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The disappointments of civil society: the politics of NGO intervention in northern Ghana

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The Disappointments of Civil Society:
the politics of NGO intervention in Northern Ghana

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ABSTRACT. During the 1990s, civil society emerged as the prime political force in the policy agenda of the major lenders and development agencies. An active civil society, it was believed, would enable choice, scrutinise errant governments, and ultimately lead to regularised, plural democracy. This article subjects this policy discourse to theoretical and empirical scrutiny. Theoretically, civil society is treated as a space of freedom, separate from the state, and constituted by Non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This ignores the reciprocal linkages between state and society, the constraining effects of market forces, and the underlying ideological agenda of the major lenders. As a result, some political scientists working on Africa dismiss civil society as a useful analytical category. However, I follow Mamdani's call for examining 'actually existing civil society' through a case study of NGO intervention in Northern Ghana. It shows that tensions exist between the Northern NGO and its partners, that the local NGOs create their own fiefdoms of client villages, and some officers use the NGO for personal promotion. Additionally, the single-minded strengthening of civil society undermines efforts at decentralisation. The conclusion suggests that the 'Third Way' programmes serve a neo-liberal policy agenda which enhances factionalism and promotes highly circumscribed visions of development.

The Disappointments of Civil Society:
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"In recent years, and especially since the end of the Cold War in 1989, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies have pursued a 'New Policy Agenda' which gives renewed prominence to the roles of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and grassroots organisations (GROs) in poverty alleviation, social welfare and the development of 'civil society'" (Edwards and Hulme, 1996: 961)

Introduction

Civil society has emerged as the key arena for various governance initiatives. The recent emphasis on civil society as a motor for development has, paradoxically, seen a convergence between the neo-liberals who champion freedom of choice and the 'new' left uniting around a post-Marxist critique (Peet and Watts, 1996; Mohan and Stokke, 2000). This article subjects the revitalised conception of civil society to theoretical and empirical scrutiny. The first half of the article examines the view of civil society being pushed by some of the major donor agencies and, through a critique, suggests certain avenues for research. The second half of the paper applies these insights to an empirical study of state-NGO-society dynamics in Northern Ghana. The study shows that strengthening civil society can create political tensions which ultimately undermine development. Here I take development to be the expansion and maximisation of capabilities in the sense that Sen uses it (Sen, 1993). Such an approach ties together individual agency and the broader institutions that determine access and control of resources. Clearly such an approach to development involves participation at a number of levels. While notions of participatory development inform and underpin much of this article I have discussed these implications elsewhere (Mohan, 2000; Mohan and Stokke, 2000). I conclude by analysing the implication of the Ghana study for the pursuit of 'Third Way' policies in the Third World and suggest that a more critical engagement with the state and imperialism is needed.

The opportunities of civil society

While debate exists over the meaning of civil society, it is generally held to occupy the political space between the state and the household (Urry, 1981; McIlwaine, 1998). Given that the interpretation of civil society has changed over time and is open to contestation it is vital that we understand, first, the key dimensions of these on-going debates and, second, the ways in which it is interpreted and used by powerful development agencies. This section begins by reviewing the underlying principles and dimensions of the orthodox vision of civil society. I then examine briefly the role expected of NGOs within this model before looking at the major theoretical critiques. I finish the section by suggesting the dimensions of an empirical analysis of 'actually existing civil society' (Mamdani, 1996).

Theorising civil society

Hyden's (1997) review of classical theories of civil society maps out some of the main dimensions which, he argues, range along two key axes. The first is the degree to which state and civil society are linked (Hegel and Locke) or separate (Paine and Tocqueville) and, second, the degree to which civil society involves private economic interests (Hegel and Paine) or is rather a space of self-governing associations (Locke and Tocqueville) which protect citizens from an over-bearing state. Marx saw the need for and possibility of civil society as central to

the development of capitalism since it claimed a political space of generalised freedom despite the partiality of class forces and the state (Tester, 1992). In arguing that the state simply reflected the needs of the bourgeoisie, Marx did away with the conceptual division between state and civil society and saw the class interests of the two as coterminous (Markovitz, 1998). While Marx necessarily grounded political institutions in the economic realm, Gramsci developed a less deterministic view which privileged political struggle within civil society as opposed to the state, although he saw each as 'integral' to the other. It is through political associations that the dominant class legitimise their position and strengthen their grip on state and society without resorting to repression, but such a formulation also, and in opposition to Marx, raises the possibility of counter-hegemonic forces within society overturning the dominant class. Gramsci's theorisation sees state and society as entwined and mutually constitutive, but by not seeing one as simply a reflection of the other allows greater room for political agency.

These dimensions have been carried forward into contemporary discussions of civil society. The so-called 'regime school' (Diamond, 1994) and 'associational school' (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Bratton and Van de Walle, 1994) both see civil society as a pluralistic space whereby associations act as transmission belts between the individual and the state. The associational school is largely inspired by Tocqueville and sees associational life keeping the state in check through scrutinising its operations and inculcating in the citizenry a sense of political participation and tolerance. Such formulations are paralleled in Robert Putnam's (1993) work on civic participation in Italy which sees an active associational and community life producing more stable governance and ultimately greater economic success. The Lockean-inspired regime school is a little less pluralist and does not see an active associational life automatically leading to better governance. Civil society does not necessarily or straightforwardly democratise so they are more prescriptive in seeing a need for state reform and, therefore, examine the rules by which state-society relations might be altered to foster democracy. From the point of view of development and democracy this takes them into questions of constitutional and judicial reform. The 'neoliberal' school is more oriented to seeing civil society as the space of private property rights and is less optimistic about the autonomous actions of associations. It is, as a result, less clear on the explicitly political reforms needed to achieve this, but the various 'good governance' initiatives are aimed at creating market-friendly political institutions. The post-Marxist school sees civil society segmented along lines of class and, more importantly for them, other forms of social identity (Bayart, 1993). They too see political life as a reflection of economic structures, but do not see much good coming from reforms which will only strengthen the position of the dominant. The solution is some form of social movement based alternative, but the conditions in which these might become significant are poorly addressed.

As Allen (1997) notes it is the associational school, and to a lesser extent the regime school, which tends to inform many of the donor discourses on civil society. I will look in more detail at specific donor discourses below, but here I want to outline the key arguments of the donors. The general dimensions of these discourses are threefold. First, that civil society is not only distinct from the state, but in conflict with it. For example, Keane's (1988) work on Europe and totalitarianism concludes that civil society confronts the state and is comprised of associations whose interests are primarily non-economic. In this sense, civil society largely resists the encroachment of an over-bearing state (Markovitz, 1998). In an African context Hyden (1983) describes the state as a balloon suspended above society with no links between the two which leaves social forces with little option but to 'disengage'; the policy corollary being to promote productive re-engagement between state and society in the form of civil society strengthening

and citizenship building (see also Chazan, 1988). Second, that civil society is as the heart of the democratisation struggle. It is felt that civil society is a means of channelling opinion into policy making in a co-ordinated fashion and simultaneously increasing peoples' confidence in involving themselves in public affairs as well as building their institutional capacity to do so (World Bank, 1997). This rather narrow and procedural view of democracy has been promoted through political aid programmes which focus on both the state and civil society although most aid has been given, in line with the tenets of the regime school, to restructuring central government and increasing its responsiveness (Crawford, 2000). As we shall see in more detail below, this has seen much talk of partnerships between donors and states and between states and civil society organisations (CSOs). The rhetoric of partnership is one of consensus rather than conflict in that all actors should negotiate a 'shared vision' of national development. Crucially, the role of the aid agenda in this is to promote quite a specific vision of development with civil society signing up to this vision, albeit through 'consultation'. This apolitical consensus in turn conceals a highly politicised and partial view of development and denies the legitimacy of alternatives (Hearn, 2001).

Third, and crucially for our discussion of Ghana, NGOs form a highly significant part of civil society, and thus of forces driving democratisation. As McIlwaine (1998: 416) observes "there has...been a tendency to view NGOs as primary 'vehicles' or 'agents' in civil society". As such NGOs are the "'missing middle' between citizens and the state" (World Bank, 1997: 114). In economic terms, it permits the freedom to mobilise resources for self-help initiatives and in doing so relieves the burden on the state for welfare provision. This latter function has become intertwined with the former in lender policy, because NGOs are seen as more efficient than corrupt states in delivering local social services. In a parallel to their market philosophy, it is better to have inefficient NGOs than inefficient states.

Donor intervention and civil society
So far I have argued that despite various theories of civil society, the current paradigm is based on a particular vision which sees civil society as an autonomous realm of associational life in which 'interests' can be pursued collectively. For the donors, civil society has a number of key functions in development and democratisation which they seek to champion through various governance and social initiatives. However, it would be wrong to treat all donors as a single entity and ascribe to them characteristics which they lack. In this sub-section I review briefly the ways in which some key multilateral and bilateral donors seek to 'strengthen' and 'promote' civil society and to what ends. It is important to examine both the specific policy discourses and the actual direction of donor support, since the two are not always contiguous.

As we have seen NGOs are central to the civil society movement despite coming under increasing criticism and scrutiny from academics and policy practitioners (Fowler, 1998; Hudock, 1999; Tvedt, 1998) as well as, more recently, the mainstream press (The Economist, 2000; The Guardian, 2000). Although precise figures on the relative amounts of aid flowing through NGOs is difficult to calculate, there is a general agreement that the increase has been significant. For example, the Red Cross calculate that NGOs now disburse more money than the World Bank (The Economist, 2000). Similarly, during the 1980s, funding to NGOs grew at five times the rate of official development funding (Fowler, 1992). The absolute and relative amounts are important, but what is more problematic is that NGOs are increasingly relying on this form of funding which could lead to a new form of dependency for these 'independent' civil society actors.

Not surprisingly most donors support "civil society organisations committed to the promotion of liberal democracy and economic liberalism" (Hearn, 1999: 1) with funding going to a small and select section of civil society. These organisations tend to be either welfare organisations which support *de facto* the withdrawal of the state from social provisioning such as health and education or a range of approved advocacy and human rights NGOs (Hearn, 1999; Crawford, 2000). In the latter case the "most popular civil society actors in terms of democracy assistance were formal, urban-based, professional, elite advocacy NGOs" (Hearn, 1999: 4) including such things as business organisations and professional associations. Underlying this in some cases, notably USAID, is a policy of stealth in which support labelled as promoting democracy through civil society organisations (CSOs) transpires on closer inspection to be directed at economic objectives based on entrepreneurship (Crawford, 2000).

The World Bank sees various benefits from strengthening and involving civil society organisations. They provide representation in aggregating the voice of citizens; they provide technical expertise; they provide capacity building for other civil society organisations; they deliver services; and, in rather vague Putnamesque terms, provide 'social functions' which foster collective recreational activities (World Bank, 2000a: 6). The role is clearly of fostering inclusion and consensus and the same document warns that a possible 'problem' of consulting with civil society organisations is "conflict and antagonisms...between government and CSOs or among CSOs" (World Bank, 2000a: 7). Surely, such differences of opinion are part and parcel of a vibrant democracy and should not be regarded as problems. The DFID (1998b) see very similar roles for CSOs - advocacy, capacity building, service delivery - and likewise stress the need for consultation and partnership if they are to avoid treating Southern CSOs as simple implementing organisations.

Others have conducted far more comprehensive reviews of donor supported political aid (Crawford, 2000; Hearn, 1999, 2001; Stokke, 1995) so I have summarised their key findings and supplemented them with additional recent statements. These are structured around three dimensions - the different donors, the different countries, and the different agendas and institutional recipients. The first dimension is the different donors. Hearn (1999) examined the major bilateral and multilateral supporters of civil society based programmes in Africa. In terms of the bilateral donors she found that the Germans, British, US and Scandinavians were the most active whereas the World Bank and EU were the major multilateral supporters (Crawford, 2000). For example, the US is responsible for as much as 85% of total civil society assistance and has, as we shall see, developed the most comprehensive and theoretically informed framework for support (Hearn, 1999). Crawford's (2000) study of more generalised 'political aid' concurs with these findings and both studies show that South Africa in global terms receives the largest proportion of such aid. The UK has come more recently to civil society support with the 1997 White Paper on International Development placing partnerships with civil society organisations as a central element of on-going activities. In 1998 DFID inaugurated a consultation process on the precise role of civil society organisations (DFID, 1998b) and by 1999 established the Civil Society Challenge Fund to support NGOs and increase their role in national decision-making (DFID, 1999). The World Bank has increasingly embraced the non-governmental sector in the wake of limited adjustment related state reform. James Wolfensohn, the latest President of the World Bank, has placed greater emphasis on 'partnership' at all levels in an attempt to counter the tendency to dictate policy terms to recipient countries. Each of The Bank's Country Assistance Strategies (CAS) includes the need to consult with civil society organisations and manuals have

been prepared to assist Bank staff and NGOs in doing this (World Bank, 2000a, 2000c).

The second dimension is the way in which these different activities vary between countries. Not surprisingly these patterns tend to follow the strategic priorities of the donors and multilaterals. As we have seen South Africa is the primary recipient as it seeks to de-racialise development, but other countries have figured at different times and in different ways. For example, Ghana was the shining example of Structural Adjustment and so received significant support for various liberalising initiatives such as Vision 2020 aiming to bring Ghana to middle income status by 2020. More recently Uganda has embraced a self-help trajectory which emphasises grassroots entrepreneurship as a form of post-adjustment reconstruction. As a result many donors, particularly the British and Americans, increased their support for civil society organisations. In both cases these countries represented the ideal-type against which other reform programmes in Africa (and beyond) had to be gauged. Hence, the lenders needed to ensure the success of these countries as much as the countries needed the assistance of the lenders. Other patterns of funding follow various historical legacies. For the British, colonial contact provides a major impetus to on-going support whereas Scandinavian donors who historically supported human rights groups have continued this in such countries as South Africa, Tanzania and Nicaragua.

The third dimension relates to the range of activities and institutions that the donor's support in different countries. The German donors tend to promote democratisation and civil society through Foundations such as the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Hearn, 1999). These tend to be urban and elite based and concentrate on networking and encouraging public debate through seminars and workshops. The Americans are more comprehensive in their political aid and spread it between central government reform, pro-democracy groups and other interest groups (Crawford, 2000). This is in contrast to the Swedish who, as we saw earlier, focus much more on human rights and pro-democracy activities. Given the relative latecoming to civil society of the British state, most support has been to central and local government reform in an attempt to make both more transparent, responsive and cost-effective.

These contrasting experiences suggest that donor support, albeit heterogenous and contextual, does not challenge the status quo of on-going neo-liberal reform (Crawford, 2000). In effect it represents a new form of imperialism and trusteeship. In this way civil society is not an objective category, but a normative or 'imagined' process. Tester (1992) observes that early debates about civil society were tied to fundamental questions about what it meant to be civil-ized and the tensions between a state of nature and an ordered society. Contemporary debates are very much in keeping with this as social and political engineering seeks to create institutions which promote equivalence and freedom within the logic of the market while leaving the fundamental inequalities that market forces unleash relatively uncriticised. Allen (1997: 335) argues that for civil society to flourish "requires a state which is limited, non-interventionary, and which furthers the 'freedoms' of individual citizens, notably their market freedoms". So, from a left perspective, civil society is part of the neo-liberal ideology of weakening the state politically, promoting self-help and choice in society and cheapening the cost of aid.

Reformulating the analysis of civil society

So far I have outlined the genesis of the contemporary use of civil society by the major donors and examined briefly the ways in which they have sought to realise their visions of civil society. However, if we wish to analyse civil society in concrete contexts it is not sufficient to do so using the partial and normative model used by the donors themselves. To do this we must develop an approach which captures the intended and unintended uses of civil society which is

also attentive to the role of space and place. In this section I critique the donor's model of civil society in order to raise empirical questions for the study of civil society in Northern Ghana.

The conceptual criticisms of civil society centre, first, upon ontological questions of whether it actually exists as separate and distinct from the state. Second, if we accept that the state-society duality is in fact unsubstantiated then we need to explore the processes linking political activities and the ways in which rule is achieved. Third, following a Marxian analysis, we need to recognise that the discourse of political freedom distilled in conceptions of civil society blinds us to the constraints placed on human agency by market forces. Finally, the discourse of fragmentation, localism and competition bound up in these ideas about civil society can deny political claims which seek to address the structural causes of poverty and marginalisation. While it unwise to generalise about the characteristics of civil society, my observations in this section are levelled most specifically at the nature of civil society in Africa.

The most common and significant criticism is that state and civil society are not discrete political spheres across the boundaries of which regularised and rational policy signals and interventions are exchanged. Chabal (1992: 82) argues that "The significance and character of the African post-colonial state, therefore, derives in large measure from the nature of civil society and its mode of co-existence with it". However, Chabal, as does Hyden (1983) and other associationalists, tends to see civil society as continually resisting and contesting the state's role. While civil society is in 'co-existence' with the state "(I)ts politics...are the politics of counter-hegemony" (Chabal, 1992: 84). Such an analysis presents a rather simplistic hegemony-resistance duality which undermines an analysis of the complex forms of governance that actually appear. In particular, by focusing exclusively upon civil society's ability to delimit state power these authors underplay other elements of civil society which may seek to promote themselves and in doing so cause conflict. For example, talking of Chile, Markovitz (1998: 26) comments "Elements of civil society have guaranteed through their use of the state apparatus that other elements of civil society, such as radical intellectuals and labour leaders, either will not be able to participate as full citizens, or would be eliminated entirely, perhaps even physically". While Markovitz cautions against simply reading politics off as a reflection of capitalist relations, he insists that any political analysis must begin by situating African countries within the global capitalist economy and the ways in which this structures state-society intersections. Hence, by positing the separation of political realms and the consensual nature of civil society, the associationalists focus only on the 'good' elements of civil society and ignore the significance of capitalist development.

Mamdani (1996) takes a more Gramscian line which sees state and civil society as integrally linked so that the focus shifts from privileging the state as the motive political force to examining the effects of power in achieving rule. It is not simply a model of state dominates and civil society resists, but a more subtle interplay of power "through which the population of subjects excluded from civil society was actually ruled" (Mamdani, 1996: 15). This requires us to look at processes of *incorporation* rather than resistance as the more-statist accounts would have it. For Mamdani, this general process is one of 'decentralized despotism' through the 'bifurcated state' which "crystallized a state-enforced separation, of the rural from the urban and of one ethnicity from another...two forms of power under a single hegemonic authority. Urban power spoke the language of civil society and civil rights, rural power of community and culture" (Mamdani, 1996: 8 & 18). Beckman (1993) concurs with Mamdani, with the corollary of their argument being that any attempt to use the state effectively will not be premised on donor-funded support

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of civil society which aims to magically develop it as an 'autonomous' sphere. Despite his engagement with post-structuralist efforts to problematise dualisms, such as tradition-modernity, Mamdani's bifurcated state theory replaces one set of dualisms for a new one. In his model the rural=tribalism=custom whereas the urban=modernity=citizenship. As Ahluwalia (2001: 104) notes "Mamdani leaves himself open to the charge that he merely is reverting to the categories of the modernisation school...of which he has been an ardent critic". Ahluwalia, in line with other theorists of citizenship, argues that the urban-rural and citizen-subject divides are far from hermetic and that most people inhabit multiple and overlapping political communities with differing forms and degrees of autonomy and power.

These critiques suggest three related avenues of investigation. First, if 'state' and 'society' are so interconnected is it meaningful to think of them as discrete 'realms'? Post-structuralist theories of the state (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Pringle and Watson, 1992) argue that such separations are not meaningful if we examine the operation of hegemony or seek to theorise political alternatives. According to Laclau and Mouffe the state "is not an homogenous medium, separated from civil society by a ditch, but an uneven set of branches and functions, only relatively integrated by the hegemonic practices which take place within it" (1985: 180). While opening up a more nuanced account of state-society relations, Laclau and Mouffe "deny states any positivity and de-privilege them as sites of political struggle" (Jessop, 1990: 293). However, by taking this basic argument that the state is not a uniform structure nor is society a 'sutured' totality, a different form of political practice is opened up whereby "(I)nterests are constituted and constrained by the discursively available possibilities for representation and action in any particular situation" (Pringle and Watson, 1992: 69). This suggests that political struggles are constituted around contextual admixtures of group interests, such that monolithic analyses of state-society interaction are replaced by ever-changing 'projects' and 'alliances' between networked political agents in space and time.

A further consequence of 'blurring' the boundaries of distinct political, social and economic realms is to breach the assumption of 'internal' and 'external' political processes. One of the main assumptions of classical thinking on civil society is to view it in national terms. However, a key element of contemporary governance in the developing world is the relation between indigenous or Southern NGOs (SNGOs) and external, usually Northern-based, ones (NNGOs). In this sense civil society is not nationally-centred, but increasingly internationally networked. Some theorists have stressed a positive role for this global-local interaction through the idea of 'international civil society' (Lipschutz, 1992, Mcgrew, 1997) which opens up the possibility of escaping the 'official' governance structures of the major states. Clearly, the series of anti-capitalist demonstrations from the late 1990s onwards suggest that inter-NGO collaboration can produce progressive political praxis, but we must be wary of seeing all inter-NGO partnerships in such liberatory terms. The autonomy of many NGOs is severely compromised as increasing levels and proportions of official aid are channelled through them. In this sense, international civil society is not separate from the inter-state system, but the two are forged from and transformed by mutual collaboration and resistance. It then becomes important to examine the fluid and blurred boundaries between these political arenas and the ramifications of this on the ground.

Second, by emphasising this 'state-society' couplet these theories also underplay the role of the market in delimiting and constraining action. Urry (1981: 31 & 69) sees civil society as "outside the state and outside the relations and forces of production...The crucial link between the two is

provided by the sphere of circulation which is part of both the economy and of civil society, and is central to the interrelations between the two". According to Marx, it is in the sphere of circulation that individuals are created as atomistic subjects able to voluntarily choose between contending options. Urry argues that, while this is certainly important, it underplays other social practices within civil society which constitute subjectivity and, therefore, moves us beyond a straightforward class analysis. However, the Marxian interpretation suggests that struggles within civil society are inseparable from the constraining and conflictual effects of market forces.

Similarly, Meiksins Wood (1995) examines the current 'model' of civil society that is being theorised and argues that it is peculiar to the development of capitalism in Britain where coercive state functions were progressively 'privatised' so that a distinction could be made between 'state' and 'civil society'. She asserts "many coercive functions that once belonged to the state were relocated in the 'private' sphere, in private property, class exploitation, and market imperatives. It is, in a sense, the 'privatization' of public power that has created the historically novel realm of 'civil society'" (1995: 254). For her, any theory of civil society which fails to acknowledge the disciplinary effects of market forces on human agency is to effect an erasure of actual power which only serves a wider ideological purpose.

Third, the focus on atomistic and consensual civil society organisations leads to a fragmentation of political effort. Spatially, this sees an emphasis on localism whereby local knowledge and community are seen to underpin a strong civic-minded developmentalism based around self-help. However, this new localism tends to essentialise the local as discrete and bounded places that host relatively homogenous communities (Mohan and Stokke, 2000). As Blaikie (2000: 1046) notes "The avoidance of conflict has strong resonances with the ideology and systems of shared values of many NGOs, but also reminds us of postmodern myopia over the highly problematic notion of 'community', as the site of unpenetrated, local, and authentic alterity and cultural difference". Such myopia goes against those recent understandings of place within human geography in which places are constituted by economic, social, cultural and political relations and flows of commodities, information and people that extend far beyond a given locality. I outline the implications of this for an analysis of civil society in the next section.

From imaginary to actually existing civil society
The question remains as to whether civil society is a useful analytical category? Allen (1997) dismisses civil society as a valid concept for Africanists since it is too ideologically loaded and fails to illuminate critical political processes. While we have seen that the discourses and policies on civil society are, not surprisingly, ideologically loaded and we should be wary of their uncritical use this does not deny the fact that whether we like the idea of civil society or not there are significant numbers of organisations in Africa who label themselves as such (Makumbe, 1998). Additionally, while the left critique is entirely valid it tends to focus only on the 'orthodox', and largely US driven, view of civil society. Other more radical civil society actors are making significant changes and it is not helpful to tar them with the same brush. A more pragmatic line follows Mamdani who urges us to look at 'actually existing civil society' which involves looking "at its actual formation, rather than as a promised agenda for change" (Mamdani, 1996: 19).

Given the critique of civil society theories in the previous section how can we operationalise an analysis of actually existing civil society. I propose the following elements which inform the analytical categories in the case study of Northern Ghana in the following section. First, we need

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to see civil society as constituted across local, national and international territories. Nationally bounded civil society does not exist so examining the relations between civil society organisations and trans-national/inter-state actors is vital. Second, civil society does not lie unproblematically between the household and state, but shapes and is shaped by economic forces. This means looking at the ways in which CSOs facilitate marketisation or become dependent upon competitive markets for their survival. Third, if we accept that state and society are not separate spheres we must examine the shifting processes of rule operating in the 'hybrid' interstices between them. This means focusing on the ways in which political actors mobilise discourses of civil society, locality and the state and utilise organisations for political gain. It also involves examining the way in which the state manipulates civil society and the relationships at a micro-level between state and civil society organisations. Fourthly, we should avoid generalising about CSOs since they are highly variegated. As Bebbington and Bebbington (2001) note we must not homogenise these diverse organisations but differentiate, at a minimum, between formal CSOs, such as NGOs, and informal ones such as social movements. In the study which follows I am primarily concerned with the more formal organisations. Finally, given that civil society debates tend to borrow heavily from Western experience, any consideration of the issue in Africa (or any other region) must be through locally-relevant cultural norms and practises. At a minimum this requires an acknowledgement of how a particular organisation perceives itself as well as more detailed understanding of how political activity is actually realised in concrete local contexts.

Such an analysis of actually existing civil society is necessarily historical, but must also be attentive to difference across space. While not framed in explicitly spatialised terms, Mamdani urges us to focus on the specificity of the local state which was established as a means of 'enforcing custom' and has maintained a powerful position in politics since then. Similarly, Migdal (1994: 15) call for an 'anthropology of the state' which investigates "different levels of the state, including the lowest rungs on the organizational hierarchy where direct engagement with society often occurs" which moves us away from a totalising analysis of the state to a spatialised understanding of political praxis. In this regard Anthony Bebbington (2000) has used the ideas of Arturo Escobar to explore place, development and livelihoods. He argues that the culturalist views of Escobar, while important, tend to underplay those factors which neo-liberals discuss *ad nauseam*; namely market forces and material well-being. Bebbington is also critical of Escobar and others' insistence on localities as sites of 'resistance', because this also fails to understand how people make a living in these increasingly global times. He argues that rather than seeing places as sites of resistance we need to see them in more complex terms involving production and reproduction. He states "Understood thus, place would be less something that people defended, and more something whose means and practices of production they aimed to control" (Bebbington, 2000: 498). This emphasis on control rather than resistance is important, because it does not underplay cultural considerations but integrates them into an livelihoods framework. Bebbington characterises these process as 'place-making', because people are not simply detached recipients of external assistance, but active and knowing agents in their own well-being.

The disappointments of civil society: perspectives from Northern Ghana
The research upon which this section is based was enabled through contact with a UK-based NGO called Village Aid which works with partner NGOs[1] in Northern Ghana, Sierra Leone, The

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[1]Given the political nature of the inter-NGO relations discussed in this section, the names

Gambia and Cameroon. The research, undertaken within their Northern Ghana programme, involved participating in programme evaluation and workshops, semi-structured interviews with their partners and reviewing project documentation.

The fieldwork took place in January and February 2000 during a mid-term evaluation of a programme entitled 'Building a Cross Sector Partnership for Community Forest Management' funded primarily by DFID. The programme involved a network of local NGOs, decentralised government departments and local agricultural research stations. The general aim was to strengthen the linkages between them so that the communities became more confident in pressing for their specific and often contextual needs. This involved the NGOs and particularly the government departments becoming much more 'participatory' and sensitive to the rural producers as legitimate and knowledgeable actors in the process of agricultural innovation. The evaluation sought to understand what the village groups saw as the main causes of unsustainable forestry management, how they perceived the process of change that was being effected, and assess how effective the village level groups were in this process. This was done through three teams of evaluators covering the programme villages in the districts shown in Figure 1. Each team held what were effectively focus groups with the a cross-section of the villages. After a week of these visits the evaluation teams returned to Tamale, the capital of Northern Region, and shared results in a two-day SWOT analysis.

MAP

The advantages of shadowing the evaluation were that it permitted some legitimacy with the local communities in that I did not spend so much time gaining their confidence or justifying and explaining my research mission. Additionally, among the villagers, as a result of on-going contact with Village Aid, my presence as a white European was less startling than I had experienced in other localities (Mohan, 1993). Working with the evaluation also allowed much greater areal coverage than I could have achieved alone while the project workers acted as translators. Finally, travelling with the evaluation team made transport a lot easier which is not an insignificant matter in an area of savannah with remote villages and few metalled roads.

However, the methodology was not without major drawbacks. First, the greatest turn-out tended to be in those villages where the partnership process was working well which in turn skewed the results and introduces what Chambers (1983) terms 'project bias'. Second, the facilitator, in a number of cases, steered the discussion where he felt that it was too confrontational. In particular a heated discussion blew up around the causes of bush fires. The men blamed the women who defended their position. As the debate intensified and voices were raised the facilitator stepped in and moved the discussion along. Third, despite being used to white project workers my presence was still a cause for some speculation and may well have influenced the discussions. More importantly, perhaps, was that as a European I was perceived as representing Village Aid despite introductions which stressed my independence and impartiality. In turn this lead to the final set of drawbacks which relate to the independence of the research process and

of these NGOs have been concealed. Village Aid works with two main SNGOs which I have re-named 'A' and 'B'.

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the power relations bound up in development aid. Given that I was piggybacking on an evaluation ostensibly for DFID the research questions were circumscribed by the requirements of the project which meant I was less able to triangulate results as critically as I wished or to follow my own research questions. I did arrange interviews with a number of key officials and stressed my independence from Village Aid which allowed a measure of triangulation, but the research would not have been the same if I was completely independent. This fed into a final problem which related to the transparency of results and my position in the politics of the partnership. As a supposedly 'neutral' observer I had the distinct feeling that the information being released to me was done so on a very strategic basis; the presumption being that I might feed it back to other stakeholders and influence political relationships. While this is to be expected and allows an interesting set of contrasting perspectives it does mean that the information was partial and politically selective.

Civil society and NGO intervention in Ghana
So far I have argued that we need to analyse civil society in complex and contextual ways through critical case studies. The study which follows is not intended to serve as a blueprint for other studies but to show how political forces are playing out in one particular instance. However, in the conclusion it is possible to highlight the ways in which we might more critically engage with the civil society agenda. In this sub-section I trace the evolution of civil society in Ghana, but focus most attention on the period of neo-liberalism when the NGO sector blossomed.

Civil society in colonial Ghana, like other African countries, was actively suppressed by the colonial government (Mamdani, 1996; Makumbe, 1988). Before colonisation there were a number of organised social formations with differing sorts of authority, ranging along an axis from centralised to decentralised. Indirect Rule sought to politicise these authority structures with District Commissioners working through traditional leaders who became the key political intermediaries with access to state revenue. It was during this period that Mamdani's 'bifurcated state' came into being although as we noted the rigid separation of custom from citizenship was not as clear cut as he believes. The only formal civil society organisations tended to be church-based and orchestrated by missionaries although from the turn of the century a few proto-nationalist organisations emerged which pressed initially for greater representation and equality and later for full-blown independence.

Following independence the relations between state and civil society was fluid with different degrees of incorporation and control. For example, Kwame Nkrumah, the country's first President, attempted to contain the authority of the chiefs as well as fashion political support through selective strengthening of key civil society actors. Indeed, this pattern of penetrating local society through state-supported civil society has been a hallmark of many African countries as centralisation of authority increased. During the immediate post-independence period a number of professional associations and trade unions were established or expanded and with the church organisations these formed the mainstay of the small and tightly circumscribed civil society.

In the early 1980s, following a military coup by the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), local participation was largely through the Revolutionary Organs and various village development committees established in the 1960s under Nkrumah. In the early days, the PNDC was highly suspicious of NGOs and expounded an anti-western line as part of their own populist

nationalism (Kraus, 1987). Instead they penetrated the localities with various para-statal and militia-based organisations, some of which later transformed themselves into 'non-governmental' organisations. It was not until the mid-1980s that the numbers of NGOs began to increase significantly. This was in response to the austerity measures of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which saw public expenditure fall and a large number of civil servants retrenched. The NGOs were monitored by the PNDC, who were keen to use them to contribute to the general development effort (Gary, 1996). In the mid-late 1980s, the Programme of Actions to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAMSCAD) was a watershed which saw the formalisation of linkages between the state and NGOs. However, the multilateral banks and key ministries devised the framework of PAMSCAD while the NGOs "were to be the 'hands' carrying out charity work" (Gary, 1996: 158).

Additionally, the SAP favoured export-sector agriculture, mainly cocoa, which saw some benefits flowing to larger farmers in the South and Centre of the country. We saw earlier that Hearn (2001) described much of the civil society activity in Ghana as 'consensual SAPs' in that support went to building, largely urban-based, support for liberalisation. In terms of official support for civil society DFID assisted in the establishment of economic fora and a more general belief in the need to strengthen rights. Hence, much is made of accountability and increasing the responsiveness of government departments, both centrally and locally. More specifically DFID fund programmes in health, education and forestry and have a fund for small-scale NGO projects (DFID, 1998a). The World Bank is also strong on governance and has supported various capacity building programmes within local government (World Bank, 2000b), although as this study shows unless people actually engage with local government such actions simply strengthen a tier of unaccountable bureaucrats. Similarly, USAID (2001) support strengthening of the executive and decentralised government with a view to making them more responsive and accountable to civil society. Civil society organisations are to be consulted and their decisions brought into governmental decision-making. Clearly all three donors are sticking to their hope of CSOs keeping the state in check and advocating on behalf of individuals.

As a result of colonial underdevelopment, and in contrast to centre and south, the north of Ghana lacks a major export base so that its farmers were further marginalised by liberalisation. For this region civil society support has been much more of the 'service delivery' type in which charity, bilateral and multilateral aid is channelled through NGOs in order to support welfare programmes and micro-scale entrepreneurship. The Government attempted some regional policy through decentralisation (Mohan, 1996a), but it is in the North that the majority of foreign NGOs operate. Indeed, Tamale, the capital of Northern Region, has become a veritable frontier town for the development industry possessing the last 'decent' hotel. The war in the mid-1990s between various ethnic groups, sparked in large part by uneven development, added conflict resolution and democratisation to the list of desirable outcomes of NGO intervention (van der Linde and Naylor, 1999). Paradoxically, this was significant in shifting the agenda of NGOs onto specifically 'political' issues around citizenship and ethnicity.

One of the key development schemes in the North has been the Northern Region Rural Integrated Program (NORRIP) financed by the Canadian government. Botchway (2001) has analysed the limitations of this scheme and highlighted a number of parallels with the analysis which follows. His focus is on the process of participation and he concludes that communities were hardly involved in programme design or critical decision-making and that NORRIP worked through simplistic notions of what constitutes 'community' (see also Aryeetey, 1998). Botchway

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concludes with the view, one which I wholly support, that the fetishisation of 'participation' among development agencies blinkers them and diverts attention away from the structural causes of poverty. In their rush to promote inclusion and equality they covertly endorse processes which deepen poverty at the individual, regional and international scales. The study which follows also focuses on power and participation, but is more concerned with the ways in which political practices are spatialised and civil society actors utilise spatial discourses in order to make claims against other organisations.

The external determination of local agendas by foreign NGOs.
Within the realms of international civil society, a major line of tension exists between the Northern and Southern NGOs (N/SNGOs). Most donors and NNGOs work with local partner NGOs. Foreign interests may lack the local knowledge or legitimacy to enter local communities so that partner NGOs are important gatekeepers in reaching the grassroots. Additionally, maintaining a fully staffed field office would be costly so that using local partners to deliver certain project elements is cheaper than using expatriates.

However, the notion of 'partnerships' is, as we shall see, a loaded process. Recent analysis (Edwards and Hulme, 1996; Bebbington and Riddell, 1997; Fowler, 1998) shows that the relations between partners is not even and that the funder tends to determine policy agendas to a far greater degree. As Nyamugasira notes, the NNGOs, despite commitments to participatory development, concentrate on ideas, networking, and education and leave the "time-bound, geographically fixed projects..to their Southern counterparts" (1998: 298). While it would be tempting to place all the blame on a imperialising mission by NNGOs, the situation is far more complex. Fowler (1998) identifies various factors including paternalistic assumptions by the NNGOs, a bias towards their knowledge and procedures being superior, poor choice of field staff and a reluctance to release control of programmes that a true partnership requires. However, given the NNGOs' increasing reliance on official funding they too are pressed to show transparent success which breeds conservatism and a wariness to hand over the reins to local partners. On the SNGO side, many do lack capacity and transparency and react aggressively to any suggestions by the Northern partners that this is the case. There are few transparent mechanisms for decision-making with limited methods for enshrining the principle of participation at all levels of the partnership. Partnerships are clearly suffused with political inequality which compromises the notion of an independent civil society emerging.

As donors seek out reliable and successful NGOs a market for development finance emerges where once small, agile, innovative and, at times, radical organisations quite rapidly become development 'success stories' and receive large inflows of foreign capital (Moore and Stewart, 1998). Such rapid growth is a problem for any organisation, but more importantly the funders tend to treat these organisations as infinitely flexible and capable of delivering any number of development competencies (environment, gender, water, health etc etc). As a representative of NGO 'A' said "it's not easy to chew" (Interview with AS of NGO 'A', 4/2/00) implying that the organisation's 'mouth' became too full with demands from funders to deliver programmes at the grassroots. As the aid market contracts, the trend will be towards niched NGOs or larger, semi-commercial organisations which can deliver entire programmes for donors. In this sense civil society begins to massify and commodify with power increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few large organisations which may well be antithetical to a competitive and 'free' civil society.

Operationally, those NGOs receiving official aid have to be accountable to their funders which

often brings conflict because the slow, flexible, culturally-specific processes do not translate easily into the fast turnaround demanded by log frame accounting techniques. On the other hand, the NGOs have a grassroots constituency, the supposed beneficiaries, who are increasingly alienated from the centres of decision-making. This double legitimacy bind leaves the NGO somewhat stranded and far away from its developmental role (Bebbington and Riddell, 1997). This is clearly demonstrated in terms of 'capacity issues' where northern partners insist on transparent accounting procedures and systematic monitoring and reporting systems (Fowler, 1998; Moore and Stewart, 1998). For some organisations this is seen as an imposition since they were established precisely to break from this bureaucratic tradition. It also runs counter to much 'participatory development' which valorises local knowledge yet the organisations impose management systems drawn from the western corporate world. For Village Aid and its partners in Northern Ghana, this has produced considerable tension over the past five years which has, at times, spilled over into outright confrontation. The following extracts both use the phrase 'dictatorship' when referring to Village Aid

> "But there seems to be too much dictatorship from Village Aid. Information flow is not adequate, ideas from partners are not respected or not take" (NGO 'B', 1999: 2)

> "dictatorship...sometimes Village Aid wants to be very strict...as if they have no confidence in us...Decisions taken at the Village Aid level before coming to the agency level...People have not been asked to participate at the planning level" (Interview with NGO 'A', 4/2/00)

From Village Aid's position these issues related to inadequate capacity and commitment to participation shown by their partners. I return to this point below as we see how the partner NGOs negotiate and manipulate their own position.

The relationship between NGO activity and the corporate sector
One outcome of structural adjustment and good governance programmes has been a move towards market-friendly approaches to development. This entrepreneurial agenda (Desai and Imrie, 1998; Fowler, 2000) has created partnerships between state, capital and civil society (Warhurst, 2000). In the past, 'corporate neighbourliness' was attempted through discrete projects in communities in close proximity to a noxious facility. These lacked sustainability and relevance, so corporations realised that closer participation with local communities regarding diverse social investments was more likely to succeed. For example, some corporations have established corporate foundations (Carter, 2000) which bring together representatives of the corporation, civil society and the state. Such moves clearly have important implications for the 'independence' of both the state and civil society.

Village Aid have attempted to work with the corporate sector without relying on it for finances. In previous programmes, they have established a network of micro-credit funds in a number of villages. While not massive, these funds are large by Ghanaian banking standards. Crucially, due to their regulation by a Northern NGO paranoid about upsetting its own funders, these accounts are relatively risk-free. Hence, Standard Chartered Bank have been very keen to support this initiative as it creates numerous new accounts. From its beginnings in Northern Ghana, the idea has been sold to the European Headquarters who want to see the link up between themselves and Village Aid, with Village Aid acting as the broker/consultant. A recent bid to

Comic Relief was successful which will replicate these credit and saving schemes across their West Africa programmes. It was described as "a unique partnership with Standard Chartered Bank, bringing together the skills of NGOs in working with communities and the financial services provided by the corporate sector, to fashion a service package for the grassroots" (Village Aid, 2000: 1). Although in its infancy, it seems likely that such social entrepreneurship will become increasingly common.

The relationships between NGOs and village organisations
By and large NNGOs tend to use partners for village level activities. The underlying assumption is that the northern NGO lacks the local knowledge and connections to represent the local communities so that intermediaries are needed. It is precisely this perceived 'closeness' to local communities and understanding of their cultures that gives the SNGOs their power. In practice, this assumption is not always borne out. In many cases the local NGOs behave in equally patronising, dictatorial and bureaucratic ways towards the villages they represent. The following extracts suggest that Village Aid's partners suffer from many of the supposed problems of inflexible state bureaucrats:

> "'B' and 'A' are still adopting old-style possessive tactics towards their client villages" (Smith, 1999: 8)

> "They (the villages) are our people" (Interview with NGO 'A', 4/2/00)

The SNGOs are taking ownership of local culture and using it as a defence mechanism. The NNGOs realised they needed to have intermediaries, ideally working in a partnership relation, but the SNGOs use this powerful position to protect their constituency of villages. They claim to represent the local communities, but have rather patronising attitudes towards them, but know they are beyond reproach. In this way civil society organisations actually impede democratisation and good governance. Forbes's analysis of local development in Nepal is interesting because she explores this issue of the ways in which 'local-ness' is manipulated, managed, and performed in claims for authentic and sustainable development. She shows how 'local-ness' is a fluid and strategic discourse and one which is ultimately not very helpful, because it means different things to different people and is even used by the same people for different meanings depending upon the audience. She suggests that rather than trying to delimit and specify where the local 'ends' and the 'global' begins we should focus on the underlying power relations. She states "The label of 'local' may often have as much to do with how much power any given individual or party has as it does with the fact that any particular group has a more privileged relationship to a particular place" (Forbes, 1999: 324).

Another manifestation of this problem is where partner NGOs intervene between the Northern NGO and the village organisations. Again, this represents a complex politics of knowledge generation and communication. In particular 'participatory learning and action' (PLA) has become a widely used research and conscientisation procedure whereby local communities generate their own knowledge which then helps in priority setting (Chambers, 1997; Mohan, 1999; 2000). A sustained critique is given elsewhere (Mohan, 1999), but what we see is SNGOs intervening in this process and transmitting alternative interpretations of reality which the NNGO takes as authentic needs.

> "Participatory Rural Appraisals are undertaken by local NGOs as a duty in order

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to access funding. Consequently, village communities identify needs and problems and tailor their prioritisation of them to the services which they perceive the local NGO is offering. Subsequent to this, the local NGO amends the prioritisation and, more often than not, the nature of the project itself to what they believe its northern partner will fund" (Waddington, 1997: 2)

"For the most part, projects are a response to the needs of a 'B' group within a village rather than the village in general" (Village Aid, 1996b: 3)

The result is that the NNGO funds acceptable priorities which may not be the genuine priorities of the villagers. To combat such problems, Village Aid have begun a programme which works within existing cultural and linguistic systems so as to avoid imposing externally-driven practices.

The autonomy of both foreign and indigenous NGOs from the state
One obvious problem associated with strengthening the NGO sector at the expense of the state is that state institutions and actors feel threatened. The good governance and social costs of adjustment initiatives came in the late 1980s and early 1990s after almost a decade of adjustment. State officials had become used to loans and aid flowing through the state so that diverting much of this lucrative source of funds was bound to excite resentment. A countervailing problem is that under the adjustment process the state had to reduce its welfare bill while austerity created such hardship that any assistance in alleviating social problems was also a vital political resource. The compromise for many states was to welcome those NGOs which had a relatively circumscribed social welfare agenda and not those which might have more transformatory political agendas.

The mechanisms for dealing with NGOs reflects these shifting and paradoxical tensions. Most common is regulation, usually taking the form of official registration (Bratton, 1989; Gary, 1996). More 'arm's length' influence can be via co-ordination through an umbrella organisation or forum which seeds debates and is selective about which NGOs are members and, therefore, privileged in terms of resources and information. More heavy-handed influence has been via co-optation where the state takes over partial functioning of NGOs via QUANGOs. Additionally, as the frontier between state and society has further muddled, many politicians have established their own NGOs as patronage structures for capturing foreign aid and promoting themselves in their local constituency. Finally, dissolution and harassment is the final form of state influence, especially with those NGOs taking critical views of the state. In Ghana we have seen various strategies adopted by both the state and NGOs. In this sub-section I look at three key sites of interaction between the state and NGOs.

Regulation. Attempts have been made by the Ghanaian state to regulate NGO activity and increase their accountability, but through legislation which sought to channel all funding through the state. The most concerted effort came in 1995 with the attempt to enact an NGO Bill which would require all NGOs - both foreign and domestic - to register with an advisory council of politicians who could refuse NGOs the permission to operate. In the Bill, NGOs were defined as non-political which clearly circumscribes their activities. Gary (1996) argued that it was largely the local NGOs which persuaded the government to shelve the Bill, but more likely is the interpretation that the large international NGOs threatened to pull out of Ghana if the Bill proceeded. However, an NGO Bill remains open to political debate through a move by the

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Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare (Daily Graphic, 10/2/00).

NGOs as patronage structures and party political vehicles. More insidious is the use of NGOs as vehicles for personal and party political gain by local officers. This is achieved through various mechanisms - petty corruption, largesse, interlocking political affiliations, and 'status' - and, as we have seen, the less obvious ways in which indigenous NGOs defend local culture in the face of 'outsider' intervention. In effect, some NGOs become fiefdoms for local élites to further their material and political status. As Hibou notes,

> "The promotion of NGOs leads to an erosion of official administrative and institutional capacity, a reinforcement of the power of elites, particularly at the local level, or of certain factions, and sometimes stronger ethnic character in the destination of flows of finance from abroad. In many cases, these NGOs are established by politicians, at the national and local level, with a view to capturing external resources which henceforth pass through these channels on a massive scale" (Hibou, 1999: 99)

Similarly, "the emergence of opportunistic organisations that call themselves NGOs but have no popular base at all. Many have been created as survival strategies for a professional middle class" (Bebbington and Riddell, 1997: 111). While 'A' and 'B' are by no means so opportunistic, both directors aspire to political power within Dagbon society. This is being pursued through various channels, one of which is the NGO. For example, the Director of 'A' is also a District Assembly member and the NGO is seen by villagers as indivisible from the former ruling party Similarly, the Director of 'B' has been disciplined on various occasions for writing cheques without accounting for the destination of the money. His response was one of indignation in that Village Aid were behaving in a dictatorial and untrustworthy way. Recently, he was placed under investigation by the National Bureau of Investigation and the NGO's operations suspended pending the enquiry.

Decentralisation. Earlier work on local government showed that one of the key problems at the level of programme delivery is that NGOs have tended to set up parallel systems alongside a weak and under-funded local government system (Mohan, 1996b). On the other side, the decentralisation programme has been hampered by institutional dualism whereby local departments answer to central ministries and are not flexible with respect to local needs. The outcome is mutual mistrust and wasteful duplication of effort. This tendency is sufficiently widespread to exact comment from the out-going Minister for Local Government who observed "the tendency of some of them (NGOs) to bypass laid-down structures and procedures at the district level and establish structures and programmes of their own without regards to their sustainability" (Kwamena Ahwoi reported in the Daily Graphic, 14/12/99). Within Village Aid's work similar problems occur:

> "there existed a communication gap between the Project and the local extensionist in the sense that instead of communicating through District Officers the Project went straight to the local extensionist thereby marginalising the District Officers" (Village Aid, 1999b: 3)

> "District Agricultural Director's and District Forestry Officers appear to see themselves on the end of decentralisation policy and not a part of it" (Village

Aid, 1999a: 7)

As Aryeetey (1998: 308) comments "Neither the assembly members nor the technocrats in the district assemblies were seen to be in a position to make serious contributions towards strengthening consultation between the communities and the assemblies". The result is that contrary to the advocates of civil society, supporting NGOs does not lead to regularised interaction between society and state and in the process build the strength of both. In fact, it alienates the two even further and could undermine the longer term aim of building citizenship rights.

Conclusion: A Third Way for the Third World

> "Real development can only come through partnership. Not the rich dictating to the poor. Not the poor demanding from the rich. But matching rights and responsibilities together. The developed world has the responsibility to transfer resources, expertise and assistance to the developing world. The developing world has the right to expect this. But also a responsibility to ensure that resources are used productively for the benefit of the poor, not on misguided policies, white-elephant projects, or the cancer of corruption" (Tony Blair, 8th January 1999)

The emphasis on civil society and local initiatives parallels many of the Third Way experiments being promoted in Britain and which are gradually being adopted in developing countries (Power, 2000). As Prime Minister Blair's speech suggests, the solution for 'real development' is one of partnership with the poor and the honouring of rights. One the one hand self-help and local initiative can break external dependency, but only if pursued in partnership with donors. On the other hand this partnership comes at a price, because developing countries are expected to pursue the 'correct' policies. In bold 'New Britain' the colonial past is not entirely forgotten, but downplayed in an attempt to present a modern, forward-looking state (Power, 2000) yet subtle forms of imperialism are clearly in place through the complex geo-politics of aid conditionality. No longer is control exerted solely through inter-national influence, but via various multilateral institutions working within a broad consensus or through willing intermediaries in the form of international NGOs.

The Third Way policy agenda being transferred to the developing world is similar to the *social economy* and *new public management* programmes being pursued in Britain, amongst other countries (Desai and Imrie, 1998; Amin, Cameron and Hudson, 1999; Minogue et al, 1998). This policy consensus emphasises the necessity of nonstate, often community-based, actors in meeting the burden of delivering social welfare; that such actors are more efficient and cost-effective than the state; and that these efforts will ultimately bring about economic and political inclusion. Some utopianists go even further to suggest that the social economy provides not only a temporary substitute or catalyst for economic regeneration, but might form a permanent alternative to the mainstream economy. While parallels certainly exist between developed and developing world contexts we must avoid claiming uniformity in political economy across the globe. For example, success of the formal economy in many African countries has never existed so that the notion of 'regeneration' is anathema. Similarly, the 'democratic deficit' in many African countries is far greater than it is in the UK so that promoting active citizenship, if one accepts this as a legitimate policy goal, begins from very different baseline conditions. However, the Ghana case study has highlighted a number of key issues in the promotion of Third Way programmes in the Third World.

An assumption of the civil society route to development is that 'self-help' can reduce external dependency, because the local organisations more effectively 'own' the process. By multiplying the number of stakeholders it is assumed that more consensual and democratic development can be achieved which is ultimately more sustainable. In the Ghana case this clearly did not occur. While the number of development organisations mushroomed in the wake of structural adjustment and the drivers of this process championed partnership, the local 'partner' organisations and, more importantly, the rural poor were marginalised from decision-making. The paradox is that external NGOs, often heavily funded by their home governments, are charged with 'empowerment', but are so wary of upsetting their funders that they tightly circumscribe the activities on the ground and completely undermine independent development. Their partners are then trapped in an irreconcilable position of being the authentic representatives of their grassroots constituencies, but being accountable to organisations outside the locality. Squeezed in such a way they usually defer to the funder and present to them a relatively trouble-free view of local communities and their development needs, all of which further marginalises and alienates the rural poor.

The aid paradigm means that civil society organisations become more dependent on external funders as well as the market. The NGOs largely become service delivery mechanisms for pre-determined development agendas. In competing for these scarce aid resources, the NGOs position themselves strategically which creates tensions between organisations. There is nothing wrong with debate and contestation between organisations and political actors, but most of the conflict in Northern Ghana was about scrapping over the spoils and not ideology. Indeed many NGOs have been set up precisely to divert aid for personal goals as opposed to responding to the needs of the poor. As the aid market has woken up to the opportunism of many so-called NGOs it has tightened up its funding criteria, which might alleviate some corrupt behaviour, but actually makes it more difficult for smaller, less professionalised organisations to succeed. It also works against the philosophy of much participatory development which seeks to valorise multiple local differences rather than impose a rigid model. This in turn undermines the democratic potential of civil society as only some interests are actively represented, whether they be ethnic, class or political party. Rather than reflecting social differences the uneven promotion of civil society covertly strengthens social divisions, promotes factionalism and deepens the marginalisation of some groups.

As we saw the real beneficiaries of strengthening civil society have been the local elites. Increasingly, we see a tier of professional NGO managers who use foreign aid and locally generated income as a means of achieving or consolidating their middle-class status. Similar processes have been observed in Britain with most social economy initiatives being "run by outsiders - professional social entrepreneurs who bring with them what amounts to an *ideology* of community empowerment which they can then set about enacting with local people" (Amin, Cameron and Hudson, 1999: 2041). In emphasising local knowledge, grassroots initiative, and community development this ideology of empowerment generates a discourse of discrete and bounded places amenable to a particular form of intervention that only they, albeit in partnership, can largely control. Again, the rural poor are only brought in as members of fictionalised 'communities' and are in practice denied any real voice.

In all instances the state, rather than being a detached political actor separated from society by a supposed ditch, is deeply implicated in these activities. The Ghanaian state has established its

own 'non-governmental' organisations, confined registration to 'non-political' organisations, and engineered debate about the 'need' for economic liberalisation. At the local level, state agencies and NGOs are in some cases relatively separate but the civil society organisations do not channel opinion into government or scrutinise its operations, but treat it with profound mistrust and often duplicate its efforts. No synergy, in a formal sense, exists here between state and civil society. However, in more subtle ways the state and NGOs are mutually implicated. The central state in Ghana has used civil society organisations to drive local politics and actively promoted decentralisation as a means of consolidating rural support. On an even more subtle level we saw how some NGO officials purposefully misrepresent themselves to blur the boundaries between civil society and the state in an attempt to present themselves and the party in a positive light by utilising the financial resources of the NGOs. As Bebbington and Bebbington (2001: 9) comment the emphasis on society "diverts attention from the webs of relationships that link civil society organizations and the state and that may offer the prospect of changing forms of state action". I return to the possibility of changing the state below.

These developments within civil society are very much in keeping with Marx's theorisation in the 19th Century. That it is a normative concept whose realisation serves the interests of the (international) bourgeoisie. Hearn (1998; 2001) and Beckman (1993) suggest that the emphasis on civil society in Africa is central to modern imperialism in which new institutional actors are added to the array of players seeking to delegitimise the third world state and further erode what little sovereignty it has left. Hearn (1998: 98) comments that "In the immediate post-colonial period, the comprador class consisted of government official and private sector entrepreneurs and managers, in the 1990s it includes leaders of the voluntary sector". This neo-compradorism simultaneously fictionalises and factionalises civil society in a bold new experiment in socio-political engineering which aims to weaken the state, cheapen the cost of aid and promote market-based freedoms.

Specifically this imagining of civil society has a number of important political ramifications. First, it cheapens aid through match funding and the whole ethos of self-help. While self-help is more likely to embed ownership and inject greater relevance into projects it also serves to place the burden for poverty alleviation on the structurally poor which, in turn, leaves NGOs *de facto* legitimising SAPs by filling in the welfare delivery gap. As Hintjens (1999: 386) comments "The state is no longer to be held accountable for ensuring that citizens' basic needs are met; instead private citizens, individually and collectively, are expected to provide for themselves, however poor or disadvantaged they may be". Also, as we have seen, those groups and institutions able to provide some match funding may well do so to ensure the favourable direction of aid which does not necessarily benefit the most poor and marginalised.

Second, and closely related to the first, is that 'partnership' and devolution might serve to spread the risk to 'locals'. Complex scenarios in which "social development is a matter of tidying up after the market" (Pieterse, 2001: 126) leaves development organisations in an awkward position, because there is little they can do to affect broader structures. In this sense, partnership becomes an insurance policy against lack of effectiveness. As with 'policy slippage' under SAPs, the donors can implicate the poor in the failure to achieve development which becomes a subtle form of blaming the victim. In the UK context Amin et al (1999: 2049) observed "Very few social economy projects are underwritten by public authorities..(and)..Even less risk is borne by the private sector". Participatory development can be seen as a sensitive form of empowerment when it works or the result of grassroots incapacity when it fails.

Third, the question of risk, opens up the relationship of civil society to the market. As the Standard Chartered case in Ghana showed, the NGO effectively underwrites the risk on a multitude of small credit schemes. In this way the promotion of civil society is, as the Marxists have argued, very much about creating the conditions in which private capital and entrepreneurialism can flourish. Additionally, the NGO sector in Ghana has been at the forefront of the negotiated consensus around further liberalisation while the veneer of stable processual democracy acts as a major stimulant to inward investment from multinationals.

Finally, the emphasis on localism has a number of effects. On the one hand it factionalises and fragments political opposition. As Mamdani (1996: 300) argues "all decentralized systems of rule fragment the ruled and stabilize the rulers" so that the emphasis on atomistic civil society repeats many of the problems of governance laid down under Indirect Rule. Central regimes are often happy to promote development programmes which seek to build upon local energies because this absolves them of responsibility for welfare provision, earns political capital by being sensitive and dialogic, and disaggregates society into a series of unconnected, both spatially and politically, 'issues'. Potential alliances and solidarity against the structural forces generating poverty are undermined as civil society actors literally scrabble for the pickings of the aid regime. Where networks of local NGOs develop it is often to enhance efficiency of delivery, such as avoiding spatial overlap or sharing 'best practice', than it is to actively lobby the state or international organisations. So, localism diverts attention from the structural causes of poverty and feeds into the belief that market-based globalisation can and should be harnessed to work for the poor.

Returning to Blair's speech, Third Way policies in the Third World represent a new form of trusteeship in which the notion of 'misguided policies' implies that 'correct' policies, as articulated by the core economies, exist. In this sense, Blair sounds very like President Truman in his oft-quoted speech of 1947. Blair urged that "We must not forget the colonial past, and look forward to a new partnership for the future" (Blair, 1999) while Truman argued fifty years before that "The old imperialism - exploitation for foreign profit - has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing" (cited in Esteva, 1992: 6). As we have seen 'partnership' and 'democratic fair dealing' conceal insidious processes of political and economic engineering in which civil society is used as one more element in the struggle to contain the third world and police its policies.

Donor and NGO support for civil society, and 'localism' in general, keeps at bay debates about more fundamental structural changes to, say, unequal property rights or despotic, but economically useful, host governments. One thing that has emerged from discussions is that 'local' action must simultaneously address the non-local. As Nyamugasira (1998: 297) observes NGOs "have come to the sad realization that although they have achieved many micro-level successes, the systems and structures that determine power and resource allocations - locally, nationally, and globally - remain largely intact". Recent efforts have begun to deal with these limitations by looking at strategies for 'scaling up' local interventions (Blackburn and Holland, 1998; Whaites, 1998). Only by linking participatory approaches to wider, and more difficult, processes of democratisation, anti-imperialism and feminism will long-term changes occur. Crucially, greater and more critical engagement with the state is required although this is incredibly difficult where states, donors and other aid organisations delimit the political space open to civil society. One route for this is more accomodatory via the recent emphasis on

citizenship and rights which seeks to generate greater 'synergy' between state and society through the promotion of social capital and civic engagement. A second route is more radical and involves civil society actors opposing the dominant development discourse and challenging local, national and global structures. While the Zapatistas have become the *leitmotif* of this form of political action, it remains to be seen whether a new cohort of political leaders and agents emerge which actively reject the present neo-liberal consensus no matter how much of a human face Blair and his acolytes give it.

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