believed that the matador will surely show up, and they have no responsibility of demanding or siding with the matador that plays better
and fairly! The matador is increasingly failing to show up (read: no reform) and the public backlash is emerging.

Civil society has not resolved the problem whether it is agency or structure that should be prioritised in the quest for change. In incestuous political societies, such as Kenya, where political leaders who lay claims to mantles of change in a classic case of musical chairs, the confusion becomes even more acute, and the situation is not helped by civil society acting merely spectator. This is part of the reason to why in 2002, civil society came close to being a matador; in disregard of the principle of non-partisanship, it engaged in direct political action and the experience has not been that pleasant either.

**Some key tensions**

We will try to headline a few of the key tensions and briefly discuss them below.

*The moral tension: Right versus popular*

In societies where power was centralised, the state repressive, political competition outlawed or constrained, and civic education levels low, civil society has commonly been the antidote – the instrument for re-balancing power relations between state and society in favour of the latter. Civil society was self-stylised peoples’ voice. CSOs were gladiatorial, and courageously fought against the state to make it respect human rights and open up the democratic space, resonating quite broadly with a people whose experience with repression was endemic. In the public imagination, civil society stood for their good and interests, the state stood for the opposite. Thus, both moral initiative and moral momentum was with civil society. It led to the unquestioning of its motives or operations. Civil society organisations were a perfect alignment of what is right and what is popular, and that is why civil society registered successes in pushing back the state.

However, crime and security has severely tested the right versus popular alignment. In so doing, it has resurrected the issues of legitimacy of civil society, which the state has always but unsuccessfully raised to try and undercut civil society operations or resist its demands. The public,
faced with growing insecurity and crime, has looked favourably to police strong arm tactics in fighting crime.

This has all undermined due legal processes and the core part of the human rights regime. The attempts by civil society organisations to protest against police actions as unlawful and undemocratic have been frowned upon by the public, who view such protestations as siding with the criminals. In this case, can civil society still lay claim to be speaking on behalf of the people? Is the premising of civil society work on popular mandate or endorsement necessary or desirable? The answers to these questions may help answer another: who, then, is civil society and what is its place in a transitional democracy?

**The space tension: Heart versus head**

Based on its higher moral claims as alluded to above, civil society agitation for democratisation has been fuelled and stiffened by its ability to mobilise the public. This demand has been characterised by the push to ‘create space’ in both political and policy circles to enable greater public participation. It has been driven by passion; a belief in the ‘rightness’ of the cause, not necessarily the ‘factualness’ of it.

However, after successfully pushing for ‘space creation’, civil society has faced the difficulties of ‘effective space occupation’, particularly in the policy realms. This is because successful ‘space creation’ struggles are heavily, even though not primarily, dependent on the mobilisation of troops (public). On the other hand, ‘space occupation’s’ success is also dependent on the ability to mobilise ideas in the form of solid policy proposal preferably backed by research. Many civil society organisations were not prepared for the latter, which has undermined their effectiveness and, sometimes, legitimacy in the eyes of the state. Scientific data and empirical proof are hard to obtain. Most of it is not panelled, and some issues are ‘evidence-proof’ by the mere fact that they are new and evolving – they have to be driven by belief and first impressions.

The ‘tyranny’ of science and empiricism in policy work has hurt civil society and undermined their capacity to effectively occupy the space they have fought so hard to create. This has been made worse by the present rigid donor cooperation framework which frowns upon research and
prefers to invest in pure ‘advocacy’. Donors view research as ‘idle’, ‘slow’, ‘elite’; yet, advocacy without the benefit of ideas is ‘noise’. The distance between thought and society and state is partly to blame for some of the sub-optimal governance and developmental outcomes that we see in the third world. The infatuation with events and drama, by both donors and civil society, fails to appreciate the changing environment of advocacy – that there is need to invest in the mobilisation of ideas in order to be able to influence change. The investment needed for space occupation is markedly different from one required for space creation.

The philosophical/ideological tension:

Liberal democracy versus social democracy

As mentioned earlier, civil society struggles were initially anchored in the liberal notions of democracy. Hence focus was on pluralism, regularity and fairness of elections, independent judiciary, individual liberty, free press, tenurial limitations etc. The liberal notions pushed to their logical conclusions also protect individual property rights and, given the economic reality of our times courtesy of globalisation, a relatively weaker labour rights regime for purposes of attracting private sector investment.

However, given the development outlook or reality of Africa – where poverty and inequality are high; unemployment rates are high; the informal sector provides the single largest source of employment (almost 90 percent); social protection policies are absent or weak; health and housing access is inadequate; land ownership is concentrated in the political elites – one cannot help wonder whether the well of liberal ideology, rather than social democracy, from which civil society drank was the appropriate one. It is little wonder then that when constitutional moments presented themselves, civil society began to fight for a robust inclusion of social and economic rights. The inadequacies of a purely liberal approach to the struggle had become evident, and an economic and social bill of rights to try and check the enormous power of business, and protect consumers, became a signature issue in the constitutional reform debates. But these debates revealed the philosophical tensions. How do you balance claims of individual rights and historical injustices? How do you balance private property versus communal property rights – both of which are competent
discourses of democracy but which nonetheless present different shades of it? Which democracy guides civil society participation? The resolution to this tension remains incomplete.

**Transitional tension: The failures of success**

Civil society leaders who make it to government suffer from an expectations–capability gap. The cultures of the two are markedly different. One is idealistic and experimental; the other is pragmatic and conservative. One is driven by individual star power; the other by bureaucratic power. One focuses on self-promotion; the other on self preservation.

Civil society has thus had an unpleasant experience in government. Many have not been able to build partnerships and master the politics of the bureaucracy, on the mistaken belief that you can reason your way to change or reform. They have underestimated the resilience and power of the traditional bureaucrat, who views the civil society actors with disdain, conscious that he can wait them out in one electoral cycle. Many civil society actors quickly surrender by either quitting government or getting co-opted – another painful lesson on how different the politics of space creation is from the politics of space occupation.

**The priorities tension: Content versus pockets**

Development cooperation is both diplomacy and security by other means. Some programmes are locally relevant but cause diplomatic discomfort. Local content and foreign pockets do not always mesh together. Diplomatically difficult programme areas have often forced civil society to abandon or avoid certain activities. It hurts the credibility of civil society organisations in the eyes of the state and in the eyes of the public. They get readily seen as agents of foreign powers. It leads to a dialogue of the three deafs: citizens, donors, and civil society.

**Conclusion**

Civil society has had a chequered policy and political career in the last two decades in Africa. It has registered some successes – first, in opening up the political space and, second, opening up policy making to popular participation. But attending these fairly liberal achievements have been
Tensions in civil society participation in Africa

contradictions both within civil society itself and also between civil society and its external environment. The important lesson that civil society must learn is that it has only been successful when it has forged creative partnerships with the peoples’ struggles and its progressive leadership. And the struggles for change or democratisation are not always neat, linear and devoid of contradictions.

Notes

1. This was particularly so with the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) and the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK).

2. However, it must be noted that NGOs such as the Public Law Institute (PLI), Kituo Cha Sheria, and the Green Belt Movement (GBM) started this agitation much earlier in the 1980s.

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Author affiliation

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## Session

**Latin American *ciudadanía* or citizenship – different notions of citizens and political participation**

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Why involve the question of citizenship, when we discuss civil society in Latin America? Would it not be enough to discuss civil society and political participation? Actually not, since our notion of citizenship may affect our understanding of political participation and also of how people view themselves as political agents. If citizenship is understood in an inclusive manner, connected to the everyday experience of people, it might be a powerful instrument for empowerment and emancipation. If understood in a more narrow sense – that citizenship only has to do with civic rights, for example – the effect may be the contrary.

The term ‘citizen’ is increasingly used in the discourse by governments as well as civil society organisations, and with varying significations. Some civil society organisations and social movements in Latin America have broadened the concept of citizenship to include not only civic rights, but also social, economic, cultural and ecological rights. Consequently, this new notion of citizenship relates not only to the national state, but also to local and international levels of community. As a consequence, research focused on citizenship may include not only the political rights of the citizens, but also focus on how citizens shape their everyday lives in dialogue with, or in contestation against, the state.

I first heard about the concept ‘inclusive citizenship’ at the end of the 1990s when I worked for a Brazilian NGO. The concept was promoted, among others, by the umbrella organisation ABONG, the same organisation that initiated the Social World Forum. The understanding of inclusive citizenship among ABONG’s member organisations is closely related both to the question of social exclusion and participative democracy. It has to do with the fight to include the marginalised and excluded in society, understanding citizens as rights bearers and political agents.

However attractive the concept citizenship may seem, it is important to have also a more distanced, critical perspective and to analyse how
it is used by governments, civil society and donor agencies around the world. Critique against the rights based perspective may also affect the broader notion of citizenship. Many rights actors have rather uncritically focussed on the emancipatory potential of a rights perspective, paying too little attention to what kind of political agency it shapes. There will be a problem if political contestation for emancipation is moved from the political realm and is transformed into citizens demanding their rights within the legal realm. Could the new inclusive notion of citizenship thus become a vehicle for political change or may it merely restrict and hamper political demands for change?

The issue at stake in the discussions in this session is how to strengthen democracy and promote political change in Latin America, and how to analyse processes for change. To be sure, there is no causal connection between a strong civil society and a strengthened democracy. The question is under what circumstances civil society might strengthen or deepen democracy and promote political change.

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Can politics of ciudadanía move social movements forward?

Cristián Alarcón Ferrari

The last decades of Chile’s socio-political and economic development have been widely highlighted as a key to understanding the neo-liberal turn in global politics (Harvey 2005). Chile was the place where neo-liberal policies were first largely developed and imposed on the population, and the neo-liberal project has continued being the hegemonic socio-political project until today. Yet, important movements and moments of resistance to the neo-liberal model have taken place in the country recently. In 2004, there was massive political mobilisation against the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders’ Summit, which included the visit of George W Bush to the country.

Membership in APEC is part of the strategy of Chile’s integration into the capitalist global economy. APEC aims at the development of free and open trade between its associates. Several groups joined in resistance to this meeting, and alliances were created to this effect. One such alliance was the Chile Social Forum (CHSF) that organised a social forum during the days of the APEC meeting. Organisations grouped under the CHSF were varied, and several political positions converged in this space. For some organisations, the focus of activism was highly dependent on a ciudadanía-based discourse. For others, the focus was on a clearer opposition to neo-liberal policies, and for others again anti-capitalism was the issue to be addressed during these events.

Another movement of resistance to neo-liberalism in Chile took place during 2006, when a huge protest movement arose with Chilean secondary students as its protagonists. The students involved, adolescents between 14 and 18 years old, abruptly changed the political scenario of the nation through the occupation of schools, strikes and protests in
public streets all over the country. Students claimed that their main goal was a thorough transformation of the educational system. Among other things, they asked for the substitution of Chilean education laws that were passed during Pinochet’s dictatorship but still valid. The student strike of 2006 came as a response to a crisis in the education system, which had been a national issue for many years, with different actors constantly criticising both the discriminatory structure of the system, the structural inequalities and the poor results of recent reforms in term of quality of education (Alarcon 2007).

Another episode of political mobilisation against central pillars of the neo-liberal model was the strike of forest workers in 2007. This strike aimed at obtaining a collective bargain for workers within contractor or subcontractor firms to one of the largest forest companies in the country. Even though strikes were rejected and considered illegal by the forest company, it was forced to accept this kind of procedure through the strike and massive mobilisations of the trade unions. The forest company was forced to assume responsibility for the working conditions also within their contractor or subcontractor firms, thereby relating the economic and working condition claims directly to the income of the large forest company.

During recent years, concepts and discussions on citizenship have been flourishing. One scholar, for example, recognises at least eleven different approaches to the idea of citizenship (Close 1995). The problematic relation between politics of citizenship and struggles for broader social emancipation was also one focus of Marx in his book *On the Jewish Question*. Marx criticised that the idea of citizenship was used to separate different spheres of the human search for emancipation. A similar problem was noted by E P Thompson (1989) in his analysis of the citizenship-based arguments of worker movements in England during the process of workers becoming a working class.

The briefly described cases above tell us important things about the challenge of developing a theoretical discussion on how to understand the relations between theories and concepts on *ciudadanía*, on the one hand, and recent developments of resistance to as well as the stability of neo-liberalism and capitalist hegemony in Chile on the other hand. The question is: can politics of *ciudadanía* move social movements forward in Chile?
While the idea of a *ciudadanía*-based social movement was launched by some organisations within the anti-APEC coalition, other movements presented above lacked the crucial articulation of the *ciudadanía* idea in their political discourses and identity politics. In fact, two of the biggest recent movements of resistance to neo-liberalism in Chile based their articulations on the very material points of organising subcontracted workers and structurally discriminated students. One could argue that it was the materiality of their lives as students and subcontracted workers that articulated the construction of political mobilisation in those movements.

The fact that material circumstances were fundamental when building the political identity is a key issue when considering the potential of *ciudadanía* as an articulating political concept within social movements. ‘Poor urban dwellers’ or ‘landless peasants’, for example, would be material situations that could articulate political identity in a better way. Besides, recent Chilean governments have used the notion of *ciudadanía* in order to articulate *their* political discourses. When opposing the governments’ use of the idea of citizenship social movements in Chile, we would therefore need to invoke another meaning of the *ciudadanía* that is being referred to, qualifying it by talking about ‘authentic’ *ciudadanía*, for example. This would imply to contrast and even oppose other understandings of *ciudadanía* that do not fulfill the requirements of authenticity.

The use of the notion of *ciudadanía* on the part of different Chilean governments, as indicated above, runs parallel to attempts to develop social movements, also through the articulation of political discourses with the notion of *ciudadanía*. Moreover, a tradition of political identification through the notion of ‘popular movement’ and ‘pueblo’ exists in Chile, so the future of *ciudadanía* as ‘the’ articulating concept for social movements becomes problematic. It may even turn into a political option that runs counter to better political articulations, when it comes to informing social movements that may bring about social changes in the country.
Notes

1. The Spanish term *ciudadanía* – analogous to the English ‘citizenship’ – is in this text used within the rationale of the theme of the session in which the paper was presented, referring to a broad range of rights.

2. Marx’s *On the Jewish Question* (1844) states the problem as follows: “The actual individual man must take the abstract citizen back into himself and, as an individual man in his empirical life, in him in his individual work and individual relationships, become a species-being; man must recognise his own forces as social forces, organise them and thus no longer separate social forces from himself in the form of political forces. Only when this has been achieved will human emancipation be completed (Marx 1844).

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How civil society participates in multilateral political process

Viviane Espinoza

The larger objective of democracy is to enable citizens to participate in decisions that affect their collective and individual lives. In this context, the objective of civil society is to create the enabling environments for citizens to effectively take part in political and decision-making processes, in order that their collective interests and rights are translated into action. On the other hand, governments alone cannot deal with complex global and domestic challenges. They need to work collectively with their citizens and other stakeholders to find solutions, respond to rising demands and deliver positive outcomes for society.

In the pursuit of this goal, social actors organise themselves, and different types of collective action occur at multiple levels, including local, national and transnational. For instance, civil society may decide to attend meetings organised by its local government to discuss priorities of the agenda for the next annual budget. Also, social actors may network and act collectively in the context of multilateral organisations in order to influence regional public policy being adopted by and affecting several countries.

**Increased participation of civil society in the intergovernmental context**

Over the past years, intergovernmental organisations have become increasingly more open and inclusive to the engagement of civil society organisations (CSOs), businesses and other stakeholders. They have created opportunities for exchange of information and ideas, designed spaces for participation, fostered technical collaboration with CSOs and private partners, developed initiatives to fund civil society projects, elaborated consultative forums, and institutionalised several participation
mechanisms, among others. All these have set a new context for global collective action, which raises several questions:

- Why have multilateral organisations opened spaces for political citizen participation?
- What forms does this political participation take?
- What are the challenges and contributions of these spaces and mechanisms?

That participation of civil society in multilateral political processes has become increasingly important is partly due to globalisation, increasing integration and collaboration among states. Since the early 1990s, CSOs have become major players in development and policy-making. Both multilateral organisations and its government shareholders recognise the critical role civil society plays in such areas as promoting good governance and advances in democratisation, opening of political space, promoting human rights, campaigning for debt relief and increased aid, advocating for social and environmental sustainability, and strengthening the enabling environments for civic engagement.

Additionally, engaging civil society in the development process is important to achieve development effectiveness and poverty reduction. Often civil society organisations can deliver services to the poor more effectively than governments and can play a crucial role in scaling up the delivery of services (UNDP 2005). By engaging in the political processes, civil society has the power to shape the policies, decisions and development outcomes that impact citizens’ lives.

The benefits of institutionalised mechanisms for participation are several.

Firstly, this provides the context for permanent consultation of civil society regarding matters that pertain to all citizens in general, that is, matters of general political interest.

Secondly, civil society has an opportunity to work in collaboration with governments by offering professional, technical expertise and know-how, thus increasing productivity and efficiency of policies.

Thirdly, assuring people’s participation in political processes encourages citizens to take an active part in other programs.
Fourthly, it helps enabling people “to be both aware of their political, civil, social and economic rights on the one hand, and of their own right to demand fulfillment of these rights” (Chandoke 2007).

Fifthly and finally, such mechanisms strengthen the transparency and credibility of political processes, which reflects into an increased support and legitimacy of governments.

For all these reasons, governments have taken steps at the multilateral arena to strengthen future engagement with civil society for more substantive policy dialogue at the global level and strengthening of democracy.

Forms of participation
Civil society participation in multilateral organisations can take several forms, including attendance to meetings, public consultation over specific topics, virtual forums and technical cooperation. Multilaterals can offer CSOs the possibility to acquire consultative status, which provides them greater leverage and access to the political arena. In addition, integrating the intergovernmental organisation’s databases of CSOs allow them to network with other organisations and establish strategic partnerships for development, lobbying and exchange of information. The World Bank’s engagement with CSOs, for instance, can be grouped into three categories of activity: facilitation, dialogue and consultation, and partnership (World Bank 2005). The Organization of American States (OAS) for its part, established three mechanisms to facilitate civil society participation in its activities, including the Civil Society Registry, participating in OAS-related meetings (such as regional forums, discussions), and cooperation agreements (OAS 2009).

While assessments hold that mechanisms for political participation exist in the international arena, they are characterised by several constraints: uneven implementation, somewhat inability to reach a larger public, and at times inefficiency in transmitting to governments recommendations agreed upon by civil society (World Bank 2005) or inability to maximise collective interests and rights. Lichbach (1996) identifies several variables predicted to affect collective action, that is, the likelihood that social actors will be able to maximise collective interests. These include: the number of participants involved; the heterogeneity
of participants; communication; information about past actions; how individuals are linked; etc.

**Challenges: Participation not equal to influence**

A number of issues and challenges facing the engagement of civil society in political processes can thus be highlighted. For instance, often the idea of political participation is limited to observing meetings in which individuals are not allowed to make interventions, or to public consultations over issues that concern specific groups of people. Weiss (1999) identifies three channels of influence at the international level: consultations, information and lobbying; surveillance; and policy-making and decision-making. Among these, virtual consultations on a variety of themes appear to be a common strategy of multilateral organisations to democratise participation and engage citizens in political processes and issues of their concern. Notwithstanding, civil society can easily perceive this mechanism as an artificial way of fulfilling the demands of increasingly support for their participation.

One of the reasons for this inefficiency is that often the product of civil society participation is vague; there is a lack of tools to assess the validity of the process. In other words, civil society does not know whether citizens’ recommendations served as inputs in the decision-making process and as a basis for the action of governments and/or the formulation of policy, that is, whether it impacts democratic governance. In fact, these mechanisms cannot assure that the results of the consultations are taken to decision-makers for their appreciation.

Secondly, there is a lack of institutionalised processes with legitimate recognition and decisive power to set an agenda. When existing mechanisms are institutionalised, they are often restrictive and bureaucratic, making it hard or impossible for ordinary citizens to participate and/or act collectively. Intergovernmental organisations generally institutionalise their processes of engagement by setting rules and regulations to which civil society have to comply. Rules usually include specifications regarding the nature of civil society, the nature of their work and their composition, frequently referring to officially constituted and established civil society
organisations. Individuals and small or recently established organisations hence face difficulties in acquiring consultative status.

Thirdly, the somehow arbitrary rules for engagement might favour the participation of specific groups and/or organisations representing specific interests, posing an issue regarding the legitimacy of the process, the sufficient heterogeneity of citizens, and the represented interests.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges, political participation mechanisms have nevertheless generated some significant results. New channels for participation have been created and, following dialogues held at the international level, governments have taken steps not only to widen the range and scope of participation tools, but also to institutionalise them, so that they become integral part of a systematic process.

In the Summits of the Americas, a multilateral political process involving 34 nation states from the Americas, governments have supported for a higher degree of institutionalisation, which strengthens the legitimacy of the whole process, provides certain voice and influence and satisfies a requirement of cooperative hegemony (Mace and Loiseau 2005). As noted by Rosenberg (2001), the Summit legitimated consultations with civil society and “has exercised a leadership role in the area of civil society participation” in the occasion of the Third Summit of the Americas, in 2001.

The main problematic here is that often the idea of civil society participation encourages the “tendency to take NGOs’ positive role in democratization as axiomatic” (Mercer 2002). Scholars have increasingly assumed that civil society and civic participation are positive and play an important role in strengthening democracy (ibid). However, civil society’s relationship to democratic governance is taken for granted, and so are the existing mechanisms for engagement. The problem with such assumption is that often strategies for increasing participation and the various forms of engagement focus too much on the aspiration for the territorial extension of civil society (Kaldor 2003), or on how participation should be, rather than assessing their actual efficiency in taking civil society’s concerns to the concrete level.
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Civil society’s “crime against the state of Nicaragua”

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Abstract

The concept of civil society may seem to concern mainly researchers (cf Trägårdh 1999). However, conflict of interpretations” (Kristensson-Uggla 2006) of what constitutes civil society takes place not only between academics. At times, events in social life turn into a ‘clash of social structures’ among numerous actors in a society. The civil society’s alleged “crime against the State of Nicaragua”, as it was coined by the Public Prosecutor, Armando Juarez, in 2008 (cited in Envío 2008), could serve as an illustrative example of the latter.

On October 10, 2008, state prosecutors and police in Nicaragua raided the central offices of two civil society organisations, the Autonomous Women’s Movement (MAM) and the Center of Research for Communication (CINCO). As a result, all files, computers, and bookkeeping were removed from their offices. Officially investigating the “crime against the State of Nicaragua”, involving mainly alleged money laundering (Envío 2008), the public prosecutor called the event a raid to “find evidence” (as cited in Rogers 2008) to mount a case against primarily the two organisations. However, the raid was also regarded, in extension, part of mounting a case against 17 other civil society organisations, including international organisations such as Oxfam (UK) and Forum Syd (Sweden), suspected of the same crime (Rogers 2008).

In subsequent discussions among different social actors – including media, political parties, state representatives, and even international actors, such as Reporters Without Borders and the European Union – different explanations were offered as to what was going on and why the state of Nicaragua had launched the investigation. It was simultaneously argued that the events were part of a “campaign to criminalize feminism”
(according to a joint statement issued by women’s right activists, as cited in Rogers 2008), part of a “war of attrition” seeking to shift the focus of certain organisations from criticising the government to defending themselves (Envío 2008), and part of a legal operation to end “imperialism”, money laundering, and the “large businesses” of the Nicaraguan civil society (El 19 2008), among other arguments.

However, framing the events of 2008 more directly to the concept of civil society, I suggest that, at the core, the raid and the aftermath could better be interpreted as a clash of social structures, in which different sides of the clash sought to establish their specific understanding of the concept of civil society, including its social ramifications. The clash of social structures seemed in general to concern the idea of civil society as a space independent of the state and the market, and in particular if this space ought to be guaranteed from ‘above’ by the state, from the ‘outside’ with the support of external agents, or from ‘within’ the civil society itself (cf Pearce 2004).

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Religious discourses as part of civil society formation and democratisation in Asia

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Session: Religious discourses in Asia

Introduction

Ann Kull

Religion and its values constitute an important part of many Asian societies, and as such it is often regarded as an obstacle to processes of societal change, and to democratisation and human rights in particular. This is an observation that unfortunately often is true. However, religion can also provide a vehicle for social and political change but such activities rarely achieve much attention. All religions have two sides, one inward oriented and one outward oriented, and in this session we are most interested in the outward oriented side of religion. Individuals and organisations use liberal, humanistic and gender sensitive interpretations of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions in processes of civil society formation and democratisation; engaged either in ideology production or in faith rights based agency and activism.

Democracy, human rights (and even civil society?) are by many regarded as universal concepts, applicable to all societies around the world. Others, of them many peoples in Asia, regard them as Western or foreign concepts and not applicable to their societies. Many scholars, politicians and activists therefore stress the importance to conceptualise or contextualise such concepts in order to make them understandable, acceptable and even desirable among these peoples. And here religion – as theology, ideology or cultural values in a general sense – can provide a vehicle for this process of conceptualisation or contextualisation. Or to put it differently, religion can provide a language or a strategy of action to make these concepts understandable and meaningful.

Religion has also proven to be a strong mobilising power, creating engaged and committed people. It has for example inspired independence struggles in several parts of Asia. A very recent example is the tsunami disaster in Thailand where Buddhist temples, monks and nuns turned out to be maybe the most important actors in civil society, providing shelter, relief and organisational structures, in the short as well as the long run.
Religion as institution or as spirituality

When we discuss religion as a vehicle for social change, it is of importance to highlight the distinction between institutionalised religion, which is generally conservative and rigid, and spirituality. In Asia, as well as globally, there is today often an option in favour of spirituality over institutionalised religion.

Subjective or social spirituality

We can also make a further distinction here, between subjective, or isolated, spirituality and engaged, or social, spirituality.

Subjective spirituality appeals more to economically advanced societies and focuses primarily on the inner aspect of each individual, aiming at self transformation.

Engaged spirituality is about world transformation as self transformation, through engagement in social service, motivated by spiritual and religious belief or principles and resulting in the betterment of both self and society. A key aspect here is the necessity of new interpretations of religious texts and rituals. It is rarely religion in its traditional or conservative form that becomes this vehicle for change.

Asian examples

In the Asian context most people are active in the field of engaged spirituality and we have a number of examples. We have social-minded urban neo-Sufism (Islamic mysticism). Traditional sufi practitioners are often affiliated with specific orders, closed for non-members, while neo-sufis are practising in open networks that transform while engaging in specific outward oriented activities, such as social work and not least education. Neo-Sufism implies a transformation from an isolated spirituality to a social spirituality.

We have a great number of various Islamic organisations that are engaged in social work of all kinds. In fact, the two probably largest Islamic organisations in the world, the Indonesian Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama with 32 and 35 million members respectively, have primarily been active in the field of education and social work throughout
the major part of the 20th century, thereby constituting very important and substantial actors in Indonesian civil society.

We have engaged Buddhism saying that the showing of compassion in this world leads to the realisation of one’s Buddha nature, and helps toward the truth of the interconnectedness of all living things, of all sentient life. During the war in Vietnam, Buddhists constructed a ‘Third Way’ ideology as an alternative to the opposing sides of North and South Vietnam. This ideology played a part in the process of uniting the country. In Sri Lanka in the mid 1990s, large numbers of Buddhist monks worked side by side with villagers to install roads, latrines and schools, all part of an effort to rejuvenate village life.

In India, millions of so called untouchables have converted to a form of Buddhism advocated by Dr Ambedkar, actively working for social change and promising an end to the misery caused by the caste system – a Buddhist liberation theology, as it were. Throughout Asia, Buddhist nuns have organised themselves to bring institutional change from a gender perspective to the Buddhist Sangha, within which they have always been second-class citizens. And lastly, no less then two Buddhist leaders, Dalai Lama and Burma’s Aung San Suu Kyi, have been given the Nobel Peace prize.

We have Hindu and Christian organisations, active in education, health and development issues of a wide variety. One example is the cooperation between peasant unions and the Catholic Church in the process of land reform in the Philippines.

In conclusion, what many of these religious organisations and individuals have in common is that they aim to solve problems that are usually outside the scope of religion.

New ideologies with historical roots

Religion is also often used as a tool in order to understand – and influence – the world around oneself through ideology production. Religiously based ideologies are firmly established in a distant and often glorious historical past, which creates a feeling of authenticity or legitimacy, something that is missing in modern secular ideologies. But again, a key aspect here is the necessity of new interpretations of religious texts.
One such ideology or discourse is called liberal or even civil Islam, an ideology that is strong in Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country in the world. Proponents of liberal Islam advocate democracy, human rights, religious pluralism, religious tolerance, and have an inclusive understanding of religion, which means that they search for similarities between religions rather than differences. These ideas are based on a contextual interpretation of the Qur’an and hadith, which takes the understanding of a problem in both its historical and modern context into consideration. The executing scholar is guided by a concept in classical Islamic tradition *maslaha* (‘public interest’ or ‘common good’).

The most important figures within this school of thought were, and still are, Nurcholish Madjid (died in 2005) and Abdurrahman Wahid (died in 2009). Both have played major roles in the reform of Islamic education, and many younger scholars have followed in their footsteps. This is very obvious when you encounter the sometimes daring ideas among Muslim thinkers around Indonesia, for example among the many scholars, female and male, active in the field of gender-sensitive interpretations of Islam (or, with another word, Islamic feminism), often used in the struggle for women’s rights by judicial instances and NGOs.

Wahid was for many years the leader of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (probably the largest Islamic organisation in the world) and served as President of Indonesia during a short period around the turn of the millennium. As President, he was an ardent advocate of religious pluralism and a defender of the rights of ethnic minorities and women. He actually launched a gender mainstreaming policy that is now implemented in many spheres of Indonesian society.

Both Madjid and Wahid were for many years very active and much demanded in the general public debate, making them important opinion makers on a wide range of issues, most of them not at all religious. Especially Madjid emphasised the ethical values in Islam, in his version very general humanistic values. He stressed every Muslim’s individual responsibility towards God, to live in accordance with these values in order to be good Muslims. This was the base for a good and harmonious society, according to Madjid, and he often accused corrupt politicians and
very rich businessmen on this ground – an unusual but maybe effective way to criticise corrupt people of power.

This, then, is a brief introduction of how religion can provide a vehicle for social and political change, with a variety of examples where this is carried out in reality.

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Towards theologising democracy in Muslim Southeast Asia

Azhar Ibrahim

The idea of democracy and its related themes, such as good governance, civil society and social justice, have increasingly become part of the Muslim discourse in Southeast Asia. Three main sentiments on democracy in the Islamic discourse, as found particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia in the post-independence period, will be the focus of this paper. The three strands I will discuss below are based on the Malay-Indonesian discourses on religion and democracy, particularly social theology.

Firstly, there is the apologetic strand, which insists that democracy and liberal principles are inherent in Islam. While affirming democracy, it is very cautious in accepting the validity of democracy in the realm of religious thought. This discourse rather affirms the ‘universality of Islam’ (for example, the claim that Islam is already democratic) than deliberates on the efficacy of democracy in society, as well as in the lives of individual citizens or believers.

Secondly, the rejectionist strand rejects democracy as superfluous to Muslims, it being merely a Western import and therefore anathema to Islam. Ultra traditionalist and fundamentalist circles see democratic principles as demeaning to Islam, which does not need any ‘isms’ or political models. While they may agree with the democratic principle of equality and justice for the people, popular sovereignty is rejected; sovereignty belongs to God alone. The practice of democracy is also seen as potentially disruptive, as it can cause disunity amongst Muslims.

Thirdly, the reconstructionist strand not only affirms the efficacy of democracy for nation and state building, but also sees the importance of appropriating democratic principles and ethos within their religious discourse. The justification for democracy is given a theological basis, where the principles of democracy are weaved into a doctrinal framework.
This strand goes beyond the claim of compatibility between Islam and democracy, adding new themes and socio-cultural concepts into the theological repertoire. Moreover, it also criticises the manifestations of democracy in their societies.

Theologising democracy

By ‘theologising democracy’ we mean giving theological substance to the concept of democracy, beyond its formal meaning. It does not simply mean making Muslims accept democracy via theological justifications, nor to sanctify a democratic regime in power, or to politicise religion. It elaborates theology with democratic and civil ideals and values in mind, while giving spiritual content and depth to concepts that relate to democracy. Religious teachings are seen through a democratic lens, and fundamental democratic principles are incorporated into the theological corpus, perhaps even as one of the constituents of faith.

Today, many Muslim writers, some of them political activist, come forward to offer their version of ‘Islamic’ democracy. Emerging radicalisation denounces any relevance of democracy to Muslims. Politicised Islam sees democracy as no more than an instrument to gain electoral power, but in more severe cases, the politicisation results in sectarianism and exclusivity.

Islam and the democracy discourse in Malaysia

Malaysia has a fairly good record of democracy. The electoral system is institutionalised since 1957. But democratic culture and the discourse on democracy does not extend much into the cultural and social domains. In Malaysia, unlike in Indonesia, we do not find leading Muslim religious scholars or politicians writing extensively and convincingly on the efficacy of democracy within the Islamic worldview.

Abdul Hadi Awang’s recent publication of Islam and democracy (2007) is more of a textbook explication than an engagement for Muslims to take the idea of democracy seriously in their political, cultural and social lives. Not unlike the apologetic strand, it affirms the supremacy of Islam. Other works generally straddle between the rejectionist and apologetic strands
Malaysia has a credible Islamic opposition party, *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS). They see democracy as compatible with Islam, and the Islamic tradition of *shura* is a platform where democracy can be exercised. *Shura* is seen as a justification for democracy, but *shura* itself is superior to democracy. Discussions on Islam and democracy tend to analyse the role of political Islam in Malaysian democratic processes (Ahmad 1989).

Malaysian Muslim intellectuals, like Chandra Muzaffar, Farish A Noor and members of Sisters in Islam (SIS), from time to time highlight the importance of democratic practices and norms while challenging anti-democratic practices, including the influential religious establishment (Muzzafar 2002). However, these discussions are carried out in English and do not reach the majority of the Malay-speaking public.

In recent years a group of young Malaysian intellectuals and scholars at the Middle East Graduate Centre (MEGC) and activists in Kumpulan Seni Jalan Telawi (KSJT) have formed a promising and credible presence in the mainstream Malay intellectual and cultural discourse. They have published critical works on Islamic scholarship in both Malay and English, and they have translated a number of English works into Malay.

**Democracy and the Islam discourse in Indonesia**

The *reformasi* era in the post New Order period saw an active and rigorous call for democratisation in all sectors of Indonesian political, social, cultural and religious life. Today, the Indonesian Islam discourse on democracy is far more substantive than the Malaysian one and characterised by different perspectives. Several prominent scholars and statesmen – for example Gus Dur (Masdar 1999), Nurcholish Madjid (Urbaningrum 2004) and Amien Rais (Thaha 2004) – have not only framed democracy in Indonesian reality, but also substantiated it with Islamic parlance.

The *santri* group has, as cultural trendsetters, been crucial in popularising the idea of democracy (Hilmy 2008). Their discourse is primarily in the Indonesian language, widely disseminated in mass media (electronic and printed) and in popular and academic publications, and with the participation of NGOs and academic institutions. Simply put, the idea of democracy is not an alien concept within the Indonesian Islamic
discourse. There are, of course, apologetic works in Indonesia as well, but many have moved beyond the apologetic stance.

The Institute for Social Empowerment and Democracy, INSED, is one example of an NGO that promotes the idea of democracy as part of its empowerment vision. Indonesian Muslim circles have gone beyond seeing democracy merely in its formal and instrumental dimensions, and the active translation by for example the International Center for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP) of critical works into the Indonesian language facilitates an active discussion on Islam, democracy and civil society.

**Democracy in Indonesian theological discourse**

An emerging discourse on social theology, where democracy as political system and cultural ethos are discussed and debated, is to be noted after the 20th century. Contemporary Indonesian Muslim intellectuals seem confident that a reformed theology can pave the way for greater enlightenment, emancipation and progress for the nation.

The repressive New Order regime that tolerated no political Islam made cultural engagement the obvious site of Muslim activism. This coincided with the belief that the efficacy of Islam could be best served via cultural transformation and through engagement in community building and social empowerment. So, this theologising discourse moves in the cultural realms, trying to undermine the right wing Islamist political agenda, as well as the radical extremism that blatantly rejects democracy and aspires for the formation of *dawlah Islamiyah* in the archipelago.

Democratic values and ways of thinking contain in themselves a spiritual dimension. But the democratic spirit is also capable of denouncing any form of power clichés cloaked in religious garb. In other words, not only does religion provide a basis of human values that are essential for a functioning democracy, but a democratic spirit itself can be the antidote against any form of religious totalitarianism and fascism. Universal religious values can contribute towards the nurturing of a democratic personality and culture, such as: the affirmation of human dignity and its rights; justice and equity as part of man’s ethical accountability that may in no way be compromised; the supremacy of respect for the law, with no arbitration tolerated; the equality of man and the reverence for
all forms of lives; and the dignity accorded to man’s labour, initiative and rights of participation, dissent and choice, where no compulsion or discrimination can be legitimised. A close reading of some Indonesian progressive theologies today easily displays these points. And, very significantly, religion can provide to democracy a sense of hope, which is crucial in our faith as well as in the will to democracy.

Indonesia is on a promising path towards developing a democratic culture, while in Malaysia, a wider reformist and progressive Islam discourse is yet to emerge.

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India is land of diversity. With more than 1.15 billion people in 28 states, speaking 14 official languages, following 8 religions, believing in more than 33 hundred lakh Gods, and divided into thousands of castes, it may be difficult to understand how it can remain one nation. But unity in diversity has its anti-thesis; poverty, gender discrimination, child labour, corruption, unequal distribution of natural resources, discrimination based on caste and so on are not unknown to India.

The Indian democracy does display idealism, egalitarianism and justice. But with all social indicators pointing towards lack of implementation of such ideals, it is important to find systems of successful contextual governance.

Today, in the era of globalisation and exploitation, nations like India need to realise – before they are sold out by super powers hunting their resources – that it is necessary to let people make use of their power to resist in order to protect their own livelihoods. The goal of empowering people towards a democratic state may possibly be achieved by civil society formation.

**India’s religious-political scenario**

Democracy is present in varied forms and in varied contexts. It has changed, as India has changed with changing rulers. Religion, however, has all the time become more entrenched into the minds of people. Religious dominance seems to have extraordinary powers that may lead communities to make their presence and dominance felt among others to any extent. The destruction of Babri Masjid in December 1992, serial bomb blasts, communal riots of 1993 in Mumbai, the Godhra massacre
in 2001, a shoot out in Mumbai on November 26, 2009, are but a few examples of this.

The nation’s political scenario is largely dominated by religious political parties. By promising well-being to ‘its own people’, a certain party will gain the support by its followers. When in power, the party will later suppress other religions in the region and may eventually emerge as sole power holder for the nation. This then ignites the wrath of followers of other ideologies, who will form organisations to protect their interests.

*Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), a voluntary organisation formed by Hindus in 1925, is one such example. It is politically involved and today accused of causing communal violence following destruction of Muslim religious shrines. In response, Muslims, followers of the other major religion in India, started to create their own political platforms, such as the Students Islamic Organization of India. These organisations clash violently and engage sometimes in terrorism, abusing ordinary citizens whose sole means of control is to place their single vote, which will decide the nation’s future.

**Religious youth for civil society development**

In India, a society where citizens may be exploited by religious dominance, and suppressed by fear or by the system as a whole, citizens must be given the power to form a civil society, and to voice their opinions in a strong and powerful way. India has already been partitioned once on the basis of religious differences. If civil society is based on religious discourses, this may again lead to religious dominance and misuse of power, strengthening the power of religious political parties yet more.

India’s youth today are, broadly speaking, capable of understanding religion in another perspective, in its bare and basic form, which is protection of humanity and human rights against violations in any form. A young civil society could be a success in attaining the true essence of democracy, provided they use their spirit and energy to further equality, justice and development, independent of distinctions based on religion.

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Institutionalised Buddhist ideology and civil society formation

M F M Fawas

Abstract
My paper explores how the ideology of the political party Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) and its interpretation of the concept of ‘democracy’ attempts to establish a civil society in Sri Lanka. The voice of civil society for a peaceful political compromise, which would accommodate the Tamil minority’s political demands for regional autonomy, was however never realised. This is probably so because it was never placed within the political agenda of the Sinhala political leaders, due to the influence of the institutionalised Buddhist ideology.

In this context, I argue that the dominant institutionalised religious ideology and its values lead to social disintegration and conflict in a multi-ethnic country such as Sri Lanka. Further, the existing religious establishment does not contribute to consensus building; rather, it gives meaning and identity to the people who belong to other religions, in a way that creates contradictions. Finally, I hold that the Sinhala Buddhist Nationalists construed the concept of democratisation within the framework of majoritarianism.

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The role of Middle East civil society in democratisation

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Session: The role of Middle East civil society

Introduction

Michael Schulz

Civil society in the Middle East has mostly been discussed in relation to democratisation within the states in the region. It is important to do so, since civil society’s space of manoeuvre and capacity is largely restricted by the state. This is not to say that civil society cannot exist within authoritarian structures, but its capacity to influence and change will most likely be harmed (cf Sariologhalam 1997).

The Middle East is usually seen as a region where democratisation has not occurred. However, democratisation has been on the agenda since the 1990s, and civil society has often been seen as the forerunner of Middle East democracy. The empirical question that needs to be answered is what role civil society is playing in the Middle East democratisation.

It has been shown that at national levels, civil society has played an immensely important role for democratisation from below. For instance in the Palestinian case, it is claimed that a strong and viable civil society has been one of the few institutions that has functioned during the Israeli occupation, and continued to play a scrutinising role vis-à-vis the previous Arafat-led Palestinian Authority that was established in 1993/94. Likewise, civil society in for instance Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco, has pushed for human rights issues vis-à-vis the state. Gradual changes have been carried out in states such as Jordan and Egypt, in which semi-open elections could take place after pressure from, among others, civil society organisations, On other occasions, state elites have made reforms and opened up to democratic practise as a reaction to civil society actors’ requests.

Networking and cooperation growing

The increased awareness within the relatively small civil society in countries of the Middle East region has contributed to regional networking, fostering new cooperation, and creating a more vivid debate around democratic issues. Globalisation itself also increases the awareness and
networking between external actors and the Middle East. This strengthens the chances to establish and consolidate a vivid and democratic regional debate, across the states. Hence, we need to understand more about the strength of civil society in the region.

The exceptional Middle East

Although a definite late-comer, the Middle East has entered the debate on global democratisation. Many have argued (from different positions) that the Middle East is an exception to the trend, in the sense that traditional kingdoms or security (mukhabarat) dominated regimes still cling to power, and the strongest force of opposition (ie Islamism) does not have democracy on its agenda. In one of the most oft-quoted works (Diamond et al 1989) on what Huntington (1991) coined as the “third wave of democratization,” it is argued that the Arab states can be labelled as semi-democratic states due to their lack of previous democratic experience.

Middle East alleged ‘exceptionalism’ is ‘explained’ by a variety of variables, depending on the author. Orientalists still point to the broad and oversimplified categories of ‘culture’ and Islam (eg Kedourie 1992). Others hold that nation-building projects have failed and that loyalties are mainly sub-national and horizontal, hindering a national democracy to take root; the state as such is imposed by external actors and is thus floating, void of meaningful relations to its citizens (Alavi 1979). The existence of “rentier economies” (Luciani 1990; Brynen 1992) and the weak taxation system are given as other factors, as is the fluid class structure and the interdependence between the enlarged intermediate strata in the form of state bureaucracy and the regimes (Ayubi 1995). Lastly, conflicts and wars are said to have paved the way for militarised states to legitimise themselves through ‘missions’, such as the struggles against imperialism, for Arab unity, and for the liberation of Palestine, rather than through rule by the people. Authors with an historical and structural approach explain, instead, the lack of democracy by focussing on the processes and patterns of state formation since independence as well as on the role of classes.
From the outset then, the Middle East does not seem to have many prerequisites for a true democratisation process.

**Civil society on the agenda**

Before the 1990s, the state was seen as the key actor for political change; but, analysts claimed, one also needed to understand the elites within the Middle Eastern state in order to identify potentials of change. In the 1990s, however, civil society came up on the agenda in the Middle East as well. As for the potentials of democratisation, one could see statements like “[n]o doubt, the defining flavour of the 1990s is participation” (Norton 1995, p 5).

Others emphasised the developmental capacity of civil society, not least the ‘Islamic’ sector of it, claiming that they were providing help to the poorest and the ones most in need. However, more recent research has critically said that civil society still is no more than a marginal part of Middle Eastern societies. The Islamic civil society, often criticised for not even constituting one, has been seen rather as a breeding sector for Islamic radicalism and *jihadists*.

**Regional integration**

The role of a Middle Eastern civil society has rarely been researched from a regional perspective, merely due to the fact that most analysts fail to see the potential of regional integration in this region. However, new regionalism theory has occasionally been applied to the Middle East context, despite the fact that the region’s integration usually has been described as a slow process, or even a non-integrating one.

Civil society has been involved in these discussions, but few analysts have tried to understand the role of civil society in regional governance, and even less so when applied to the Middle East. This is surprising. Civil society not only acts within in each country in the region; it has also increasingly developed transnational networks, thereby constituting a forerunner in regionalisation and democratisation in the regional context.
Trust in civil society as an actor

It is often assumed, from a liberal point of view, that civil society refers to values such as civility (implying tolerance), pluralism, “a cast of mind, a willingness to live and let live” (Norton 1995, p 12). This, however, is a romanticised and idyllic perception. Civil society might also include prejudice and hatred; therefore, this session sees it not as inherently societally benign, despite the fact that Middle East citizens often trust civil society more than government structures.

Rothstein (2001; 2000) points to the importance of the socialisation process, i.e., the formation of our perceptions and norms in relation to societal institutions that begins already when we are children. Based on our parents’ stories and our social environment, we internalise perceptions and collective memories of whom to trust and whom not to. In the Middle East, one would expect that because of historical authoritarian government structures, citizens have no experience of civil society – and in particular of its informal forms – other than that it is more trustworthy than official authorities. This is so, even though civil society certainly does not always make up a counterforce to government structures (Cohen and Arato 1997; Ibrahim 1995; Moussali 1995; Norton 1995).

At the same time, Islamic as well as secular civil society organisations have played important roles as actors bringing issues linked to democratisation and the social service sectors of societies in the region into the public debate.

It is indeed, then, for researchers to treat the judgment of the actions of civil society actors as an empirical question.

References
Session: The role of Middle East civil society


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Public diplomacy initiatives and social media – ways to support opinion leaders in the Middle East

Javeria Rizvi Kabani

In the last few years, the Internet, digital and mobile technologies and social media tools like blogs, twitter, YouTube, Facebook and other user-generated content (UGC) have rapidly changed the way information is shaped, shared and spread. We are witnessing a shift in power from governments and traditional media to ordinary citizens, and we are now provided with a window into the events and lives of people who were distant in the past. What does this paradigm shift mean for civil society engagement in the Middle East, and how can Sweden continue to support and strengthen democracy in the region?

In the Middle East, the increasing use of social media is changing civil society engagement as well as shifting previously cemented power relations. New social media platforms enable the general public to participate in political and global affairs. In the digital era information is spread in increasingly creative and diverse ways, and new tools are used to circumvent censorship. The Internet and social media have in recent years come to serve as forums for political activists, human rights defenders and artists, whose governments or conservative societies want to suppress their voices, and the voices of other democratic forces. Building public diplomatic relationships and global social networks with these people in the Middle East is a crucial way for fostering change in Middle East society.

A June 2009 study by the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, a research institute at Harvard University, shows that the majority of the Arabic blogs surveyed are written in diary form, featuring personal accounts and observations on everyday life. When it comes to politics, Arab bloggers tend to offer a critical view of political leaders. In other
words, bloggers play an important role in disseminating information on issues rarely covered in the mainstream press, such as police brutality, sexual harassment and torture (Etlin et al 2009). Social media is also transforming international and diplomatic relationships in the way Sweden and other countries speak with citizens around the world (Wait 2009). Over the past couple of years, a number of European countries have organised programs focusing on intercultural and interfaith dialogue between Europe and the Middle East with an increasing focus on incorporating social media literacy. In 2008, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs commissioned the launch of Sweden’s Young Leaders Visitors Program (YLVP) in an effort to build “a social network of young leaders and opinion-makers in the MENA region and Sweden to work on issues concerning freedom of expression and human rights.” These efforts fall under the realm of public diplomacy.

In the three years of the program’s existence, YLVP has helped form strong relationships between the participants. Through social media these networks have expanded and become stronger. However, in order to lay a foundation for dialogue, mutual understanding and knowledge-sharing among young opinion-makers from different Arab countries and Sweden, social interaction is critical. Social media only connects people; it is real-life social interaction that changes people and the world.

YLVP is a Swedish Institute initiative, in line with the public agency’s goal to create mutual relationships with the Middle East (Kabani Rizvi 2008). The program focuses on improving the participants’ leadership and social media skills, in order to empower them and help maximise their potential. Human rights, freedom of expression and democracy are some of the topics that are presented and discussed via lectures, workshops by prominent speakers and study visits. The participants are encouraged to come up with ideas for future social networking platforms that can help improve the level of freedom of speech and social change around the world.

The result is a passionate network of young leaders with sound social media skills that help them share and support each other through their own democratic endeavours in their respective countries. Anyone can listen to the dialogue between these young leaders on twitter by searching for the “#ylvp” hashtag and by reading their blogs.
Some argue that while social media technologies might provide a utopian ideal for decentralised civil society engagement, they could also support extreme dictatorial political systems. The argument put forth here is that the two major restraints to true democratic participation is economic access and citizen participation. First, there is an enormous economic barrier to internet access in the Middle East. Second, the democratic systems are not fully developed and, therefore, a democratic culture is not yet consolidated, which might reflect on the attempts at online democratic exercises (Guedes 2002).

On the other hand, recent statistics illustrate that the number of internet users in the region grew 13-fold from 2000 to 2008, far surpassing the two-fold increase worldwide. Studies estimate that the Arabic language blogosphere consists of about 35,000 regularly updated blogs (Miniwatts 2009).

Using USA as a case study, Vesser maintains that from the perspective of public diplomacy, social media tools should not only be deployed on issues such as cultural exchanges but also on the tough questions, such as engaging in direct diplomacy with countries like Iran. She goes on to state that

…building these bottom-up communities means that the conversation can’t be one way. It means taking criticism publicly. It means investing the resources to build the communities and keep the dialogue going. And it may mean responding with policy changes where warranted. While not a substitute for official diplomatic channels, encouraging this global dialogue sends strong signals of participation, collaboration and transparency – reinforcing values consistently promulgated by the administration (ibid).

Hence, social networking tools should be used not only as a way to support opinion leaders in the Middle East but can also be used as a powerful tool for engaging in the dialogue of nations.

It is a trajectory form of public diplomacy which we should be heading towards. We need to look into the future to find ways to support democracy in the Middle East. True leadership comes from listening first, identifying the needs and maximising all the tools and resources available
to build tools at the global level without being afraid of the risks. While there are economic barriers to people’s access to internet today, this might not be the case tomorrow. In the West, and particularly in Sweden, we often speak about the lack of democracy in the Middle East. We claim that we need to do more to support democracy in the region. However, we do not need to support democracy; instead we need to support people who are democratic forces, and we need to build respectful relationships, networks and alliances with these people. Young men and women are risking their lives to get the free word out to the world.

References

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Palestinian NGOs and international donors

Carin Berg

Abstract

The focus of my presentation draws on my personal experience working as a Development Officer for the Palestinian NGO Civic Forum Institute (CFI).

CFI is a grassroots civic education program aiming at supporting and strengthening a democratic Palestinian society in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. It is financed by international donors such as the EU, USAID and Save the Children. The organisation has a coherent and exclusive democratisation and local empowerment plan. However, CFI is a more or less typical example of an NGO in the occupied Palestinian territories, with a great mandate but a weak and reactionary outcome leading to mistrust and corruption.

My main questions are: What role does or could CFI (and NGOs as such) play for Palestinian civil society development? How can the international communities (as the main donor society) support the NGOs to accomplish their often excellent mandates of civil society democratisation and empowerment?

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Session

African governments, civil society and democracy

Introduction
Henning Melber

Civil society in the making: Can NGOs contribute to development and democracy?
Lina Suleiman

Alliance politics in Nigeria’s civil society
Björn Beckman

Bridge over troubled waters:
State–civil society relations
Tamuka H Muzondo (abstract)
Introduction

Henning Melber

Civil society, as is pointed out by several others in this volume, tends at times to be looked at in a positive way without any negative connotations. It emerged in European social theory and philosophical history as a concept and term, which can claim to be considered nowadays as a universal phenomenon. This means, civil society in Africa is by no means an imported product. Rather – as not least the World Social Forum in January 2007 in and around a sports arena at the outskirts of Nairobi, with an estimated 50,000 participants from all parts of the world, documented – civil society is very much alive and kicking also in African countries. It is an integral part of governance structures.

Civil society is widely associated with forces from below, mobilising against authoritarian regimes. This is only part of the story and not the full picture. As much as we tend to translate civil society into something fundamentally positive by nature, it actually demarcates and defines an arena, which is occupied, claimed and used by a variety of actors – not always with the noblest intentions. Civil society also includes some very uncivil activities and motives, dressed as civic action and initiatives separated from the direct powers vested in the state. It can also serve as a smokescreen for neoliberal interests, mobilising against a welfare state.

Civil society embraces a wide panorama of social and political forces, organisations and groups, operating with very different, often colliding interests and agendas. It comprises workers movements and grassroots initiatives as much as religious communities, sport associations and industrial lobby groups, to mention only a few distinct examples. They are neither fundamentally opposed to the state nor by definition promoting stability and security, or – for that matter – democracy and human rights. While the rule of law in societies is not by definition progressive but at times only the very convenient law of the rulers, civil society agencies
have no moral authority over the government or state for the mere fact that they are not associated with them.

On the other hand, civil society actors within the plethora of NGOs are not necessarily the alternative to governments but often more of the same. Especially in transitional societies, the acronym NGO all too often translates into ‘next government officials’. They are the state power of the future, and not its alternative. Hence, the balances of power to a large extent play a role in who is representing which interests at what time. Dividing lines can change, and those representing civil society one day might represent the state the next day, and impose restraints upon other civil society voices the following day.

Representatives of civil societies in African countries operate at times under more difficult circumstances than in many other places in our world. This has to do with the character and nature of the post-colonial state as an often relatively fragile institution, much dependent upon individual power and interests. It is a state occupied by predatory elites, who use state power to enrich themselves unashamedly. As a result, everyone challenging the authority of the state is challenging the clique or elite, which uses the state not for serving the public interest but purely the own selfish agenda.

This is not to say that states elsewhere would be indeed the neutral agent they usually claim to be. They are catalysts for social cohesion. But they manage to play that role by being seen as a kind of neutral mediator and facilitator for a variety of different, often colliding interests. Under many African governments, the force of the state and its claimed monopoly over legitimate power and violence is abused to hold dissenting views at bay. This turns the state into a blatantly biased agency of ruling interests serving a minority. Civil society under such circumstances becomes even more associated with something positive, operating against state power.

State agencies, in return, have no inclination to support independent initiatives rooted in non-state, civil society agencies. While this undermines the legitimacy of the state, it also undermines the scope and efficiency of civil society actors looked upon with suspicion and mistrust. The interaction between state and civil society is mostly not seen as something positive that would strengthen legitimacy and stability.
African civil society actors often face repression, coercion, punishment, marginalisation and are considered as unpatriotic, if not traitors of the national interest. Under such circumstances, a commitment to an autonomous civil society is often tantamount to sabotage and high treason.

Maybe this is a reason why African civil society agents are often more so than anywhere else seen as engines for social change in a positive way and context, as advocates of the interest of ordinary people, as human rights defenders and democrats. The case studies in this session might provide us with evidence to which extent such a perception is justified.

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Civil society in the making:
Can NGOs contribute to
development and democracy?

Lina Suleiman

This paper examines the assumed role of civil society in the new policy agenda of ‘good governance’ promoted by bilateral and multilateral agencies. According to donors, civil society – often represented by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – can play a substantial role in the enhancement of development and the promotion of democracy. Through governance arrangements that are characterised by a limited role of the state and a flexible combination of governmental, private and civil actors, NGOs are predicted as missionaries to advance stagnated development and to consolidate youthful democracies (Van Rooy 1998).

In the development field, civil society organisations (CSOs) are expected to reach the poor, improve equity, compensate for waning state services and help generate economic growth (Edwards and Hulme 1996; Van Rooy 1998). In the field of democracy, civil society allegedly fosters democratic values through the involvement of CSOs in micro-reform policies. The claim here is that the policy dialogue that integrates actors from NGOs, competitive business and local government can delineate solutions for public services provision, and enhance an effective partnership and pluralistic decision-making that is conceived of as a precondition of democratic structure (Brinkerhoff 2003).

This paper bases its arguments primarily on a review of literature, and uses theories in relation to the role of civil society in development and democracy. It draws upon the theory of social origin of non-profit organisations, the theory of social capital and the theory of two publics in Africa – how the colonial background in Africa created two publics, the
civic public and the primordial public – to raise concerns regarding the current policy trends of governance.

**Social origin theory**

Developed by Salamon and Anheier (1998), the social origin theory describes the development patterns of non-profit organisations in developed countries, based on different theoretical assumptions regarding development processes in a society. Public institutional choices are profoundly controlled by patterns that evolve historically. Accordingly, the social origin theory identifies four types of ‘non-profit’ development routes according to context: the liberal or ‘capitalist’ regime (such as the United States), the social democratic regime (such as is found in the Nordic countries), the corporatist regime (such as Germany), and the statist regime (such as Japan).

**Relevance of theory and policy implications in the strengthening of civil society**

The social origin theory stresses the organic ties of non-profit organisations to their wider society and political system. Non-profit organisations are seen as an integral part of a social system; their role in governance processes is a by-product of a complex set of historical social forces. The policy implication of this theory does not appear to support the arguments assuming that donor-funded NGOs play a substantial role in the development processes, when NGOs are formed in response to external demand rather than by local institutional dynamics.

According to this theory, grass-root civil groups have stronger organic ties to their wider institutional settings and are ostensibly more capable of complying with socio-economic development tasks. The paradox of engaging civil society in developing countries is that governance processes often entail donor-created NGOs, while grassroots groups are excluded, rather than privileged (Edwards and Hulme 1996).

**Social capital theory**

The notion of ‘social capital’ received a boost from the work done by Putnam (1993). His conclusions were widely recognised and are used
primarily to support the argument that citizens-networking is a means to foster democracy (Harriss and Renzio 1997). Putnam pinpoints the ‘network’ of civic engagement as the core issue that will make democracy work. Voluntary horizontal associations integrate face-to-face horizontal relations among individuals, generating trust and norms of reciprocity. How societies are shaped to embrace such attributes is not discussed.

The weakness of Putnam’s thesis is that although he stresses civic engagement as decisive for good governance – a view that constitutes the basis for theoretical arguments to strengthen and generously finance NGOs – he does not provide information on the manner in which good governance makes a society civic. Putnam pays no attention to factors that characterise civic networks, such as the attributes and power of individuals or groups that make up civil associations, or the power imbalances among members. He focuses mainly on the scale of civil networks needed to make development and democracy effective. Many examples from the context of real life have been presented by Carothers (1999, 2000), and they partially challenge Putnam’s theoretical statement. Japan, France, and Spain, for example, are countries characterised by strong democracies, but weak civil societies.

The connection between civil society and economic growth and development is also inconclusive. South Korea is one example of economic success that was built on the back of a repressed civil society. By contrast, as reported by Haque (2004), Bangladesh has thousands of NGOs, advocacy groups and social services organisations but remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

As often discussed by Ostrom (2005), trust and reciprocity in a certain society are decisive factors in the creation of social capital, and in the effectiveness of governance processes for the common good. In the same line of thought, Harriss and Renzio (1997) emphasise that civil associations may act in an uncivil manner, generating more social harm than benefits.

Relevance of theory and policy implications in the strengthening of civil society

Defining social capital in terms of civil associations and scale alone has different policy implications than defining it in terms of generalised
norms of trust, reciprocity and mutuality that facilitate cooperation and collective actions for the common good. According to the former, the construction of civil society in the form of aid supported NGOs may create social capital; according to the latter, the task is more complex and requires close scrutiny of the socio-political context as well as historical factors affecting the wider society.

In conclusion, a good governance policy assuming a spillover of positive social values into democracy and development through the creation of an escalating number of NGOs seems to be short-sighted. Harriss and Renzio (1997, p 928) quote Tarrow (1996, p 396) who concludes that “policy makers who attack the lack of social capital by encouraging associations would be attacking the symptoms not the causes of the problem”.

**Civil society in Africa: The theory of two publics**

According to Ekeh (1975), the nature of civil society in Africa in terms of structure and function is unique. The public realm in Africa is a product of Africa’s historical intercourse with the West through colonisation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Ekeh 1975; Osaghae 2006). The psychological and social implications of colonisation were revealed in the emergence of the two publics: the ‘primordial’ and the ‘civic’. The ‘primordial public’ consists of traditional groupings and communities, whereas the ‘civic public’ is made up by the African western-educated bourgeoisie, developed during colonisation and historically associated with the colonial administration. The social divide between the two publics created tensions that have persisted into post-colonial times.

Ekeh (1975) explains the two publics’ dual moral linkages to the private realm and dual understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizens. The primordial public is regarded as being moral, privately and publicly. The civic public is regarded as being amoral and lacking the generalised moral imperatives that work in the private realm and the primordial public. According to the dual moral standards, it is legitimate for a citizen who works in the sphere of the civic public, to take from the civil public to give to the primordial public.

The two publics also have a different understandings of the notion of citizenship (Edwards and Hulme 1996; Ekeh 1975). In the primordial
public, citizens are obligated to fulfil their material duties while gaining little in terms of immaterial benefits. In the civic public, duties are de-emphasised while assumed rights are prioritised. Problems arise when the same citizens operate in both publics simultaneously.

Civil associations in Africa follow the same principles. They are integrated in the primordial public in a manner that does not complement the civic public but subtracts from it. The social and dialectical divides as emphasised by Ekeh and Osaghae may explain policy ineffectiveness and corruption. According to them, African states see themselves as being observed by a foreign institution, whose money, property and goals are not the direct responsibility and concern of the community. Corruption is an outcome of dual moral standards held by workers in the government sectors; it is considered moral for civil servants to take public funds or seek bribes to benefit the primordial public.

The politics of clientelism that prevail in Africa today are also explained by Ekeh (1975) and Osaghae (2006). The African bourgeoisie did not fit readily into the social fabric of other segments of society and thus lacked the legitimacy to hold power over their own people. To win the loyalty of the mass of Africans, the ruling successors promised an increase in benefits and lower taxation, trying to gain political support through the distribution of benefits such as land, civil works, and cash among loyalists.

The relevance of theory and policy implications in the strengthening of civil society

Barber (1998, 2004) emphasises how citizenship is indispensable from a strong civil society. How, then, can a fractured citizenship accommodate the building of a social realm where citizens can gather to act for the common good? Or, in social settings where corruption and clientelism prevail, how can civil associations stimulate democratic behaviour?

The bifurcated public realm makes civil society an arena of vigorous contestation, far from the peaceful harmony of pluralistic governance processes. Civil society in its African status quo is seemingly not able to play a consistent and effective role in participatory governance processes or to contribute to pluralistic decision-making processes.
The policy implication of this theory is apparently evident. To integrate civil society into effective development policies and the promotion of a democratic culture, social dividends must be bridged. Political leadership should act to remedy the social rift between the two publics. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) stress the importance of examining and recognising the complex historical forces in Africa that have influenced the characteristics of civil society; otherwise, policymakers run the risk of being taken in by the idealisation and the vagueness of the concept of civil society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, CSOs that are driven by access to funds cannot be reform agents for political and social change; they are easily trapped by corruption and clientelism practices that prevail in the public realm. As argued by Matthew (2005), the aid system supports the interests of the elite in the first place, thus preventing political and social transformation that could be driven by committed leadership. Looked at from this perspective, aid supports the educated Africans that comprise the civic public and fails to support the rest of the people, thus preventing the merging of the two. The participatory role of civil society, as represented by donor-funded NGOs, is not evident, and NGOs are unlikely to have the strength to either promote development or to foster democracy.

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To be able to change government policy, trade unions need to be rooted in the informal economy. Structural adjustment and the neo-liberal turn have undermined unions, undercutting rights. Membership is dwindling, and union allies in civil society are weak as well. Jointly, they provide an ideological alternative to the hegemonic pretensions of the neo-liberal position and hold an alternative vision of ‘national development’. In the case of Labour, its mode of insertion in the wage-earning economy makes it identify with strategies of modernisation and industrialisation. Its members are directly affected by the non-functioning of basic public infrastructure, such as water, electricity, and communications. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) is outraged by the anti-union orientation of government policies and by the shift in the balance of forces globally in favour of repressive labour regimes. It has been badly affected by de-industrialisation, privatisation, and ‘flexible’ labour contracts.

Reaching out to organisations in civil society has a long history in the Nigerian labour movement. As the NLC was revived in 1999, having been banned by the Abacha government, it pushed a broad labour–civil society coalition, including a new Labour Party. Joint action with other civil society organisations was pursued successfully over the recurring attempts to raise the local price of petrol products, giving rise to LACSO, the Labour Civil Society Coalition. In 2009, government plans to privatised local petroleum marketing was expected to result in sharp increase in prices, affecting transport costs generally, including the price of food. To LACSO, petrol was local resource; why should the Nigerian people not be able to benefit from this special access?

The other main issue of the LACSO campaign in 2009 was electoral reform. In the views of the NLC, political parties lacked ideological
substance and were mere alliances of ‘big men’ with claims to territorial control, based on patronage and hierarchy. Unions saw themselves as more credible representatives of popular democratic interests. The party structure of the post-Abacha transition was unprincipled and unpredictable in terms of policy commitments, and expectations of ‘dividends of democracy’ were soon disappointed. The elections in 2003 were grossly rigged, and so were those in 2007. They were met with a mixture of popular outrage and despair. For the NLC and its allies, electoral reform, with the aim to lead to free and fair elections in 2011, became an issue of the life and death of the Federation. It was centre piece of the LASCO campaign of 2009. It drew on networks in the ‘informal economy’. In the case of the Lagos rally of May 2009, market women ensured that markets were closed. Community groups were mobilised, including ‘lumpens’ – people of no specific occupation at the bottom of society, prone to violence and therefore feared by others – to impose ‘discipline’ in the streets. The crisis of union rights and membership, as well as the self-assertion of artisans and traders, underscored the importance of rooting union action more firmly in society.

More than ever unions need their allies in civil society, both to defend earlier achievements and to change the direction of policy. But also civil society needs to be well rooted. Both depend on organisations in the informal economy to enhance their bargaining power in challenging the shallow territorial control of political elite. Both realise that they have to intervene to change the policies of the government to ensure the necessary preconditions for production. Both wish to advance their visions of an alternative to the prevailing neo-liberal order. Alliances across the formal–informal divide are essential for the democratisation of politics and changing the government. By protecting rights to organise, trade unions may serve as allies, radically broadening the notion of civil society.

Note

Geographies (2010). For a joint outline see “Organising in the informal economy: Union power and civil society in Nigeria” (2010). For trade unions in Nigeria, see Beckman in Harriss, Stokke and Törnquist (eds), Politicising Democracy (2004) and in Törnquist, Stokke and Webster (eds), Rethinking Popular Representation (2010); for trade unions in Africa, see Beckman and Sachikonye (eds), Labour Regimes and Liberalisation (2001) and Beckman, Buhlungu and Sachikonye (eds), Trade Unions and Party Politics (2010). For a discussion of Nigeria’s Labour Party, see Beckman and Lukman in the latter.

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Bridge over troubled waters:  
State–civil society relations

Tamuka H Muzondo

Abstract
The level of human rights abuse in a country is directly linked to the reliance the population places on the NGO sector to improve the situation, and the repression of NGOs by the state. States with good human rights records are more tolerant of NGOs than their counterparts with bad records.

Zimbabwe is a case in point. Not only does it have one of the worst human rights records during the past decade; it also has – despite a very vibrant NGO sector – an NGO legislation that effectively restricts civil organisations. Despite the power sharing agreement of last year, which brought relative peace and prosperity, NGO–state relations have not shown a marked improvement. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has sided with President Mugabe and the ZANU PF against civil society to the extent of co-sponsoring a change of legislation to curtail NGO operations.

The continuation of the hostilities demonstrates the inherent problem that African governments have with civil society. The basic problem lies in the governments’ unwillingness to be monitored or contradicted by NGOs. Criticism, no matter how constructive, is viewed with suspicion and dealt with by arresting the leaders of those NGOs that dare criticise – and, as is now common in Africa, by proposing new legislation to curtail NGO operations, especially those dealing with democracy and governance matters.

The main cause for government discomfort is the ease with which NGOs are able to put out information, and particularly that which the state is keen to suppress. The other major issue is that as NGOs succeed, funding is increasingly channelled to them, at the expense of the state,
which at times – because of a poor economy – also relies on the same donors. In this competition, governments lose out, because they are perceived as corrupt or inefficient. On top of that, foreign governments attempting to influence policy through NGOs is a real issue.

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Contradictory interests within civil society: Open conflicts and new state–civil society relations

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Introduction

Henrik Berglund

Civil society is essentially contested, both as social terrain and as theoretical concept. Civil society comprises a myriad of active groups and individuals, and conflicts between the various groups can be as intense as those between civil society and the state. The opposition movement experience in Eastern Europe in the early 1980s proved that civil society could be used as an arena in the democratic struggle. It also showed that an open, not state-controlled, space for voices was vital for any serious resistance (Arato and Cohen 1994; Smolar 1996). The civil society concept was later adopted in studies of stable liberal democracies as well, and the debate on its role in the popular struggle for democratisation in the third world has recently witnessed a significant growth. While the usefulness of the concept is highly debated, there seems to be at least a general consensus on how to define it: a realm or arena situated outside the private sphere, but also outside the immediate reach of the state.

The liberal civil society

Drawing on its supposed autonomy from the state, civil society, according to liberal theory, promotes democracy by constituting an arena in which individual citizens as well as various groups and associations can meet and express themselves. Proponents of the theory argue that it is within this arena that the values and implicit laws of a democratic society are instituted and maintained, and they follow the arguments developed by Tocqueville in his study of American democracy: a strong civil society is necessary in order to counter the state’s ambition to dominate, and in order to strengthen the feeling of civic solidarity amongst citizens. In his very influential article Toward Democratic Consolidation from 1994, Larry Diamond argues that civil society is conducive for democracy because it opens up a space for interaction between citizens and associations, interactions that help to create a feeling of ‘civicness’, including the respect
for democracy, and cut across various cleavages in society. A strong civil society further increases citizens’ possibility of political participation, as it provides an alternative channel for interest articulation, outside of the political parties. The importance of civil society has also been emphasised in recent programmes established by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), not as much for its role in the democratisation process, as for its ability to off-load the state within the areas of social services, health and education.

The Marxist and feminist critique

A major critique has been directed against liberal civil society theory by Marxists, post-Marxists and others who reject this definition of politics as well as that of civil society. They argue that civil society should not be seen as a separate sphere, as it is dominated by power relations in other existing spheres, such as the economy and the family. For Marxists and feminists, the unequal relations between workers and capitalists, as well as between women and men, are mirrored also in civil society, making it less relevant in the explanation of the consolidation of democracy (Phillips 2002). Further critique has been delivered against the state/civil society dichotomy for being too simplistic and, in many empirical cases, proven wrong. While recognising the need for an independent sphere, developments within the state have often contributed to the consolidation of democracy. Already in the writings of Hobbes and Locke, rule of law is presented as a necessity for any civil life: the state guarantees law and order and therefore contributes to the development of a civil society.

The liberal definition favours associations that are internally democratic, open to all citizens, and where goals and activities are in line with the core values of liberal democracy (Diamond 1994). Groups that mobilise in a cross-cutting manner, bridging ethnic, religious and class-based cleavages, are therefore seen as more valuable and to contribute more to the strengthening of civil society. A parallel definition is found in the debate on social capital, where cross-cutting ‘bridging’ social capital is defined as more conducive to democracy than ‘bonding’ social capital, often found in closed or semi-closed organisations (Putnam 2000; Leonard 2004; Rydin and Holman 2004). The problem with this argument is that if you
apply a strict definition, including internal democracy and a propensity for bridging social cleavages, you run the risk of excluding many of civil society’s most important associations. These may not live up to the liberal definition, but may nevertheless be crucial for mobilising the citizens and act as a counter weight to an oppressive state. In the third world this is especially important, since the fight against perceived injustices is often fought on the basis of race or ethnicity.

A possible synthesis

A more open approach, bridging the liberal and the Marxist/feminist perspectives, would be to define civil society as a public arena outside the immediate control of the state, including links between individual citizens as well as formal and informal associations of citizens, also including associations formed on the basis of primordial identities, such as religion, caste and ethnicity. Furthermore, we must recognise that many of civil society’s political demands are not directed to the state. As the political power lies with the state, various associations will put pressure on the state, but their demands often challenge other sections of civil society. For example, the demands for group rights, based on religion, ethnicity, language or gender, may clash with the interests of other groups, turning civil society into a battle field rather than a secluded sphere of peaceful interaction. This is further complicated when the state takes sides in these battles, as is often the case in many third world countries – and when this is not done through the proper constitutional process, but rather as an attempt from the state to ally itself with specific sections of civil society.

An alternative to the liberal definition emerges, in which power structures and forms of domination within civil society are identified, while the importance of the interaction within civil society is recognised. In a third world context, we have seen successful challenges against authoritarian regimes and oppressive social structures developed within civil society, and the decisive factor in these successes have not always been the level of autonomy from the state. The various actors of civil society may strengthen their positions through cooperation with the state or through distancing themselves from it, all depending on their strategies and calculations. While discarding any simple links between civil society
and democracy, we should treat civil society theory as an important part of the complex puzzle of democratisation and open up for empirical studies of how this sphere has contributed.

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A triangle of peace, politics, and people’s voice: Nepal

Bala Raju Nikku

The term ‘civil society’ was used by early modern philosophers to refer to an association of individuals, linked together in subjection to a rule of law which they had some part in creating and modifying. It was the German philosopher Hegel who in *The Philosophy of Right* (1821), building on the social theory of the eighteenth century, distinguished a modern state as comprising three realms: individual and family, civil society (which included the economy) and the state itself (Minogue 2002).

This paper discusses civil society’s role in the process of Nepal’s peace building and reconstruction process through its ability to enhance peoples’ participation in the policy process. Civil society is defined here to represent the sphere of society outside government and business. It includes a multitude of groups, organisations and associations that participate in public life. In other words, civil society should be distinguished as the free associations and institutions made possible by the state’s framework of law and order. Civil society is what provides the infrastructure for direct democracy. This argument provides the conceptual framework to answer the question: *Is the Nepalese civil society able to provide a counter hegemony to state and market influences and hence ensure people’s participation in policy processes?*

The ongoing discourse in Nepal between popular sovereignty, embedded in individual liberty, and representative democracy, legitimised by majority rule, has caught the imagination of various civil society groups. This discourse has divided the Nepali public into those who defend absolute popular sovereignty – rooted in human rights and the accountability of power to those affected by its exercise – and those who accord primacy to the essence of representative democracy, which tends to pluralise sovereignty into various institutions of governance.
A genuine civil society is self-chosen by the citizens themselves and emerges from a process of rational contestation of ideas about the good life. For countries like Nepal, transitioning from authoritarianism to republic, the establishment of structures for more substantive democracy involves the creation of a strong state, a stable market and a vibrant civil society that can jointly working together and facilitate the development process. The cooperation and collective efforts of civil society, state and market are essential to easing an otherwise difficult democratisation process (Dahal 2001). It is difficult to distinguish between civil society (CS) and political organisations, because the same or related organisations are active in both sectors. Nepal is an example where civil society and political parties worked together and contributed significantly to making the 2006 Democracy Movement Jana Andolan II a success, transforming the country from a monarchy to a federal republic. Nepali civil society supported the democracy movement early and actively through writing, creating a discourse, and organising street protest action under different banners.

The Nepali state and civil society

The Nepali state, as the only locus of democracy and the central organising element of foreign affairs, is very weak when it comes to mediating between citizens and the state. Decade-long insurgency and counter-insurgency operations have eroded the state’s authority and capacity to perform basic state functions and release the potential for system integration.

The Nepalese civil society spectrum is very diverse, ranging from religious and indigenous Ghutis (welfare trusts), through dhukuti (traditional microfinance institution) to recent human rights and advocacy based organisations.

Civil society functions and impacts

Many civil society groups are registered with the Social Welfare Council (SWC), a government body, and are given the mandate to work on relief, charity, environment protection, economic project and social development rather than on political education and conflict resolution. This suggests that the government takes control over civil society
activities. In a survey made in connection with a workshop organised by the International Council of Social Welfare, July 12-13, 2009, only about one third of the responding NGO representatives claimed that they could make an impact and influence public policy. The majority of these are human rights organisations (like CWSIH on domestic child labour) and women’s rights organisations, working to give women legal access to parental property, the right to equal property, the right to self-determination, and reproductive health rights, including family planning and safe motherhood and divorce laws. Only very few – about 15 percent – of the NGO representatives stated that they are able to hold state and private market actors answerable and accountable for actions that affected their members (Nikku 2009). Many of these civil societies are functioning outside the Kathmandu valley and felt that they do not have enough access to information to be able to lobby and influence.

Importantly, however, more than half of the civil society organisations stated that they are able to respond to social interests in their working area. About two thirds of the civil society leaders stated that their work empowered the citizens and increased their voice in the local decision making processes.

Donor dependency

Almost all civil society organisations in Nepal, except religious ones, are dependent on the state and/or external funding for their work. In the above mentioned investigation, the NGO leaders stated that citizen support has become very low because the state has taken over welfare functions that used to be the domain of community groups. In recent years, however, the state has not been in a position where it has been able to support and fulfills these functions any more. At the same time, community groups have lost their interest in collective activities, maybe due to the growing impact of globalisation and capitalistic attitudes. The Nepalese society is rapidly changing. We now have high out migration in search of jobs, more nuclear families, increasing abuse of elder citizens and weakening ties with community, suggesting that families are much more grabbed in to globalisation and its negative influences. Civil society
has come to depend on external donor support, sometimes even risking their independent nature (see Nikku 2009).

**Political affiliations**

In Nepal, political parties have decided to work on the basis of political consensus (*sahamati ra sahakarya*) rather than mobilising popular support for their respective party programs. Civil society, in its turn, is divided on issues of governance due to affiliations to a particular ideology and funding sources. Civil society organisations that are affiliated to political parties (trade unions, party affiliated service organisations, student unions) are at times not able to protect the interests of their members due to their excessive involvement with party politics and party agendas. This issue needs further research.

However, the hope is that recent changes in the country’s political environment may have positive repercussions on many aspects of the development and functioning of civil society – if only civil society is able to make use of the time and the opportunities.

**Conclusion**

Civil society’s impact on the peace process in Nepal is crucial, but donor dependency is restricting its role as the creator of autonomous public space and the enhancer of citizen participation in the politics of policy process.

It has been argued that civil society groups in Nepal and their role were minimised in the democratic process when the term ‘political consensus’ was inserted into the interim constitution as a means to reach the establishment of a constitution for the young republic. Constitution-making and the peace process were taken from the hands of citizens and elected members and given to top political leaders, restricting the influence of people’s voices.

Civil society has used various tools to mobilise people’s support during the democracy movement *Jana Andolan II*. It has organised discussions, rallies, and protest programs, such as *band* (closing down), *gherao* (encircling), and *dharnas* (sit ups), to pressure the then royal government to stop its militarised actions against political forces, including human rights groups, and to adhere to a peace process respecting human rights.
The research findings suggest that Nepalese civil society is active in urban centres and to some extent successful in fulfilling essential functions, such as facilitating people’s participation in policy-making process in the Nepalese society and politics.

A number of external and internal factors limit the role of civil society in Nepal. As a result, the Nepalese civil society is not able to provide a counter hegemony to state and market influences and hence not able to ensure people’s participation in the policy process. Thus, a strengthening of civil society is crucial for the current democratisation process in Nepal and to make most out of the transition that Nepal is currently going through.

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Democratic space in Cambodia

Jan-Erik Wänn

My background for discussing what appears to be a shrinking democratic space in Cambodia is an engagement in civil society and development for more than 40 years. Ten years ago I restarted my international career and have since worked for international NGOs in Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq and now in Cambodia, for the Swedish NGO Forum Syd. After many years of work in conflict areas with all their problems, especially major humanitarian challenges, I was looking forward to take up a position in the less problematic Cambodia. However, I was soon quite disappointed: over the missed opportunities, the increasing inequalities, the open corruption (rank 166 out of 180 countries), and a government limiting the democratic space.

Civil society reappeared in Cambodia in 1979, when the Khmer Rouge had been driven back by Vietnamese forces and the first international NGOs arrived. They were welcomed by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Hun Sen, now the powerful Prime Minister. After the Paris peace accord in 1991, the UN led Cambodia through a transition from a one-party state and civil war to a multiparty democracy. Securing peace, stability and international cooperation has since been a priority of the governments. These aims have been quite successful and something the electorate has appreciated. Fairly free elections have been held regularly since 1993, and the reformed former communist party, Cambodia’s Peoples Party (CPP), has continuously strengthened its positions. After the July 2008 election, CPP controls 73 percent of the seats in the parliament and can therefore dictate decisions and limit discussions and transparency, all of which they are happy to do.

From a February 2010 report by the electorate watchdog COMFREL (the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia, supported by the Swedish NGO Forum Syd) I will mention some examples of
limitations on freedom of expression and participation in the National Parliament:

- All parliamentarians have to belong to a group of minimum 10 Members of Parliament (MPs), and they have to get the approval of the group leader as well as from the Assembly Chair before speaking. This has effectively silenced the three members of the Human Rights opposition party;
- A new law, Statute of Parliamentarians, contradicts the constitution and makes it possible to prosecute MPs for abusing an individual’s dignity, social customs, public order and national security without specifying what constitutes these acts;
- The parliamentary immunity has been lifted for three opposition MPs, including the opposition leader Sam Rainsy from the party with the same name. He has been condemned to two years in prison and is threatened with another 18 years in prison for insisting on his website that the border demarcation with Vietnam is not being done correctly. He lives in exile in Paris and will probably not be able to participate in the next election.

Starting from zero in 1979, there were major positive developments in Cambodia in the areas of democracy, human rights and civil society. In the beginning, NGOs were mostly engaged in service delivery and infrastructure, activities that the government is still quite happy for them to carry out. When some NGOs, like Forum Syd in 1993, started to get involved in issues of democracy and human rights, the positive attitude of the government changed. After the 2008 election, we have seen several attempts to limit the space for civil society. As one activist expressed it: “Now that the ruling elite has the financial control [see Global Witness reports] and the political control, they are going for the control of civil society.”

New decrees and laws containing limitations to civil society and opposition have been adopted in 2009. One example is the criminal code, which in vague terminology includes the crime of defamation, thus opening for the criminalisation of critical analysis and protests. Activists already say that they are now more careful about how they voice concerns,
in order not to face prosecution. As there is no separation of power between the executive, legislative and judicial branches in Cambodia, there is a major abuse risk in the implementation of laws.

A new law on demonstrations (adopted in December 2009) had the expressed intention to improve freedom of demonstrations, but in fact, the law limits the freedom in many ways: the number of participants may not be more than 200; demonstrations can be held in official places only, and during working hours, and after the approval of capital/provincial authorities.

The new Law on Expropriation, quickly adopted in December 2009, contains many areas of concern to civil society. Land grabbing and evictions are major problems in Cambodia, and Forum Syd and many other NGOs are trying to support local communities here.

A Law on Anti-Corruption has after 15 years in the pipeline been passed by the Council of Ministers under total secrecy, no public forum, transparency or discussions. The Parliament was given less than one week in March 2010 to read, analyse and accept the law. That was not a problem for the rubberstamp CPP Members of Parliament, but the opposition walked out at the voting. In this law, leaders of NGOs, as well as government officials, have to declare their assets, but the results will remain secret, kept by a government selected body. As mentioned above, corruption is a major problem at all levels with major negative effects on democracy, civil society and on the society as a whole. Therefore, no one in civil society expects much progress on anti-corruption.

One of the highest priorities for the dominating Prime Minister after the last election was legislation to control NGOs and associations. Civil society does not consider NGO legislation urgent or even necessary. Examples from other parts of the developing world are not encouraging (for example Ethiopia and Zambia); such legislation has instead been very repressive to civil society. NGOs in Cambodia have so far not seen a draft or been invited to any discussion on this law yet.

In my view, the Cambodian leaders see the communist countries of China, Vietnam and Laos – rather than countries like for instance Sweden or India – as models for civil society and ‘democratic space’. China is the major investor in Cambodia and a major donor; its conditions never include improved human rights but ask instead for, for example,
the expulsion of protected groups of people, before signing agreements. Vietnam is a major trading partner and seen by some, including the CPP, as liberators, while others, including the opposition, consider them an occupation force from 1979.

Civil society is active and working hard for improvements of human rights and democracy in Cambodia, supported by parts of the donor community. However, activities like voicing opinions and advocating for a cause are getting increasingly difficult, as the examples above have shown.

Cambodia is a country with a major potential for positive development of its whole society, rich in natural resources, with a great nature and tradition. There are some positive signs in the country, and to me the important ones are to be seen in the empowerment of the local communities and the increased awareness among many young people. These are areas that Forum Syd, with the support of Sida, will continue to support and focus on in our work to strengthen civil society.

A more general conclusion from my years working in conflict and post conflict states, maybe not very original but based on personal experiences, is that advances in democracy, civil society and human rights are totally context dependent. Such advances cannot be driven but only supported from abroad, and can be severely limited by state and non-state violence and repression. Hopefully, however, they can never be totally eliminated.

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NGOs providing support to migrant workers in China

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Abstract
Market reforms in China have created a space for the rise of a third sector; they also triggered the largest rural–urban migration flow in world history. Rural–urban migration is one of the major challenges that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has to face. Today, around 200 million peasants have left their villages to seek employment and a better life in urban areas, but appear as second-class citizens in the cities of their own country.

Unlike peasants and state workers, migrants’ claims for rights protection are supported by Chinese so-called NGOs that first appeared toward the end of the 1990s and in the beginning of the 2000s. These organisations function as substitutes for official trade unions, from which these workers were long excluded. The unions are now increasingly deemed inefficient and sometimes seen as illegitimate means of representation. NGOs also lobby authorities to improve migrant workers’ conditions, thus appearing as a social structure, capable of organising migrants’ resistance and of interacting with the state on a sustained basis.

To which extent do NGOs challenge established social and political values? Do they foster migrants’ emergence as an autonomous self-conscious group, capable of negotiating a new social contract in China? How does NGO mobilisation and the way it tends to become institutionalised re-configure state–society relations? Do these changes strengthen or threaten the power of the CCP?

Based on six years of fieldwork in Beijing and in the Pearl River Delta, my paper analyses how political constraints and contradictory interests within civil society shape the way NGOs defend migrants’ rights, socialise them and interact with the state. While highlighting the contradictory
dynamics that re-configure the Chinese political field in a very uncertain way, my paper also seeks to assess the political changes that have taken place over time.

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Session

Gendered participation in civil society:
New spaces for women or a less powerful road?

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Introduction

Edmé Domínguez

Is civil society a new space for women’s participation? If we understand civil society as everything that is outside of the state’s sphere, we still have many sectors of society whose inclusion within civil society can be debatable, such as the private sector and, in particular, big corporate enterprises. However, if we restrict this definition to include all social spheres not directly linked to the state nor to the creation of profit, we can start trying to observe if this civil society is effectively giving new opportunities to women’s collective expressions – and if these spaces are achieving any change in favour of women’s demands. What, then, are these demands and what is this participation?

Such is the subject of this parallel session: the exploration of these spaces and their achievements if any, in a contextualised and concrete way, and through different levels: from the home (‘the personal is poli’) to the community, to broader social organisations and eventually to political organisations.

The papers presented in this session were chosen on the criteria of diversity in geographical location and the relevance of the cases to the issues we wished to discuss. Most of the abstracts submitted came from Asia, particularly from India, so two of the chosen papers come from those regions: one from India and one from Pakistan. The third one studies a Latin American country: Bolivia. As to the issues, they are also diverse. One focuses on the study of three different women social movements in India, the other on the use of radio broadcasting to raise awareness as to women’s issues, and the third one on conflicting loyalties: ethnicity struggles and women’s demands among indigenous women in Bolivia.

Although diverse, the papers point to common problems and issues: how women’s social movements may be co-opted by political parties or ethnic movements who use the demands of these women for their own purposes, denying them any space of their own within the leader-
ship. Women’s movements, for the most part not feminist orientated but mostly focussed on the fulfilment of the so called ‘practical gender demands’, are thus used as ‘support bases’ and their potential for change is minimised. The ‘patriarchy dressed in red’ uses the spaces created by these women for their own aims, denying them the possibility of constructing any power of their own.

Another issue discussed in the papers is the power of the media. Even a traditional media like radio broadcasts highlights both the potentiality of using such power for raising awareness among secluded women – and for indoctrinating them in fundamentalist ways; thus the importance for any progressive movement of controlling such media and neutralising its use for other purposes.

So yes, civil society is opening new spaces for women – but these new spaces are not always transforming women’s situations, they are not always rendering them the power they have traditionally lacked. Civil society opens possibilities for women’s participation, but such participation has to be much aware of the risks of falling into the trap of political, ideological or religious manipulation, risks that are unfortunately not very clear from the beginning.

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Women and the public sphere: 
Gender politics in West Bengal

Dayabati Roy

Though the idea of ‘civil society’ has a long history, particularly in the West, almost certainly since the beginning of modern political theories, it “has made a dramatic return recently” all over the world (Kaviraj and Khilnani 2002, p 1). A new wave of political discourse has emerged in the intellectual and academic fields as a consequence of globalisation over the last couple of decades, and debate and discussion on the idea of ‘civil society’ has gained momentum. In fact, the idea has of late gained so much importance so as to partly explain contemporary politics that have emerged in every corner of the world – very often in the form of local or micro level social movements, working for greater democratisation, equitable development and social justice.

Two vital questions arise at this point in relation to India and the historical context of the countries of the Global South. The first question is whether the same idea of ‘civil society’, which is broadly used to describe and analyse the public sphere beyond the domain of state in Western countries, can be equally useful to describe the conditions of Indian politics. The second question concerns whether the idea of ‘civil society’ can at all be applicable to explore the gender dimension of the political practices in India.

This paper seeks to understand the usefulness and relevance of ‘civil society’ as a conceptual category for exploring the gender dimension in some recent local level social movements surged in West Bengal, an Indian state. By examining the underlying dynamics of women’s participation in the emerging politics of West Bengal, the study reveals that the idea of ‘civil society’ in all its diverse meaning seems to be inadequate or inappropriate when it comes to explaining contemporary gender politics of post-colonial India. If we do not opt for other conceptual categories
appropriate to study the specific political conditions of countries like India, the specificities of the political practices in these countries would be considered just as a ‘deviation’ from the ‘norm,’ i.e., the normative political theories, as imagined and practised mainly in the West.

‘Civil society’ as an analytical concept

‘Civil society’ seems to be considered one of the core classical concepts created and used in modern political theories to analyse and envisage modern capitalist societies of the world. As opposed to the state, ‘civil society’ is perceived as a modern institution, meant for the interest of the citizens. In the context of Western modes of development, the concept is defined as the modern institutions of the propertied people “which are based on equality, autonomy, freedom of entry and exit, contract, deliberative procedures of decision-making, recognized rights and duties of members, and other such principles” (Chatterjee 2001, p 172). These kinds of associational formations have also been observed in non-Western societies like India as a result of colonial endeavours since the nineteenth century. However, very few people in this country actually could engage themselves in these types of projects of modernisation, and the vast masses of people have remained outside. They have, on the other hand, been involved in other types of political formations, characteristically very different from the associations of ‘civil society.’ In fact, ‘civil society’, as it exists in non-Western societies, seems to be somewhat different from the Western kind. This notwithstanding, we can use the term ‘civil society’, or bourgeoisie society as described by Hegel, to denote these modern associational formations as well.

But how can we explain these other political formations in post-colonial India that are characteristically very distinct from the formations of ‘civil society,’ and which are based mainly on principles of morality, social justice and communitarian aspiration? The political practices of modern India, as we know, are immensely influenced by caste, religion, ethnicity and gender; and everyday politics – both inside the legislative houses and outside of it, at grass root level – have revolved around these social or communal identities. The majority of India’s common masses have been deprived of the basic human rights enshrined in the Constitu-
tion of India since its origin. They are increasingly organising themselves in political formations in order to achieve their goals related to their lives and livelihoods. It is important to note that they are very often not organised or mobilised to defend their private property or some other individual interest of civil life; rather, they organise themselves either to defend their basic livelihoods or for the interests of their entire community. In order to fulfill their demands, participants of these political formations try to garner support from political parties and members of ‘civil society’ as well. The Government is very often compelled to concede to the demands of these political formations, even though their means are sometimes ‘violent’ or ‘illegal’ and certainly not complying with the norms of ‘civil society’ as defined by Western political theory.

Rethinking ‘civil society’

The question is how we can define and categorise such political practices and formations as have emerged in post-colonial countries in the recent times. How can we use the idea of ‘civil society’ to explain these political practices and the gendered participation in them?

An analysis of three recent political movements in West Bengal reveals the actual dynamics of these political formations and women’s participation in it. On the basis of this analysis, this paper argues that the idea of ‘civil society’ seems not to be applicable as an analytical category in the specific context of West Bengal or all over India.

A very small section of citizens in the country might engage themselves in civil associational forms on the basis of autonomy and freedom of the individual. The civil associational forms of this section could be termed ‘civil society,’ even though the nature of their functioning differs to some extent from that of similar forms in the countries of the North. The elite, ‘bhadralok,’ people in the cities or the urban areas, might belong to this category.

However, the vast masses of common people of this region live and engage themselves continually in some kind of political formation in order to resolve their everyday complexities in regard to their lives and livelihoods and the basic entitlements enshrined in the Constitution of the Modern nation. These vast masses of people usually endeavour to
garner support from various political parties and from eminent persons in the so called ‘civil society’, asking them to mediate on their behalf in relation to the Government. Moreover, community, be it social or ethnic, matters to a great extent to these political formations of the people.

Perhaps we could better understand political formations of the vast masses of peoples in the South through some other idea or concept, as Chatterjee (2004) proposed, by introducing the idea of ‘political society’?

Note
1. The term bhadralok was coined in the nineteenth century Bengal to denote the English educated rich people in modern professions. In general, the people belonging to higher castes fell in this category.

References

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Active Aymara women
inside and outside of Parliament

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Since the beginning of 2000, Bolivia has been going through a process of re-structuring of the state that is intimately connected to the organisation of civil society. Bolivia has had a remarkably gender unequal official political sphere. However, women’s participation in party politics and government structures has increased during the last decade due to different factors: the introduction of new contexts of participation, for one, such as the new local political governments introduced through the decentralisation reform in the mid-1990s, and the constituent assembly of 2007/2008; and the increasing political influence of the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism), through which women active in the social movements have been able to enter party politics.

In this paper I discuss the experiences of female Bolivian politicians of social movement and indigenous background, in order to analyse the possibilities and restraints of female participation and influence on decision making processes. The paper is based on anthropological research conducted in La Paz and El Alto during the period of 2006–2009. Its focus lies on interviews conducted with female leaders active at different levels of Bolivian society: within formal political structures and/or within NGOs and social movements.

Experiences of participation
among female leaders of indigenous background

Bolivian legal framework supports equal representation of women and men, and the legal framework has been developed further with the country’s new constitution, but the problem with the introduced gender quotas has been the quality of participation. Several obstacles make female participation more difficult.
The discourses of indigenous female politicians generally show loyalty to the movement they represent, as in statements such as “Our goal is not to work against our men and the unified struggle”. The relation between discourse and practice reveals a more complex picture, however. In interviews conducted with female leaders of Aymara background – active at the level of parliament, municipality and neighbourhood committees in the department of La Paz – I explored the way they experienced their political participation. In general, and contrary to the common discourses referred to above, none of my interviewees denied difficulties for female leaders, and experiences of discrimination were common. I will discuss three aspects that influence these women’s participation: the way they entered politics; their possibilities to exercise leadership; and the way active women are looked upon.

Hurdles for women’s political participation

To fulfill the quota reforms from the 1990s, parties have had to find female candidates for an arena highly dominated by men. Political conviction or the desire to exercise leadership were not always the reasons behind women’s participation. Most women seemed to have entered politics on other grounds: a) they were pressured to take on a certain task, with reference to the need to fulfill obligations within their community and to display solidarity with their place of origin; b) they were appointed due to their level of education; or c) they had a male relative who had been involved in politics (particularly the women who became more important leaders). The representatives were elected in order to fulfill the expectations of the base organisations (cumplir), to serve in loyalty to the people they represented. In several cases, fulfilling expectations was not possible, and participation implied a cost, which in many cases was higher for the women than for the men.

A second aspect concerns the possibility for women to actually exercise political leadership, once elected. It is well known that the female quota at the municipal level has been difficult to fulfill; nor has it led to results of acceptable quality, that is, the elected women have not been able to exercise their political tasks (Costa Benavides 2003). Many of my interviewed women testified to a strong resistance to female political
participation, especially in the rural areas (see Michao Barbery 2007). Women have, once elected, been harassed and pressured to resign to the benefit of the male person next on the list. The Bolivian Association of Female Councillors (ACOBOL) reported 200 cases of abuses and harassments between the years 2000 and 2008 (Chávez 2009). There is also competition between different ministries. Together with a tradition of clientelism and corruption, this makes coordination between the ministries and state secretaries difficult, and it hampers the creation of networks between female parliamentarians and state secretaries. Several interviewees brought up how difficult it has been for the Secretariat for Gender Issues to get the President’s and other governmental bodies’ ear. It was also difficult for individual female parliamentarians to get support for their ideas. The female parliamentarians I interviewed had their roots in Aymara base organisations promoting women’s issues. All of them continued this work alongside their parliamentary tasks.

The third issue hindering female participation was found in the way politically active women are seen. The political sphere belongs to the men. According to the complementary views on gender relations in the rural areas, it is the male head that should represent the household in the communal assembly. If women participate they are not supposed to talk very much but wait until consulted. An active woman breaks these rules. A female unionist leader who has to travel a lot is not well seen in her local surroundings. Furthermore, most of the testimonies proved it very difficult for women with an indigenous background to combine active leadership with the role of wife and mother.

**Working ‘outside’ or ‘inside’ political structures?**

Due to the strong male-dominated and clientelistic structures within official politics, the experiences of many of my interviewees suggest that – for women – working on the ‘outside,’ in civil society organisations, is more effective than working ‘inside’ the political structures. The pattern that evolves in the interviews is one where women are often pushed into participation in a political sphere that is competitive, corrupt, demanding and male-dominated. They find themselves in hierarchical relations of conflict and alliance – between women and men, among women them-
selves, and between different groups of women. It is very difficult for them to live up to expectations (Widmark 2010). If they want to promote feminist issues or respond to women’s interests it is more effective to work in civil society organisations, trying to influence politics from the outside. However, since civil society organisations are also often male-dominated, most of the interviewed women opted for a continued work within women’s organisations.

As demonstrated by Bjarnegård (2009), a context with much corruption will also see many male-dominated networks, building on male loyalty. The high level of political harassment against women in Bolivia could thus be understood as a clash between a male-dominated political system and newly introduced quota laws. Most incidents of harassment toward female politicians are reported from the municipal level. Many women are active at that level, and this is also the level where gender quotas were first adopted. The interviews seem to indicate that the higher the women climbed up the political ladder, the less harassment they experienced. However, they found it as, or more, difficult to get their voices heard. Female parliamentarians and councillors that I interviewed had not found it possible to promote specific gender issues in relation to their parliamentary tasks, and they had experienced difficulties in forming female networks within this sphere, despite the fact that two out of three were active within base organisations promoting Aymara women.

A quantitative gender equal participation, then, does not automatically imply a qualitative improvement of gender issues. My interviews suggest that even though female participation has increased considerably within official structures in Bolivia, gender issues are not necessarily on the agenda. Due to the tough and resilient structures of male dominance, it seems necessary to work ‘outside’ official structures – in civil society organisations – in order to make gender issues and women’s rights issues visible.

References

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Women of Pakistan:
Giving voice to the voiceless in Swat

Tasneem Ahmar

Abstract
In my paper, I introduce gendered participation in civil society within the context of Pakistan’s conflict areas. I then explore initiatives in which women are trying to create a space for themselves in a male dominated media scenario by bringing forward case studies and oral testimonies of the women, whose voices may never have been heard outside the four walls of their houses. Taking these unheard voices and untold stories to millions of listeners is not only extremely courageous; I argue that it is a step towards bringing social and cultural transformation based on gender equality and equity.

The paper also focuses on three case studies from one area, Swat, in the northern region of Pakistan. It discusses whether the inroads made possible by women producers, working with various radio production houses and FM channels in Pakistan, can have as great an impact on the minds of women as did the notoriously infamous Fazlullah aka ‘Maulana Radio.’

I conclude with recommendations on what kind of space and power is required for women to make change happen – for themselves and for others – in this conflict-ridden area.

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Session

Uncivil attachments: The role of ethnic affiliations, kinship bonds and patron–client relations in contemporary popular politics

Introduction
Bengt G Karlsson

Indonesia’s (un)civil society and the future of democracy
Verena Beittinger-Lee

Civil and not-so-civil forms of protest in West Bengal
Kenneth Bo Nielsen

Displacement in democracy
Staffan Löfving
Introduction

Bengt G Karlsson

Late anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss famously suggested that human thinking works through what he calls binary opposition, such as day-night, heaven-earth, up-down, raw-cooked or civilised-savage. In the light of this, one could assume that when we think about or search for ‘civil society’, we simultaneously also call upon or postulate the existence of the opposite, something that we for the sake of argument can call ‘the uncivil’. When, for example, it is claimed that a strong civil society is a pre-requisite for democratic development, ‘the uncivil’ would be the dark counter force, holding back society or preventing such development from happening. It is this ever-present ‘shadow’ that we are concerned with in this session. Civil society is thus taken to represent desired societal qualities, something that apparently is regarded as missing in many parts of the world.

Following this, three interrelated questions seem pertinent: Is civil society a useful scholarly concept, if we find that many of the societies we try to understand are seemingly lacking it? What do societies with a weak or absent civil society have instead? Do we have a better or a more universally applicable term to point to a sphere of society that is neither state nor market, a space between family and state?

‘Civil society’ – a policy driven concept

The emergence of civil society as a concept and a policy concern during the past two decades or so obviously partakes in a political project that seeks to circumvent the state and push for neo-liberal social reform; the assumption being that governance no longer is or should be the privilege of the state. Civil society actors – read NGOs – are called in to take over many of the functions earlier considered the responsibilities of the state and government. This has been the policy advice not least in the post-communist so-called transition countries.
What I thus suggest is that civil society along with a number of similar or ‘like-minded’ terms, such as ‘social capital’ and ‘governance’ index a neoliberal political project. This is not a new argument, but one that is worth re-stating. As scholars, we always need to handle our concepts and analytical frameworks with care. It is through language that we bring aspects of the human condition to the fore or, to put it more strongly, that we make certain things thinkable. To uncritically adopt concepts that carry normative social projects or a policy driven discourse is simply bad scholarship.

Different – or lacking?
As an anthropologist, I always reach for the guns when I hear someone saying that there is no civil society or that civil society is absent in such and such a place. And indeed, this is heard over and again. Africa seems to be lacking it, as well as the post-communist countries. It is not held that civil society might look different or be of a different kind in such places. No, what is argued is that it is missing or lacking. There are, of course, a number of social features missing in many places; for example, there is not much of a clan system in Sweden. But again, this is usually not considered alarming or in need of intervention. I say this not to be polemic, but to state the obvious: that the civil society discourse pushes us to look at societies in a particular way, and hence to aspire for a particular type of society. In doing so, it arguably makes us less attentive to what is actually there or going on in these other societies; to understand how they are being organised and what values, norms or world-views sustain them.

In other words, civil society might be useful in policy thinking where the stated aim is to bring about certain desired changes, for example, to promote democracy, human rights or gender equality. But certainly, this is quite a different project than to understand or explain what people are up to in a particular place or part of the world.

In the world of development
Let me just give a small example from my present life as an accompanying spouse to a development practitioner; my wife works for Sida in southern Caucasus, mainly in charge of civil society issues. As a coping strategy,
I soon realised that I had better study what all these people in development aspire for, and I have on and off for the last soon four years been interviewing professionals that work for various international aid organisations, as well as taken part in meetings, conferences and workshops dealing with issues like domestic violence, rural development, election monitoring and IDP policies. But above all, by just being a member of the development ex-patriate community, I have been made to listen to the pros and cons of all kinds of schemes to improve life in Georgia. A very common statement or identified problem is exactly the lack of formal civil society organisations, and subsequently a lot of Western support to Georgia goes into the strengthening of civil society.

During the Eduard Shevardnadze era in the 1990s, the United States put a lot of their aid money into this, that is, to build another structure of governance in what increasingly was perceived as a ‘failed state’. With the Rose Revolution in November 2003 that brought the present Western friendly, US educated and ultra-neo-liberal government in place, the US policy – and along with it that of many other Western donors – changed to direct support to the government and its reform efforts. George W Bush’s famous visit to Tbilisi in 2005, speaking about Georgia as a friend and a beacon of liberty, was the salutary event of the new government under Mikheil Saakashvili.

But things did not turn out the way many expected it to, and the Saakashvili government started to show authoritarian tendencies and, eventually, in late 2007 sent police to brutally attack a demonstration organised by the political opposition. The August 2008 war with Russia – that Georgia apparently started – further stained the regime’s reputation in the West. Interestingly enough, the main frenzy within the international aid community during the last months has been the announcement of a larger US project on civil society.

Earlier experience of much civil society support has been that it created a sphere of urban-based elite NGOs with difficulties to sustain their activities on their own. When funds dried up, their engagements ended. There was no lasting impact – other than the skilled new class of NGO workers, many of whom ended up working for the Saakashvili government. A Georgia-based foreign researcher explained this missing
impact as a consequence of a deep distrust of the state among Georgians after the fall of the Soviet system and subsequent years of government misrule. People have come to trust no one but close friends and relatives. Being active in voluntary organisations or programs organised by NGOs is simply not considered a useful investment of time. To attend a funeral, however, is.

To me, this last point is significant. It is here that we encounter the left-over sphere we call ‘uncivil society’ or ‘uncivil attachments’. Such attachments to family and friends are rarely something international development experts take note of or develop an interest in. They continue instead to put their money on what is not there, the absent civil society.

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Indonesia’s (un)civil society and the future of democracy

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While transition research has produced numerous studies on the positive effects of civil society on democratisation processes, only few deal with the possible threat emanating from those parts of civil society that are marked by a ‘civic deficit’. The case study of Indonesia illustrates that an opening up of the public sphere and the rise of civil society can have negative impacts on democratisation processes as well, especially when political opportunities for civil society are clearly limited by a framework of failing state functions, corruption, violence, and the persistence of predatory interests in society.

After some short and turbulent experiences with democracy in the 1950s, Indonesia remained under authoritarian rule until the fall of its second president, Suharto, in 1998. Needless to say, the expectations that the country would become a democracy after the Western liberal model were high in Indonesia and abroad. The fall of Suharto led to democratic opening and the so-called reformasi-movement, which resulted in the annulment of many repressive laws and regulations, press freedom, freedom of opinion and assembly, and an unprecedented civil society boom. Tens of thousands of new civil society organisations (CSOs) have been established since then.

Because the mainstream transition research assumes a positive correlation between a vigorous civil society and democracy, civil society was widely expected to promote democracy and help establish democratic norms and values – in short: a democratic culture. However, parallel to the establishment of new democratic institutions and reforms, especially in the first years after 1998, Indonesia’s political landscape has been marked by the eruption of unrest and conflicts, ethno-nationalism, violence, and acts of terrorism. In the wake of democratic opening, not only pro-
democratic civil society organisations have mushroomed in the country, but ‘uncivil’ society groups have come increasingly to the fore as well.

A critical analysis of Indonesia’s civil society and its impact on the country’s democratisation efforts therefore has to take not only the classical actors of civil society into account, which represent a (mainly Western) concept of liberal democracy, but portray uncivil groups and their influence on political processes as well. These USOs (Uncivil Society Organisations) vary significantly in their degree of incivility and come in many shapes. In Indonesia, they range from vigilantes and paramilitaries to ethno-nationalist and militant religious groups, just to name a few.

By blinding out such less democratic or even ‘uncivil’ forces, which nevertheless form a substantial part of Indonesia’s civil society sphere, we exclude a substantial and influential part of associational life from the beginning and thus falsify the picture of Indonesia’s civil society landscape.

Therefore, the use of a definition of civil society that allows us to include a wide variety of agents reflecting Indonesia’s diversity and social reality is suggested here. John Rawls’s understanding of civil society as a neutral zone, in which various virtues compete was taken as a starting point. Civil society should be defined as a value-free, neutral sphere per se, whose content and direction are determined by the values, norms, and ideology of the actor or group of actors who gain supremacy over this sphere. Secondly, I followed Gramsci’s conception of civil society as a sphere of struggle for ideological and cultural hegemony. Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) defined civil society as a public space, separate from state and market, in which citizens form their political opinions and make their decisions. This contested sphere is the main arena for creating legitimacy and is marked by conflicting interests and power struggles. Not only the state is trying to gain ideological supremacy, but the various social groups as well.

From the above we can conclude that firstly, civil society cannot be understood as a solitary united actor but rather as a realm of heterogeneity and competition. Secondly, civil society is not a sphere of activity independent from the state, but more an arena where thoughts, ideas, political principles, and ideologies are contested and debated. Lastly, depending on which actor or group of actors gains the hegemony of the realm of civil society, civil society can have democratic or antidemocratic effects.
Uncivil society – the drivers of conflict

What then is ‘uncivil society’? Most academic treatment of the subject defines uncivil society only indirectly by pointing out what characterises ‘civil society’. Larry Diamond, for instance, sees pluralism, diversity, and partialness as distinguishing characteristics of civil society (Diamond 1994). However, there are some attempts to identify ‘uncivil society’ explicitly. In one of his speeches in 2004, former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan defined uncivil society as the “drivers of conflict”, those who “promote exclusionary policies or encourage people to resort to violence.”

Moreover, Laurence Whitehead provides us with a definition of the ‘uncivil citizen’ in his essay on the incivility of civil society Bowling in the Bronx: The Uncivil Interstices between Civil and Political Society. According to Whitehead, uncivil citizens are those who enjoy political rights while not being restrained by the norms of civil society. Whitehead correctly pointed out that the greatest danger for democracy may be posed by the “insecurity, rootlessness, arbitrariness, and perhaps even the social cannibalism’ that have come to be associated with many post-transition liberalized societies” (Whitehead 1997, p 94).

Despite the lack of a clear definition of ‘uncivil society’, I believe that all USOs share some of the following characteristics that render them ‘uncivil’ in one way or another:

- the use of force, violence, and fraud to acquire power or political influence;
- the pursuit of illiberal or anti-democratic agendas;
- an undemocratic internal structure;
- an ideological foundation that is opposed to liberal democratic values;
- the lack of a “spirit of civility” (Whitehead 1997, p 100);
- the absence of “commitment to act within the constraints of legal or pre-established rules” (Whitehead 1997, pp 100-101);
- racism, intolerance, uniformity; and
- illegality/criminal activities.

The case study of the opening up of Indonesia’s public sphere illustrates that not all elements of civil society are necessarily fostering democracy.
Civil society is never a harmonious and homogenous entity, but an arena of ongoing conflict, contesting interests, power struggles, competition, and ideological clashes. Under certain conditions, voluntary associations can therefore deepen conflicts and biases in society, and even contribute to the disintegration of democratic regimes by complicating the formation of majorities and segmenting the political community. There is the danger of a civil society exhibiting strong ties that only benefit members of certain groups and exclude others: “Internally cohesive groups which isolate themselves from the rest of society may use their social capital to pursue goals at odds with the public good” (World Bank nd).

Depending on their goals, methods and ideological orientation, the actors of civil society may either enlarge or contract democratic space – especially when political opportunities for civil society are clearly limited by a framework of failing state functions, corruption, violence, and the persistence of predatory interests in society as the last decade in Indonesia has illustrated. The development of a civic culture with underlying civic virtues is decisive in this context. If these virtues fail to be developed, ‘uncivil’ values will be nurtured instead in the realm of civil society, and the resulting civic culture will hardly be a liberal democratic one.

Notes
1. John Rawls (February 21, 1921 – November 24, 2002) was an American philosopher, a professor of political philosophy at Harvard University and author of A Theory of Justice, Political Liberalism, Justice as Fairness: A Restatement, and The Law of Peoples (1971). He is widely considered one of the most important English-language political philosophers of the 20th century.


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Civil and not-so-civil forms of protest in West Bengal

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Civil society has over the last more than two decades become one of those ‘Hurrah!’ words – along with eg democracy and human rights – the meaning and inherent merit of which are taken for granted and left unexamined. For precisely those reasons, most anthropologists – myself included – are of the opinion that the notion of civil society is in fact of little use when it comes to making sense of most forms of popular political mobilisation in most parts of the world.

The notion of civil society assumes a particular kind of political subject – that is, the culturally equipped citizen – who makes sense of his world using the language of political modernity. This species of *homo politicus* thinks of himself as a rights-bearing citizen first of all – as an individual with the personal freedom to enter into and break alliances with other similar citizens in the pursuit of shared interests. In addition, the notion of civil society – at least in some renderings – also assumes a civic political culture in which political actors behave like citizens and accept the authority of the state which, in turn, is expected to listen and be responsive. Such conditions do not prevail everywhere, and as anyone with a sense of realism, or with any kind of field experience in a non-Western context will know, this is not how popular politics is conducted in most of the world, to paraphrase Partha Chatterjee (2004).

With particular reference to India, Chatterjee has argued that most of the country’s inhabitants continue to be only tenuously, and even then ambiguously and contextually, rights-bearing citizens in the full sense (Chatterjee 2004, p 38): India’s poor do not relate to the organs of the state in the same manner as India’s culturally equipped and affluent middle classes do; nor do governmental agencies treat the poor as
proper citizens belonging to civil society. The poor make their claims on
government, and in turn are governed, not within the framework of stable
constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary,
contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct negotia-
tions (Chatterjee 2008, p 57) on a political terrain where rules may be
bent, stretched or broken. Importantly, the success of the claim-making
of the poor seems to depend entirely on their ability to mobilise support
to influence the implementation of governmental policy in their favour.

In the remainder of this paper I show how the very uncivil act of
confrontational and violent mobilisation remains an important part
of the repertoire of claim-making deployed by the poor. I present two
cases from the Indian state of West Bengal, where the rural poor, by
using heated confrontations, mass mobilisation and violence to create
spectacular public action, have managed to force the state government
to listen to and act on its claims.

‘Hostile’ mass mobilisation: The Singur case

The first case concerns resistance to land acquisition in Singur, where
1,000 acres of agricultural land was acquired in 2006 by the state govern-
ment for the purpose of setting up – by Indian industrial giant Tata
Motors – a car manufacturing unit that would produce what is now the
Tata Nano, the world’s cheapest car. A section of the project affected
population chose to oppose the acquisition of their land and to this end
they formed an impromptu committee, the Singur Krishi Jomi Raksha
Committee (committee to save the farmland of Singur), complete with a
president, joint convenors, and village-level leaders. While this committee
in some respects behaved like a civil society organisation (eg by sending
deputations and petitions to various government departments, and by
filing court cases challenging the government), it was the mass mobilisa-
tion of thousands of people for days on end in 2008 around the factory
site that really had an effect. This eventually made the chairman of Tata
Motors decide to call it quits and shut the factory in Singur down. It
was impossible, Ratan Tata said, to operate a factory under such “hostile
local conditions.”
Violent resistance: The Nandigram case

The second case concerns protests against the acquisition of 14,500 acres of land in Nandigram for a chemical hub and special economic zone. As rumours of the acquisition began to circulate locally, angry villagers expressed their opposition by staging protests. They were met with police fire, which injured several villagers. In turn, the villagers confronted the police and drove them out of the village. Subsequently they damaged roads and bridges, dug trenches, and blocked yet other roads with boulders and tree trunks to prevent the police from entering. To organise activities, the peasants then formed a Bhumi Ucched Pratirodh Committee (the committee to resist the destruction of the land, BUPC). Soon after, a CPM (the party heading the government in West Bengal) state secretariat member said about the BUPC that “if they want to make things difficult for us, we are prepared to make life hell for them.”

Within days, BUPC and CPM supporters hurled bombs at each other and engaged in gun battle. With no police presence in Nandigram, CPM activists ‘had a field day’ riding through villages on motor bikes and armed with guns or rifles. But BUPC activists put up a fight: they burned down a CPM leader’s house and burned another alive in a haystack. In all, six people died in the clash. Two months later, large contingents of police moved into Nandigram to restore normalcy. They were joined by armed gangs of CPM supporters seeking revenge. When more than 20,000 villagers stood their ground to keep out the police and the CPM cadre, the latter opened fire and killed 14 of them while 75 were injured. In addition many BUPC women were reportedly raped.

As a result the state government was immediately criticised from all sides and public pressure on it mounted. Two weeks later, the chief minister relented and announced that his government would no longer pursue their plans for acquiring land in Nandigram, and that the chemical hub would be established elsewhere. In addition the state government offered plenty of sops for Nandigram, perhaps to make amends: in 2007 and 2008 the state government undertook several rounds of patta distribution among Nandigram’s rural poor, who were thereby given legal title to and ownership of plots of agricultural land. The state government also increased the funds under Rural Infrastructure Development to Rs
1,500 crore – up from Rs 600 crore the previous year – and identified rural roads, irrigation and agriculture as priority areas under the new budget. Precisely these areas are a prime concern for Nandigram’s rural population. In addition, plans to build a new school and a new college in the area were revealed.

Conclusion

Evidently, from the point of view of rural communities, spectacular public action with a distinct violent quality remains an essential and effective way of making claims on the government. In Singur it was a prolonged road block that created the ‘hostile conditions’ that ostensibly made Tata Motors leave, while in Nandigram it was violent and confrontational mobilisation against the government and its supporters that did the trick. Clearly, people do not need to be or even behave like a ‘republican citizen’ to acquire a stake, strategically and morally, in the process of governmental power.

Forms of popular politics and mobilisation such as those described here are a far cry from the civilised world of civil society politics. As Partha Chatterjee notes, they

...bring into the hallways and corridors of power some of the squalor, ugliness and violence of popular life.. But if one truly values the freedom and equality that democracy promises, then one cannot imprison it within the sanitized fortress of civil society. (Chatterjee 2004, p 74)

Doing so might actually disempower the poor.

References


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Displacement in democracy

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This short paper is part of a project that approaches violence in democracy, not in terms of an expression of a failed or yet unfulfilled political development but by exploring its ongoing operation, seeing violence as constitutive of liberal democracy itself. I am particularly interested in the relation of violence to the social spaces opened or closed by political transformations commonly referred to as democratisation.

Among groups of forcibly displaced in Colombia, the power of the government is currently perceived to restrict itself to building foreign relations while continuously outsourcing domestic control to paramilitaries. State power, locally understood in terms of the metamorphosis of authoritarian rule, also thrives on the depoliticisation of the armed conflict through the criminalisation of the insurgency and the denial of the existence of paramilitaries; the manipulation or cooptation of media and foreign aid; the securitisation of urban life; and the economic complicity in the displacement of the rural poor.

By paying attention to local voices struggling to reconceptualise displacement in terms of new emplacements, emphasizing that the security of the state is violently sustained by the insecuritization of citizenry, I look for ways to reimagine the conditions for a political change beyond the cosmetics of metamorphosis. The paper deals with the role of paramilitary violence and foreign aid in this process; the limit to ‘partnership’, and a random, or even apparently cynical application of notions of ‘project ownership’.

Amilcar works in one of Colombia’s many ‘civil society organisations’ for and of internally displaced people. When in town to run errands and meet with potential donors of a small scale agricultural project in the Bogotá suburb of Soacha in January this year, he passed an internet café. He dropped in to check his inbox and found a message from *Aguilas Negras*, the Black Eagles, a re-emergent group of Colombian paramilitaries. The letter bore all the characteristic signs of a paramilitary death
sentence, with, this time, accusations against Amilcar and three other popular leaders of having behaved unpatriotically and for this reason having lost their right to life. It contained details of where they live and of how many children they have, and of what will happen also to their families unless they give up their work and abandon the place they currently inhabit; unless they displace themselves again.³

Amilcar talked quietly but without ever looking into my eyes as he spoke of this most recent episode of persecution in his life, and he showed me the copy of the email from *Aguilas Negras*. Since he received it he had cancelled all his meetings, and refrained from any unnecessary appearance in public (in fact, from any unnecessary appearance at home as well). The reason he went to see me was because he had misunderstood the person who had set our meeting up. He had taken me for someone he already knew, which he did not, and it now seemed to dawn on him that easy mistakes like that could cost him his life.

22 years old, married and a father of two children, one born back home and one ‘in displacement’, Amilcar leads an organisation that could be labelled radical or even subversive by conventional standards. It is open to anyone in displacement regardless of ethnicity or place of origin, and it confronts the Colombian government with claims on an unconditional right to return. It rejects the very label of ‘displaced persons’ and works with its own members and in confrontation with foreigners like myself to reclaim the identity of the *campesino*. It is as if, they say, the label of displaced itself erases history, and casts shadows of doubts as to their rightful attachment to abandoned territories. Instead, they become bureaucratically categorised which, while making access to a limited funding and a legal framework possible (but far from granted), is also perceived to be limiting their space of manoeuvring and political freedom.

Amilcar saw the death threats against him as proof of the subversiveness of currently reclaiming lost territories and organising for return. Over the course of the last two years, a large number of social organisations involved in a civil society network partly funded by Swedish aid have had their equipment, like hard drives with member identities and other information, stolen or destroyed by paramilitary organisations. Continuous threats against office staff have made changing offices an almost
compulsory routine. In our conversations, Amilcar and others testified to the devastating implications for their work of the fear resulting from being under threat. Recent examples of death sentences having been executed were far from wanting: On February 12, 2010, two members of FEDEAOGROMISBOL (Federation of Smallscale Miners of the South of Bolivar, an organisation within the same civil society network) were found dead. The links to paramilitary perpetrators and efforts at violently evicting people from their lands are made by both their organisation and by Human Rights activists currently denouncing the event.4

In discussions with international donors, my colleague, a Colombian sociologist, and I recommended that they re-evaluate their strategies for protection and accompaniment to better be able to meet the challenges to social mobilisation and the violence that Amilcar and other leaders of their so called partners are exposed to. The responses oscillated between fatigue and the comment that “there is nothing we can do”, to suspicions raised concerning either the veracity of the accounts of the displaced, or the level of actual or ‘real’ danger. The prevalence of threats were also measured against the, as the argument went, relatively few murders being committed.

In exploring populist stories of conspiracy and revelation as empowering moral allegories that seek certainty amid indeterminacy, surety amid insecurity, anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff argue that the labelling of persons paranoid

...is another, generic form of displacement, one that seeks to locate them beyond the limits of ‘normal’ society. … As this suggests, allegations of pathology may, among other things, mark out fault lines of social, cultural, and ideological difference.” (2003, p 296)

In a series of interviews that I made in Bogotá and Quibdó in February 2010, it was argued among civil society organisations that the Colombian government works aggressively to cut the funding of grassroots mobilisation from sources not organised, controlled or owned by the state, or by phony NGOs set up by wealthy families, local politicians, or even paramilitaries themselves (see also Gill 2009).

Allegedly democratic states, claiming to be steering post-war development on the waves of a sea of violence, represent double edged swords in the sense
that their capacity to govern is often weak enough to render democratic means of protest and advocacy of civil society organisations toothless at many times; there is simply no one there to listen to you when your democratic rights are being learned and subsequently claimed; and also, strong enough to pose a perceived threat through different actions of discrediting, neglect and, according to the most affected organisations in Colombia, acts of direct violence through the use of paramilitaries. An increased ‘international presence’ and a developed strategy of accompaniment is not only needed in the promotion of ‘participation’ in processes of peace and democratisation on behalf of civil society; it should also be considered part of the responsibility of the agencies funding the activities of those under threat. The donor to Amilcar’s organisation justified the lack of protection through reference to the state’s obligation to live up to its democratic commitment to protect its citizens. In a sole focus on the weakness, or belief in a contingent sovereignty of the state, such a view fails to consider its violent strength.

Notes
1. His real name and organisation are not revealed here.
3. A text message sent from Águilas Negras to a large number of leaders of Colombian civil society organisations in October 2010 state: “[w]e know where you are […] our rural and urban structures will not fail. Leave or die.” See www.wola.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=viewp&id=1188&Itemid=2 (accessed December 7 2010).

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Social movements and interest groups in developing countries are facing a number of challenges pertaining to trends in the international donor community. These trends range from the so-called new aid architecture – as laid down in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the ensuing Accra Agenda for Action – and, linked to this, the emphasis on effectiveness, growing donor demands for rigorous monitoring and evaluations of partners in the global South. It would appear that such trends make their marks, for good and for bad, at all levels of society subject of development cooperation funds and programs. On top of this, so-called emerging donors are entering the stage, each with their own set of policies, priorities, approaches, and conditionalities, some of which may affect civil society profoundly. A final challenge lies in the friction between priorities and concepts used by the majority of the international donor community, and realities on the ground in developing countries.

**Principles of the Paris Declaration**

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (PD), agreed in March 2005, establishes global commitments for donor and recipient countries alike to support more effective aid in a context of a significant scaling up of aid. The intention is to reform the delivery and management of aid in order to improve its effectiveness in reducing poverty and inequality, increasing growth, building capacity and accelerating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Paris Declaration outlines five principles which should shape aid delivery:

- **Ownership.** Developing countries will exercise effective leadership over their development policies and strategies, and will coordinate development actions;
• **Alignment.** Donor countries will base their overall support on recipient countries’ national development strategies, institutions, and procedures;
• **Harmonisation.** Donor countries will work so that their actions are more harmonised, transparent, and collectively effective;
• **Managing for results.** All countries will manage resources and improve decision-making for results; and,
• **Mutual accountability.** Donor and developing countries pledge that they will be mutually accountable for development results.

Taxpayers and their governments appear to be increasingly concerned with ‘value for money’ and tangible results of development cooperation. This tendency partly explains increasing demands for rigorous evaluations. Needs and aspirations of finding out if and how poverty in all its dimensions can be reduced in a particular context is an obvious endeavor for a number of actors involved, be they donor governments or local NGOs in developing countries. Such needs and aspirations, however, may sail into more dire straits when they are motivated more by upwards accountability to donor governments, the funders, rather than by accountability to people living in poverty, and by knowledge production for the sake of learning and, ultimately, improvement of methods, processes and content of activities used by social movements and interest groups involved in donor funded poverty reduction work. In addition, there is a tendency for donor funded evaluations to be guided by linear before-and-after conceptualisations of change, as opposed to alternative and more pragmatic methods of looking into means and consequences and reduction of uncertainties.

Social movements and interest groups in the global South are faced with another challenge – or possibility, depending on one’s perspective – on top of the new aid architecture: the ensuing focus on results-based management, and the preference amongst donors for linear before-and-after type of evaluations. It is the emergence of new donors/funders/creditors, outside of the largely intergovernmental aid architecture of donors linked to the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which
spearheaded the aid effectiveness agenda mentioned above: multilateral donors, and so called traditional non-OECD donors, mostly Arab states.

Emerging donors with another set of policies

Most emerging donors come with their sets of policies and approaches, a few of which may include principles of non-interference (in grand corruption or human rights abuse in the footsteps of extractive industries). These so called emerging donors consist of two main types: private foundations, including global funds providing large amounts of funding of specific issues like HIV/AIDS, and governments, such as those of China and India.

The increasingly complex environment of donors, funders and creditors create challenges for social movements and interest groups. Civil society actors may bounce into hurdles while finding their way in this maze of different political/economic/strategic priorities, policies, methods and approaches. This is due to the tendency of some emerging donors to focus on support to governments, while disregarding civil society; or of others to work only with certain parts of civil society, such as faith based groups; or of yet others to tilt the balance of resources by providing massive amounts of funds for a very specific issue, while the broader environment in which this issue is expected to be dealt with gets next to nothing.

Another dimension of challenges facing social movements and interest groups pertain to value based conflicts within society. NGOs, in particular those connected to global discourses through memberships in umbrella organisations and other means of communication, may end up using ideas and concepts which are perceived to, or actually do, go against local traditions, at least as defined by local elites. Gender equality is one such concept. NGOs’ setting up of women-only groups as a means of pursuing a poverty reduction program in villages may run counter to male dominated informal and formal power structures, as they may threaten the foundations of their legitimacy. People living in poverty may end up being caught between these two nodes of influence, each claiming to be development oriented, not knowing whether to go with the flow or opt for resistance.
By way of introduction, this was a very brief overview of but a few of the existing challenges – and opportunities – facing social movements and interest groups in developing countries in relation to trends in the international donor community.

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Local vs global civil society: Religious backlash against NGOs in Bangladesh

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Civil society is considered an important constitutive element of the development discourse as it nurtures “a vibrant life world of symbols and solidarities” (Anderson 1996, p 112). The concept of civil society is largely understood in relation to the role of a competitive market economy and a government’s responsibility to manage the state. It opens space for the role of citizens to maintain the quality of their institutions by making them responsible. Some attributes of civil societies include the functioning of a vigorous voluntary sector or NGOs, a free press, democratic processes, change of government by free elections and entrenched rights.

Global civil society

In the context of global development, Western civil societies operate with increasing influence alongside multiple partner NGOs in the South. The partnership between the West and South forms a fluid intermediate civil society, which operates on a global scale beyond national boundaries. This civil society has its own “scholars, consultants, activists, and policy analysts that influences policy making in national governments, international agencies, and nongovernmental organizations” (Jenkins 2002, p 250).

The Global Civil Society (GCS) takes shape by incorporating Western civil societies, intermediate civil society and NGOs into its frame. International agencies, donors and lenders have turned their attention to the idea of civil society in order to bypass the state and directly assist NGOs. The NGOs in the South are an extension of the West. The UN System of National Accounts considers an organisation that receives more than 50 percent of its income from a governmental source to be effectively a part of government. In this sense, most NGOs in developing countries which receive funds from bilateral donors – and even those channelled
through Western NGOs – should not arguably be recognised as NGOs at all, but rather as donor government institutions (Tvedt 1998).

The GCS has a global policy language, which seeks consensus and equality, and shapes development assumptions (Arce and Fisher 2003). Despite diverse social, cultural, political, and economic settings around the world, NGOs frequently seek to talk the same language and follow similar development agendas. The global policy language is influenced by transcultural values like gender equality, good governance, human rights or rights-based approaches, environmental sustainability, and market capitalism; these sets of values are universal and not negotiable. The development policy language also constructs ideas of development abnormalities like ‘the poor’, ‘the malnourished’, ‘the illiterate’, ‘pregnant women’, ‘the landless’, which it would then treat or reform. The emphasis on global policy language also nurtures two hegemonic views. In the first, developing countries are shown as low on the scale of progress by which societies are mapped (Tucker 1999). In the second, many development pundits speculate that people in non-Western societies exist without history and with a diminished culture.

**Local civil society**

The GCS operates through NGOs in the South. For example in Bangladesh, NGOs claim to operate in over 90 percent of the 69,000 villages, benefiting 35 percent of the population. Currently, around 1,300 NGOs receive 14 percent of the total foreign aid. Around 30 NGOs receive approximately 80 percent of all funds, 60 percent of which goes to the eight largest NGOs.

An important distinction is made between NGOs that receive international capital and local civil society (LCS) organisations that do not. LCS mobilises and relies on local resources. Without this distinction, an NGO claim to be part of local civil society could prove elusive.

Historically, two forms of LCS have evolved in Bangladesh. Firstly, modern civil society organisations such as Anjuman-e-Mofidhul Islam or Shansha Ziaul Huq Complex of Maizbhandar. They raise funds from local resources to deliver welfare to the poor. Secondly, in rural areas the so-called samaj acts as civil society. The samaj upholds a moral order which
acts as a compelling force on its members. In recent history, membership in a samaj has been seen to be more enduring than that in a state. Each village has one or more samaj that are as old as the villages themselves. The samaj plays roles in disaster management (for example by mitigating flood effects), constructing bridges, mosques, schools, protecting the poor from hunger etc.

Shaping the conflict

NGO intervention has brought about structural changes in the villages. NGOs form exclusive ‘women-only groups’ to carry out their activities related to micro-credit programs, education, health, advocacy and human rights, bringing certain changes to household relations. To keep control of the women groups, NGOs use empowerment ideology. For example, in micro credit programs, empowerment embraces a political economy that uses the culture of shame in a subtle way to exert pressure on women to repay the borrowed money to NGOs. In most cases, as women form groups, they do so by recruiting female kin which in turn gives rise to matri-focal groups, a new phenomenon. These matri-focal groups appear to be supportive of activities of NGOs, but in the process women are transformed into small scale commodity producers for NGOs.

The formation of ‘women-only-groups’ could also be interpreted as an attempt to create parallel organisations to the male dominated samaj (Mannan 2010). NGO staff mobilises women from a situation of ‘private patriarchy’ controlled by males to that of a ‘public patriarchy’ controlled by NGOs. In other words, the lives of women become the subject of struggle between capitalist patriarchs and Islamic patriarchs. Capitalist patriarchs operate through NGOs and international organisations, while religious patriarchs operate through traditional social structures, mosques, local power structures, etc. As a result, a women’s group is looked upon with suspicion by the social and religious elite and considered a threat to local agnatic ideology.

The struggle between NGOs and the religious elite to control the lives of women generates tensions and conflicts. On the one hand, NGOs want to further their development agendas, believing them to be of benefit to the poor, and on the other hand, religious leaders see the NGOs as a
threat to the legitimacy of Islam. The NGO approach to development is interpreted by some Muslims as an effort to ‘de-Islamise’ poor men and women. The de-Islamisation is a process that seeks to undermine the Islamic faith, belief, values etc of poor men and women by arguing that Islam cannot free them from either exploitation or their abject poverty. It is believed that once women are de-Islamised, it should become easier to convert them to Christianity.¹

**Hybrid culture**

The deep reason of conflict and tension, however, lies elsewhere. The massive development activities through implementation of projects create the conditions for a hybrid culture, which has two dimensions. Firstly, when NGOs adopt global policy language, this results in a synthesis of the contradictory: values of Western agency (individualism, equality, market, etc) clash with Bangladeshi rural cultural life (community, hierarchy, subsistence, etc). In this hybrid environment, actors engaged in development adhere neither to old values nor to new ones. Secondly, the global policy can be at odds with local understanding, so conflicts arise as intentions differ (Mannan 2010).

NGOs have always found it difficult to understand the hybrid culture of Bangladesh and the processes of social change. The confusion and conflict fume in the gap between the religious ideology and economic reality. *Moulavis* (religious priest) spread hybrid stories and fictions to invoke ‘dharma vhiti’ (fear of religion) and many people believe in such stories. The success of *moulavis* in agitating the rural folk lies in their diagnosis of peoples’ popular belief system.

Religious leaders spread stories and rumours in order to implant the idea that the enigmatic NGOs, with support from the Western Christian world, are polluting and jeopardising Islam. As a result, the poor will be unable to carry out their Islamic duties and daily prayers, which will have at detrimental effect on their future in this world and the hereafter.

The problem is that while NGOs continue to impress by an exogenous model of civil society, *moulavis* continue to misinterpret and fictionalise Islam in order to oppose NGOs. The poor, and especially poor women, helplessly witness that their two patrons – religious leaders and NGOs – are
engaged in a confrontation. Perhaps, both development practitioners and moulavis gain from such a tension and conflict, but it is the poor peasants who suffer the most. The sufferings of poor men and women encourage them to launch “resistance either in defence of threatened religious values, or to punish violations of sacred space, or in anticipation of the imminent establishment of God’s kingdom on earth” (Copland 2006, p 123).

Note
1. Women are traditionally considered as active bearers of religion.

References


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Evaluation in NGO development cooperation: Room for communities of inquiry?

Tiina Kontinen

Our partners do not really understand all this LFA-matrix stuff, even if they can use them. And I think we ourselves do not understand either…. The narratives are much more helpful for us; a narrative is something that everybody living a human life can understand. (…). It would be great if we could do a real report as an appendix to the annual report to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. But it is a problem, since the Ministry report is a must, and it takes all the time and energy, and you are not able to do more.

(Member of staff of a Finnish development NGO, 3.3.2010)

This quote illustrates the situation between the ‘rock and a hard place’ that a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) currently find themselves in. Since the early 1990s, NGOs have occupied increasingly important places in the international aid architecture (Tvedt 1998; Opuku-Mensah et al 2007). But with NGOs growing in importance and receiving increased funding, the demands for showing results of their work have grown as well (Mitlin et al 2008). NGOs struggle between increasing demands from donors to evaluate rigorously the effects of their work, and their limited skills and resources to conduct such activities. Often, the motive behind the evaluation is that of accountability to donors rather than learning (Chelimsky 1997). The pressures to show results might lead the NGOs to distance themselves from the commitment to ideas such as empowerment and participation (Mitlin et al 2008), and to commission evaluations to be carried out by experts. The Logical Framework Approach (LFA) has been a dominant framework for working in
development co-operation, and many NGOs have adopted it in one way or another (Bakewell and Garbutt 2005).

The LFA is based on a linear and hierarchical conceptualisation of change (Davies 2004) which, in terms of evaluation, leads to the idea of before–after designs following the experimental model. Furthermore, it proposes that the evaluation should be based on observable and measurable indicators. A crucial critique against the LFA and the experimentalist evaluation thinking at large has been the participatory approach advocated by Robert Chambers (1988; Chambers et al 2009). That approach aims at turning the traditional idea of expertise upside down. A participatory approach states that instead of trained experts, it is the people, the beneficiaries themselves, who should analyse their life and identify their problems. Thus, the value of evaluation knowledge can be judged either on the basis of its objectivity by scientific standards, or by judging the extent of accommodation of multiple knowledges.

NGO work is often driven by a strong moral commitment to the promotion of the voices of the poor and of Southern partners. However, in regard to evaluation, NGOs might struggle with the tasks of combining scientific rigour with value-based attitude. In this paper it is suggested that the Deweyan concept of ‘community of inquiry’ and its underlying pragmatists ideas, related to knowledge production, could offer an alternative way to conceptualise evaluation.

**The community of inquiry**

Current administration science has testified to a ‘rediscovery’ of John Dewey (Snider 2000; Shields 2003). One of the implications for evaluation activities of this rediscovery has been the questioning of the role of technocratic expertise. Rather, the Deweyan idea of *inquiry* as a basis for evaluation challenges the privilege of experts and advocates the importance of *multiple ways of seeing the world* (Evans 2000, p 309).

Two main principles are central to inquiry; that of a democratic process and the analogy with scientific experimenting. However, according to pragmatist thinking, the inquiry is not a method of finding the truth but a means to reduce doubt and uncertainty. Therefore, if the core
problem and source for anxiety for evaluation in NGOs has been identifying the right indicators that can really measure the effects and impact, the pragmatist point of view could offer relief. It points out that since we are dealing with such complex social situations, one ‘final’ truth is unreachable. Rather, both evaluation and the development intervention itself could be conceptualised, following the pragmatists vocabulary, as processes of reducing the uncertainty inherent in the situation so that the next steps in action can be taken (Evans 2000, p 314).

Inquiry, for Dewey, is a method of both knowing and acting. In inquiry, theoretical knowledge is understood as a tool that can be used to sort out and decide among the possible actions and consequences that could best resolve the experienced problematic situation (ibid, p 320). Thus, in evaluation a productive dialogue with academic knowledge might be understood as an additional, but not superior, tool for making sense of the situation.

The idea of causality and attribution are central to evaluation. Contrariwise to LFA, pragmatism does not conceive of causality as linear (ibid). Rather than the struggle to show the relationships between actions and effects, pragmatist thinking would suggest talking about means and consequences. In conducting an inquiry in a problematic situation, we tend to think about potential consequences of acting in the present. Therefore, goal setting as well is practical; according to pragmatism, the defining of a goal is always accompanied by a programme of action by which to reach it (ibid, p 315; Diggins 1994, p 241).

Democracy and valuing everybody’s knowledge are the core of the Deweyan concept of community. Parallel to Sen’s concept of development as increasing capabilities, democracy in community refers to the moral commitment to use the inquiry to realise each community members’ potentialities. Bottom-up organising of the community and valuing the judgments of all are central to the Deweyan understanding of democracy (Zimmermann 2000, p 481; Evans 2000, p 312). For evaluation, this idea would mean the integration of facts and value-judgments provided by a variety of stakeholders.
Conclusion
Pragmatist thinking potentially offers a well-founded methodological approach for evaluation in NGOs. The idea of evaluation as a joint inquiry by a community of different actors, in search of reduced uncertainty and the identification of a better working agenda vis-à-vis problematic situations, supports the NGOs’ moral commitments to democratic relationships and the quest for learning (Kontinen 2007). The practical implementation of the idea of ‘community of inquiry’ will also show whether the approach is plausible. For instance, the way Dewey stresses the education of community members as a prerequisite for engaging in reflective inquiry may be a problematic feature. The implications of conducting an inquiry in North–South NGO partnerships often face the challenge of non-educated participants. Moreover, forming a joint community for inquiry with people situated over the North-South divide, in culturally different contexts with sometimes quite sparse communication opportunities, is a challenge.

Lastly, whether the pragmatist view on knowledge production and the products of ‘community of inquiry’ – ‘real reports’ – of NGOs would suffice to donors committed to measurable truth poses an additional, and huge, challenge.

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New challenges: The impact of the Paris Agenda and new emerging donors on child rights in civil society

Eva Geidenmark

This paper is based on a study that was commissioned by Save the Children Sweden. Its purpose is to increase the organisation’s understanding and knowledge of how to support and strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations in a changing development aid environment. It is basically a desk study, aiming to give an account of how the traditional development aid setting is changing, and to assess how the implementation of the Paris Agenda and the increasing influence of ‘emerging donors’ might affect civil society at different levels.

The most substantial development aid partners for almost all developing countries remain the traditional Western donors. They are members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and are signed up to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action (together referred to as the Paris Agenda). They are, however, not the only important partners; the ‘traditional Western approach’ now appears to be challenged by increasing activities of other state and non-state actors such as China, India and large private foundations, outside the largely intergovernmental aid system centred on the OECD donors.

Major players in development aid and what they do

In the study, five categories of major players in development aid of particular interest to Save the Children Sweden (SCS), have been identified:

- traditional Western donors,
- multilateral donors,
- traditional non OECD donors – Arab aid,
• China and India as ‘emerging donors’, and
• non-state emerging donors.

Traditional Western donors
The DAC has 23 bilateral donors as members, constituting ‘traditional Western donors’ for the purposes of this report. These traditional Western donors have developed the Paris Agenda in order to entrench principles of aid effectiveness through ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results and mutual accountability.

The case studies examined in the report demonstrate that the implementation of the Paris Agenda has created both challenges and opportunities. It has created opportunities for civil society to inform and influence the aid effectiveness agenda so that the realisation of children’s rights becomes an important element of it. However, the case studies also highlight that civil society is not always seizing these opportunities. This may be a consequence of unwillingness on the part of governments to encourage civil society participation; it may also be that civil society is not always provided with the information it requires to participate meaningfully; or that civil society lacks knowledge and understanding of the processes and/or has weak technical and institutional capacity.

Multilateral donors
Multilateral donors are international institutions with government membership; they include UN agencies and global and regional financial multilateral institutions such as UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP, FAO, UNFPA, UNHCHR, OCHA, Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, World Bank, European Commission and so on. Bilateral donors are increasingly supplying aid indirectly through multilateral institutions.

Traditional non-OECD donors – Arab aid
The traditional donors beyond the OECD are made up mostly of Arab states that have been active in development cooperation since the 1960s or 1970s. States belonging to this category have provided levels of funding exceeding the development contributions of many individual DAC donors.
China and India as ‘emerging donors’

China’s development aid has increased significantly in recent years, particularly in Africa. China has been driven principally by its search for energy resources to sustain economic growth. It has been criticised at length for its policy of political ‘non-interference’ which has raised concerns that efforts to combat corruption and promote good governance will be weakened.

The main focal point for Indian aid is its large bilateral programmes in neighbouring countries, and the country’s technical training and cultural assistance programmes. India does not engage itself significantly in multilateral development assistance; as with China, it has signed the Paris Declaration but as a recipient country rather than as a donor.

Non-state actors

There are only rough estimates readily available of the scale of foundation giving, but Marten and Witte (2008) estimate that international foundations spend $3 to $5 billion per year. They find that the main emphasis of private foundations lies on health initiatives followed by education, civil society and good governance, agriculture and the environment. Other important non-state donors are large scale Global Funds, focussing on vertical funding rather than interventions across multiple sectors in the context of a country-level development strategy.

Conclusions

The development aid environment is changing. Four major areas of change have occurred:

- the implementation of the Paris Agenda and a growing alignment of DAC donors’ aid with recipient governments and harmonisation amongst themselves;
- the emergence of private donors as development actors in their own right, notably but not exclusively the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the alliances they have formed around issues such as AIDS, malaria, and agricultural development in Africa;
- the importance and long-term implications of Islamic donors, and their support for faith-oriented development in Islamic countries; and
• the increasing influence of China and India in the global economy and global politics, and as development actors.

The significance of the rise of the emerging donors may lie more in terms of challenging Western norms of operation than in equalling their financial clout. China, in particular, challenges the Western view that there is a positive relationship between democracy and economic growth, and it has different perspectives on human rights, state power and the role of civil society. The differences between Chinese and DAC donor approaches to development assistance arise from differences in views about what works economically and what is desirable politically and socially. The other implication of the increasing influence of the emerging donors is that the hard-won consensus in the DAC may have to be reworked in the light of the challenge coming from the new actors.

Some commentators have argued that there may be benefits from this reworking. For example, there may be benefits for African civil society in losing its close association with Western donors and becoming more autonomous and independent.

The challenge for an organisation such as Save the Children today is to engage with the international aid agenda in order to promote children’s rights, while negotiating its way through the shifting priorities and the landscape brought about by the Paris Agenda as well as the increasing role of the emerging and non-state donors.

Notes
1. The term ‘emerging donor’ is far from ideal. In some cases, countries such as China and former Soviet bloc countries have been involved in some form of development cooperation for an extended period of time. In addition, some may object to being classified as donors at all, given that the restricted nature of some of their activities may not correspond to more rigorous definitions of the term ‘donor’. Similarly, many private foundations have been in existence for a long time. However, the term has widespread currency and is used here since it is a useful description inasmuch as their impact on development aid is increasing and developing.

2. The OECD’s definition of ODA is: ‘Official Development Assistance (ODA) is defined as those flows to developing countries and multilateral institutions provided by official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies, each transaction of which meets the following tests: i) it is administered with the promotion
of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective; and ii) it is concessional in character and conveys a grant element of at least 25 per cent.’

3. For a detailed inventory of donors across the piece including emerging donors such as South Africa and Brazil as well as new EU states, see Grimm et al 2009 and Rowlands 2008.

4. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, United States and the Commission of the European Communities, http://www.oecd.org/document/38/0,3343,en_2649_34603_1893350_1_1_1_1,00.html (accessed 10 September 2009).

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Getting the Church on board: Frame-bridging in an agrarian reform campaign in the Philippines

Lennart Niemelä

In 2007, farmers from Sumilao in the Mindanao province of Bukidnon walked 1700 km from their homes to the capital, Manila, in an attempt to win back the 144 hectares of land that should have been distributed to them via the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). Not only were they successful, but their victory was perceived as a landmark event by the people in the agrarian reform movement. Identified as a case that would be able to set a policy precedent, the Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) involved with the farmers had intentionally set out for the campaign to symbolise the struggle for agrarian reform nationally, and “Sumilao became a poster boy for the CARPER issue” (Chan-Gonzaga, interview 2009). The Sumilao Walk affected how later campaigns were organised, in particular the likewise successful 2009 national CARPER (CARP Extension with Reforms) campaign, but it also inspired similar action at a local level, eg by the Banasi and Calatagan farmers.

This study aims at understanding the processes behind the mobilisation strategies that formed the basis of an ultimately successful campaign. Conclusively, the Sumilao campaign led to two important outcomes: strengthened horizontal relationships in civil society between agrarian reform oriented SMOs, and increasing cooperation between the agrarian reform movement and the Catholic Church. This paper will develop on the latter outcome.

According to Kamrava and Mora (1998), representatives of, for example, the Church could be in a strategically beneficial position to facilitate resources for a social movement. The Catholic Church in the Philippines did not take a leading part in pushing for land reforms in the past, so from the viewpoint of the SMOs, it was not expected to offer
any support. So how was it possible that the Church repositioned itself during the Sumilao campaign?

Theory and method
Collective action frame theory, as systematised by Benford and Snow (2000), was used to address the social movement setting of the study. For this paper, the derived concepts of motivational framing and frame-bridging will be central to the discussion.

The study upon which this paper is based was formulated as a unique case study, resting heavily on in-depth interviews with various actors in the agrarian reform movement and a narrative analysis of the transcribed material.

The farmers and the Catholic Church
Although the Catholic Church had locally been involved with the Sumilao farmers since 12 years before, when they were first approached by the farmers, up until The Sumilao Walk, their involvement had been limited to spiritual support (Ledesma, interview 2009; Chan-Gonzaga, interview 2009). It was not expected of the Church to offer assistance in terms of space and issuing statements (Bag-ao, interview 2009). Initially, focus was on other NGOs and farmer’s organisations that the farmers met with prior to the walk, asking to hold forums and receive accommodation in the provinces that they would pass. Involving the bishops was an initiative from the farmers, who felt that the Church had been supportive ever since their hunger strike in 1997.

Bishop Ledesma from the archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro, the first major city in the walk, and Bishop Pacana from the diocese of Malaybalay, to which Sumilao belongs, are Jesuits, and as such they made use of a Jesuit network that could facilitate the walk (Bag-ao, interview 2009; Chan-Gonzaga, interview 2009).

The walk made the issue personal. When the farmers went from one parish to another, from one diocese to another, speaking to the bishops, they were no longer reduced to the abstract notion of a ‘farmer,’ but became each a face and a name of a person fighting for his land (Chan-Gonzaga, interview 2009). Cardinal Rosales had previously been bishop
in Malaybalay and therefore knew the area and its farmers. The Cardinal’s engagement in the farmers’ cause sent a signal to the Church in general.

The Sumilao campaign opened up for an educational process on agrarian reform within the Church, between bishops, as the farmers managed to talk to a third of the dioceses in the country during the walk. This facilitated an opening up for discussions on the issue of CARP within the Church, because the farmers were not only bannering the local disputed 144 hectares, but also the agrarian reform extensions, CARPER. This consequently led to the provincial Superior defending the call for agrarian reform at the Association of Major Religious Superiors.

In 1992, bishops and lay people held the Philippine Plenary Council of the Philippines II (PCB II), during which it was stated that the Church would be a Church of the poor, taking their needs into consideration and encouraging the rich to share their resources with them (Chan-Gonzaga, interview 2009). The PCB II is likened to Vatican II, which, with the 1968 Bishop’s Conference in Medellin, led to the Catholic Church adopting a social justice agenda (Kamrava and Mora 1998).

A J Ledesma (interview, 2009) states that supporting the rural poor and landless and pursuing agrarian reform is a way for the Church to reiterate its position as a Church of the poor. I J Chan-Gonzaga (interview, 2009) further accentuates this by saying that: “this is the first time the Church was able to say that we are still pro-poor”. Chan-Gonzaga (ibid) continues by explaining that there is a need for doing so as the Church perceives its major criticism to be that it has forgotten “how to mingle with the poor” and that it has “become too comfortable having dinner with politicians and landlords.”

The engagement of the Church in the local Sumilao farmers’ case, which developed into an engagement in the national CARPER issue later on, was thus aided by an already existing social justice paradigm.

**Active Non-Violence**

Prior to the fall of the Marcos regime in 1986, both civil society actors and the Catholic Church were deeply involved in the people power movement. During that time, a series of workshops promoting Active Non-Violence (ANV) as a method for activism were carried out, and both Church and
civil society actors partook in those workshops. This directly affected the Sumilao farmers; the initiative for a hunger strike – as opposed to the community organiser’s suggestion to take up arms – in 1997 came from a farmer leader who had taken part in the ANV workshops (Banzuela, interview 2009). AJ Bag-ao (interview, 2009) mentions that there were a number of inspirational sources: the leaders had all gone through a peace-building formation program; some were inspired by “The salt march” – a movie on Gandhi – and there were already talks about an ‘exodus.’

Motivational framing and frame bridging

*Motivational framing* provides adherents with a vocabulary for engaging in collective action and for sustaining participation, and is articulated as severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety (Benford and Snow 2000). Applying these vocabularies provides an understanding of how the Church was motivated to act:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severity</th>
<th>Urgency</th>
<th>Efficacy</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Church felt a need to improve upon its reputation as a Church of the poor.</td>
<td>The Sumilao farmers’ campaign opened up an opportunity for the Church to show itself as a Church of the poor.</td>
<td>There was a Jesuit network to facilitate immediate action.</td>
<td>According to the social justice agenda introduced by Vatican II and the 1968 Bishop’s Conference in Medellin and further developed for the Philippines in PCB II, it was the duty of the Church to be pro-poor and to seek to resolve social justice issues. Agrarian reform addressed both issues of poverty alleviation and the right of land to the tiller.</td>
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*Frame-bridging* is a process which links “two or more ideologically congruent, but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular
issue or problem” (ibid, p 624). According to Benford and Snow (ibid, p 617), although SMOs may share a common goal, what usually separates them is when they formulate their prognostic framing, what needs to be done to reach that goal. The ANV frame was already shared by actors in the agrarian reform movement and members of the Catholic Church since the mid-1980s. This study argues that frame-bridging between the agrarian reform movement’s agrarian reform frame and the Church’s social justice frame was facilitated by having a common method as an intermediary frame.

Conclusion
Getting the Church on board proved instrumental for the Sumilao campaign’s success. The Church managed to provide a platform of political support for the farmers’ cause and logistics for the 1700 km walk. Building bystander support was also facilitated by having the Church as an ally, considering that Catholics constitute a large majority in the Philippines. The Sumilao campaign set in motion a process of consolidating support from the Church which would continue during subsequent farmers’ campaigns and later the CARPER campaign.

The Church felt motivated to involve themselves in the farmers’ struggle for land, articulated as a vocabulary of severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety.

This study argues that one of the key elements for the successful frame-bridging between the agrarian reform frame and the Church’s social justice frame, ie what made interaction and cooperation possible, was the intermediate Active Non-Violence frame. Since the mid-1980s, this method of conduct was shared by both actors in the agrarian reform movement and members of the Catholic Church. As SMOs often differ from each other when it comes to the prognostic framing task, this study can arguably highlight the importance of shared methods in frame bridging processes.

Notes
1. Due to an unfortunate mistake, this article does not appear in the printed version of the book; we are, however, pleased to be able to include it in the web version. The article is to be regarded as part of the session on Religious discourses in Asia. Editors’ comment.
2. This article is a condensed version of the author’s master’s thesis in Asian Studies, Lund University, which is published as a working paper in Niemelä, L., 2010. WALK! Framing a successful agrarian reform campaign in the Philippines. *UKM Ethnic Studies Papers*, No. 11(September) and as an article in Niemelä, L., 2010. WALK! Framing a successful agrarian reform in the Philippines. *Philippine Sociological Review*, vol. 58.

3. The processes that led to the Sumilao farmers’ walk and an analysis of these processes, of how other farmers’ groups were influenced by the campaign, and of the Sumilao campaign’s relation to the later CARPER campaign are discussed in detail in the original paper upon which this is based.

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Outlook on Civil Society is a book series addressing and critically discussing the mounting interest in civil society and its potential role in promoting democracy and development. Each volume constitutes the proceedings of an annual conference.

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Outlook on Civil Society? discusses the concept of civil society and its relevance across the world. A strong civil society has over the past decades been considered of increasing importance for democratisation, the protection of human rights, and for demanding accountability of states. This volume presents a critical examination of these expectations of civil society, and the circumstances during which mobilisation within civil society may promote positive social change. It brings together authors from all continents – scholars as well as practitioners within NGOs and bilateral development cooperation – to explore the varying forms in which people engage politically, outside the state and political parties, to pursue their concerns and interests.

With broad regional comparisons, case studies, and theoretical discussions, the volume offers a significant contribution to the understanding of civil society and its multifaceted appearances throughout the world.