

研究論文 3

Civil Society and Democracy: A Contested Companionship**Mark R. Thompson***City University of Hong Kong.***Introduction**

In much recent discussion, civil society and democracy have become close conceptual companions¹. But such theoretical intimacy is viewed with suspicion by other commentators, particularly those dissatisfied with the supposed consensus about democracy as Schumpeterian proceduralism. Samuel Huntington² claimed that “by the 1970s the debate” between one side favouring a more substantive and another side a more procedural definition of democracy “was over, and Schumpeter had won.” Benjamin Barber³ critiqued this view as mere “thin democracy,” contrasting it with his own theory of “strong democracy” which stresses citizen participation. David Held⁴ dismissed Schumpeter’s view as outdated “competitive elitism” which misses many more substantive elements in other models of democracy. For such critics, understanding the relationship between civil society and democracy requires going beyond a mere political/procedural definition to consider social/participatory dimensions at both the national and local levels.

This paper follows Gramsci’s insight that civil society is a site of contestation. It represents a preliminary effort to distinguish various forms of civil society based on differing models of democracy. While *democratizing* civil society focuses on liberal political change, social revolutionary or *populist* interpretations instead put the “social question” at the centre of concern. Eastern European dissidents rejected the ideology of egalitarian socialism that in practice had led to collective downward mobility and robbed peoples of their freedom. But (the few remaining) social revolutionaries and (the more numerous) populists asked what was the use of political freedom in the midst of profound social equality that characterize life in so many “developing” countries in the world. Often ignored in analyses of civil society, this social movement-oriented kind of civil society is as much based on the intermediate sphere between the state and market as is its liberal counterpart.

Socially-oriented societal movements are taken seriously by its elitist civil society opponents, however. The latter mobilize against populists in a way that Gramsci analysed nearly a century ago in the Italian case: capitalist states move to crush their communist (or, more recently, Islamist) opponents. Elitist society tries to counter the efforts of populists

who use electoral victories to at least promise (if not actually bring about) significant social reform.

Another kind of civil society is Rousseauian which focuses on local power structures in order to break through patterns of clientelism and traditional authority in order to create *citizenship*. It finds its counterpart in Burkean civil society in which *traditionalists* use their proximity to the state in an effort to roll back secular policies and implement more religiously oriented ones. Even Putnam's argument about social capital creating civic-minded civil society and thus helping to support and deepen democracy has its critics: on the one hand, those who believe civil society needs to be deepened through radical social reform and, on the other, those who aim reinforce in-group identities rather than "bridging" across ethnicity, class and other cleavages.

In the case of civil society, the "star" group has long been non-government organizations (NGOs). They are considered prototypical of civil society because they are usually founded independently of the state and free of market influences (although, confusingly, there are NGOs started by governments and ones that are profit making). As foreign donor money has flowed into developing countries, many NGOs have become well-funded and able to decide what the key problems to be addressed are.⁵ Sometimes NGOs are involved in social movements and protests, in others in sub-contracting and provision of services. The internet and mobile phones which have eased social networking have created a "global civil society",⁶ also termed "activists beyond borders".⁷ But despite much hyperbole about de-territorialisation, most NGOs still operate primarily in a national context in developing countries.⁸ Besides being a key strategic group in civil society, NGOs are also a chief advocate of this concept itself. Seeing themselves as "inclusive, vigilant, and progressive social forces in cooperative and oppositional relationships with the state and the market," civil society has become a popular way for them to frame their own activities.⁹ As part of the "professionalization" of civil society, much organizing and mobilizing has been undertaken (and taken over) by NGOs rather than more spontaneous organizations and protests of the past, on the one hand, and well-organized, highly ideological social movements, on the other.

But particularly the literature on civil society in India has stressed the limits of an NGO-centred understanding of civil society. It acknowledges that "the rise of NGOs has brought a qualitatively different way of doing things: campaigns rather than social movements, lobbying government officials rather than politicizing the population, working through networks rather than civic activism, and a high degree of reliance on the media and judiciary rather than on direct action".¹⁰ However, it would be misleading to overlook other key "strategic groups" operating in the intermediate sphere between the state and the market.

Ethno-religious groups often have restricted and discriminatory bases for joining which violates the NGO-principle of open, secular, and non-discriminatory membership criteria. These exclusionary groups put forth group-specific demands. In Putnam's terms¹¹ they rely on in-group, "bonding" social capital, rather than cross-cutting, "bridging" forms. They often fan the flames of intolerance rather than dousing the fires of hatred.

Yet Susan Randolph¹² has argued that such groups can only be excluded from civil society at the cost of a broader understanding of the intermediary sphere as an arena of conflict and cooperation. It is misleading to brand them "involuntary organizations" as ethno-religious identities are constructed and selected, making them "the product of intention and cultural construction as much as birth." While many groups have agendas that are "modified and brought into line with other agendas that strive for democratization of the general social and economic order," other groups single-mindedly pursue projects at the expense of others, such as Hindu nationalist religious right groups like the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS, the National Self-Service Alliance) in India. Though termed "bad civil society",¹³ they should still not be excluded from the concept of civil society altogether. Because such groups claim to represent particularly cultural identities and often provide social services (such as in moments of national disaster), they may earn a great deal of trust among the population. Therefore, "the only way in which uncivil organizations and their undemocratic agendas can be neutralized is through contestation in civil society itself".¹⁴

Democratizing civil society

This is the category of civil society most celebrated in many recent discussions.¹⁵ Articulated by Eastern European dissidents in the 1970s and 1980s, the "revolt of civil society against the state" became the rallying cry the 1989-91 anti-communist revolutions.¹⁶ Reacting against an intrusive state that monopolized not just politics but also the economy while trespassing into private life, oppositionists in Eastern Europe strove for what the West already had: political freedom, free markets, and personal autonomy. Civil liberties would protect against arbitrary state interference in citizens' lives by a despotic communist state. The only legitimate role of the state "was to defend the institutional bases of a depoliticized, independent, pluralist, and self-organizing civil society".¹⁷

Hannah Arendt's theory of political revolution helps elucidate the philosophical foundations of democratizing civil society in Eastern Europe, Latin America and elsewhere. Arendt saw a "republican" moment in revolutions that "re-creates the classical model of the public".¹⁸ In *On Revolution* (1963/1990) Arendt contended that political revolutions that strive for liberty against tyranny foster the rise of citizen participation, political pluralism, and democratic rule.¹⁹

The “social question” (discussed more below) was largely absent from Eastern European dissidents’ democratizing narrative in part because they rejected it as a socialist utopia but also due to the relative equality of Eastern European societies – including a virtually equal decline in all people’s living standards as economic performance lagged. The combination of relatively egalitarian wealth distribution and political oppression had a “homogenization” effect: an undifferentiated society directed its anger at the top leaders of the party-state seen to be repressive and responsible for uniformly declining living standards.²⁰

Havel spoke of dissidents “living within the truth” while much of society, fearful of regime repression, “lived a lie”.²¹ Western journalists, who scoffed at the small number of oppositionists in most Eastern European countries, were upbraided by dissidents who claimed to merely saying out loud what all others were thinking in secret.²² These claims proved to be prophetic as millions turned out for mass protests in 1989 that had seemed unthinkable even a few months earlier. In Latin America, military regimes faced similar legitimacy crises. This helps explain why democratizing civil society often emerged suddenly, largely spontaneously, cutting across class and sometimes even ethnic lines to overthrow despotic regimes in largely non-violent “democratic revolutions” in Eastern Europe and Asia²³ as well as Africa.²⁴

The character of democratizing civil society also helps elucidate why it has often involved broad alliances, sometimes between otherwise ideologically opposed groups. In the Arab Spring, largely secular and social well-networked NGO’s opposed aging dictators alongside Islamist groups. In Indonesia, there was a similar secular-nationalist, Islamist alliance against the Suharto regime. Social revolutionary groups played a key part in democratic movements in many recent transitions such as Nepal where Maoists recently formed a government after parliamentary elections. In Latin America, civil society became the “political celebrity” of anti-authoritarian movements by emphasizing societal opposition to the state and unity among otherwise disparate opposition groups.²⁵ These alliances are in many cases temporary, with civil society groups going separate ways in the post-transition situation, from secular to traditionalist, from participatory to more elitist.

Given the economic failures, ideological hollowing out, and faltering repressive apparatuses, non-democratic rule proved particularly vulnerable to anti-despotic civil society during the “third wave” of democratization.²⁶ The most recent addition to the long list of regions that have undergone substantial democratization is North Africa and much of the Middle East during the Arab “Spring” of 2011 (which as of this writing is still on-going in Egypt and Syria). Here too it was less the rise of a middle class demanding democracy than it was authoritarian Arab regimes’ arbitrary repression, financial crises, and loss of

legitimacy that was crucial in explaining popular uprisings. Goldstone²⁷ argues that it was the primarily “sultanistic character” of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt - extreme personalism, arbitrary rule and irresponsible economic management - that are the key to explaining why revolutions occurred there.

Social revolutionary or populist civil society

Hannah Arendt has influentially argued that the dominant model of revolution since Marx (who in turn claimed to be interpreting the “inevitable” course of the French revolution) has been a preliminary political stage followed by a culminating social one. As revolutions have generally occurred in poor countries, the achievement of political equality has led the spotlight to be turned on the existence of widespread poverty. Civil liberties seemed to pale into insignificance as the “Rights of Men” were transformed into the “rights of the Sans-Culottes” with freedom being abdicated in the “face of necessity”.²⁸ If in a condition of regime tyranny, political rights came to the forefront, the overthrow of a tyrant merely uncovered another, graver injustice: the exploitation of the workers by the capitalists (be this within a liberal democratic framework or not). This, Arendt argues, is why “social question” has often become the dominant concern of “professional revolutionaries” and the masses they have mobilized by the hundreds of millions in the Russian, Mexican, Chinese, Cuban, and Nicaraguan revolutions. But the civil society literature has generally ignored social revolutions. Because social revolutionaries often employed violence in the course of their revolutionary struggles and as they later founded regimes that were highly totalitarian or at least had totalitarian tendencies - largely destroying autonomous civil society in the attempt to turn societal groups into “transmission belts” as Stalin termed it - they have been seen to place themselves outside the realm of civil society. Moreover, social revolutionaries often propagated anti-individualist, collectivist ideologies, challenging liberal democracy in the name of a higher socialist good. Even with the collapse of Soviet communism and the rise of “market-Leninism” in China, this social revolutionary trajectory persists. Major Maoist movements can be found in Nepal, India, the Philippines and, until recently, in Peru.²⁹

It has also been plausibly argued that in recent times many social revolutionaries have been Islamists. Although considered an insult by Marxists who think of the fight for social justice as secular and universalist, supposedly “medieval” fundamentalist movements are actually modern ones strongly influenced by Western models committed to extensive social revolutionary change.³⁰ The Iranian revolution of 1979 is generally considered the last great social revolution to date.³¹

To what extent do social revolutionary movements involve civil society? Since Maoist and Islamist movements commonly rely on violence and terror to achieve their aims,

they are of course ruled out categorically by authors who define civil society in terms of non-violence.³² But is this definition by slight-of-hand reasonable? Social revolutions are the products of “mass movements”. Maoist and Islamist parties, though sometimes resorting to terror to keep their own followers in line, often enjoy genuine and enthusiastic support from the masses. These movements involve not just tens of thousands of revolutionary soldiers, but millions of civilians organized in “front organizations” of various sorts (peasants, women’s groups, student activists, etc.) supporting the insurgency mostly out of conviction. From a liberal democratic perspective their goals may not be admirable, resulting as they often have in new forms of tyranny, in the Soviet Union or China, on the one hand, or in Iran and Afghanistan under the Taliban, on the other. But mobilizing civil society has been the key to the success of their revolutionary effort.

Gramsci articulated a theory of “counter hegemony” in civil society to aid socialist revolution. But Gramsci was a famous theorist, not a successful revolutionary. In this sense, social revolutionary civil society is better characterized as “Leninist”. Lenin famously articulated his theory of vanguardism in his 1901/02 tract “What is to be Done”. He questioned whether the masses would spontaneously seek revolution. Instead, unions would be confined to “trade union consciousness”, reformism involving efforts to improve the wages and working conditions of the workers without fundamentally transforming society. For Lenin, the revolution could only be led by a disciplined party properly schooled in Marxism. With its higher level of consciousness, it could lead a social revolution. The great Islamist theorist Sayyid Qutb articulated a similar vision for a small, dedicated group needed to bring about a rebirth of Islam. As Berman³³ writes:

“Islam’s champions seem to be few, but numbers were nothing to worry about. The few had to gather themselves together into what Qutb in Milestones called a ‘vanguard,’ by which he meant a tiny group animated by the valiant spirit of Muhammad and his Companions at the dawn of Islam. The vanguard had to undertake the renovation of Islam and of civilization all over the world. The way to begin was to live an Islamic life themselves – by following the precepts of Islam and by holding themselves aloof from the wider society and its heathen customs. The vanguard had to form a kind of Islamic counterculture – a mini-society where true Muslims could be themselves”.³⁴

Whether Marxist or Islamist vanguards, revolutionary activists aimed to mobilize the masses in the cause of social justice and/or religious purity. Civil society may have been reduced to the object of the revolution by the revolutionaries, but it was still decisive for them to find the “proper” ways to mobilize it. Although the heyday of social revolution - both Maoist and Islamist - appears to have passed, it was once one of the most significant forms of civil society.

In much of the contemporary world, however, social revolutionaries have been displaced by “business” or “left” populists. The decline of left-wing Marxist movements worldwide since the fall of communism in Eastern Europe meant that would-be populist politicians enjoyed a large political space in which to launch bids to woo the “unorganized masses.”

Despite being an inexact, slippery and impressionistic political narrative, one common feature of populism is that “the people” — simple but good — are contrasted with the elite — privileged and greedy.³⁵ This does not mean, however, that “populism” actually involves the rule of the people. Leading “populist” politicians have often been elites, albeit political outsiders and “black sheep” in terms of social habitus in the Bourdieuan sense. Populist politicians once relied upon organized labour (for example, Peron in Argentina in the 1940s and 1950s). But “labour” populism has been in decline, with more recent populists drawing support from large informal sectors of the urban poor and marginalized rural populations. Recently, there have been “business” populists in Peru (Fujimori) or Thailand (Thaksin) but also “leftist” populists such as in Venezuela (Chavez) or Bolivia (Morales).³⁶ While the latter have undertaken transformative economic programmes that have made major changes to the economy, business populists usually made only perfunctory alliances with NGO-activists while their more important allies were their business cronies. But while often pursuing neo-liberal economic programmes they have still enjoyed large followings in the “informal sector” of the urban poor and marginalized rural population.

Despite important differences between “labour”, “leftist”, and “business” populism, they share a common attitude toward civil society which can, in a potted version, be referred to as “Peronist”. Populist civil society in this sense is about the inclusion of previously excluded “popular” sectors. But this inclusionary stance does not stop at liberal notions of citizenship that focus on political rights. Populism redefines citizenship to include social identities usually based on class, but also including ethnic, regional and even religious identification (a combination one sees in current Bolivian populism, for example). As Daniel James³⁷ argues, Peron was able to “recast the whole notion of citizenship within a new social context ... Citizenship was not defined simply in terms of individual rights and relations within political society any longer, but was now defined in terms of the economic and social realms of civil society.” This put the project of “social justice” at the forefront of the effort to mobilize the down and out “popular sectors” of civil society. Political identities were enlarged by giving them social scope.³⁸ Metaphors of war were employed to dramatize social divisions (a strategy which Gramsci has also used in his metaphor of the “war of position” progressives needed to wage against the “bourgeois” state and its societal supporters). This turned politics into a battlefield between supporters of “the people” and defenders

of the established order (I return to this point with the discussion of “elitist” civil society below). This explained the extreme polarization that even “business” populists who did not challenge prevailing macroeconomic policies (such as Thailand’s Thaksin or the Philippines’ Estrada) but nonetheless have provoked harsh reactions from traditional elites and their often “progressive” civil society supporters. Populist civil society, like its “Leninist” predecessor, assumes that the masses require a vanguard, albeit elected politicians rather than secretive revolutionaries. The “civil society” they mobilize is transgressive not just against the political regime, but also the social structures that underpin it. Like revolutionaries of the past, populists mobilize around class and other social cleavages in their battle against “corrupt elites”.

Citizenship-based civil society

Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed classical liberalism could not explain how human beings become fully human in civil society.³⁹ Liberal theories of John Locke or Adam Smith were not up to the task as civil society is much more than merely the sum of the advantages it offers to individuals. Civil society is a moral association of people who together participate in the political life of the community. An “updated” Rousseauian perspective might suggest that liberal democracy is not a sufficient condition for the flourishing of civil society, as it only ensures the protection of individual rights and interests, not a universalist orientation of what is best for the community. Rousseau’s critique of political factions and personal dependence is taken up by his contemporary followers in their attacks on clientelist networks and ethno-religious discrimination. But just as Rousseau argued that such a community can best be realized on a small scale, so his contemporary followers tend to focus on the local level.

What relevance is this to our understanding of civil society? NGO groups promoting economic and social development often take what can be considered a “Rousseauian” orientation. They pursue what can be called citizenship strategies, weaning the poor and oppressed from clientelist ties and ethno-religious identities that reinforce such backwardness.⁴⁰ A recent study of local civil society in India points to the difficulties that “NGOs, social movements, community groups, religious organizations, and advocacy networks” seen as “inclusive, vigilant, and progressive social forces” confront in their efforts to foster citizenship.⁴¹ They face a complex reality:

“Not all actors involved in civil society share a particular normative vision, nor do they all follow progressive ideologies or methods. The organisations investigated in this study range from well-funded formal organisations, to part-time collectives, to ethnonationalist organisations with close ties to insurgent groups. Many of these organisations do not appear

in analytical frameworks... Yet these organisations all have an impact on which issues are contested and politicized in civil society and who participates in politics, and thus a more complex understanding of the aims and types of organisations existing in local contexts is vital".⁴²

Exclusionary aspects of local civil society must be recognized. These can constrain and marginalize the underprivileged. This form of exclusion is usually hidden not just behind dominant ideologies but away from national politics in localities where there is little political transparency or social justice.⁴³ Such constraints lead Fox⁴⁴ to argue that limiting ones view of democracy to "classic procedural terms" misses "another necessary condition for democratization: respect for associational autonomy, which allows citizens to organize in defence of their own interests and identities without fear of external intervention or punishment." Fox asks "how regimes begin to accept the right of citizens to pursue their goals autonomously" which will allow "subordinated people make the transition from clients to citizens?".⁴⁵ The key is that that "representative societal organizations" come to be accepted "as legitimate interlocutors." The result is that "poor people gain access to whatever material resources the state has to offer without having to forfeit their right to articulate their interests autonomously" as is the case with clientelism. Clientelism relies on "material inducements" by local elites supported by national politicians in interlocking networks to "enforce compliance" and "punish noncompliance" among subaltern clients to maintain their dependency of local "strongmen" patrons. This is particularly obvious in places where "violent electoral machines" reign in the backward areas of a society, such as in Mexico, the Philippines, Colombia, and Brazil in the 1980s. But it is even, at least partially, the case in "semi-clientelist" contexts in which there is much less reliance on force and much more on material inducements to maintain clientelist networks that stretch from the local to national levels. But even here the ideals of pluralism based on organizational autonomy go unfilled.⁴⁶ This "citizenship" project of breaking clientelist stranglehold on poor voters has moved to the centre of NGO agendas in Mexico and, Fox suggests, in many other developing countries as well. Citizenship can be achieved when clientelist chains have been thrown off, with local elites forced to accept the organizational autonomy of their once subordinated clients.

Thus, while "democratizing civil society" may have succeeded at the national level, the deepening of democracy to include real citizenship for the disadvantaged has often been defeated locally due to a combination of clientelist networks and "bad" ethno-religious civil societal groups. Thus, the "Rousseauian" efforts of many NGOs in developing countries face significant obstacles. Successful NGO "citizenship" projects can thus be seen as highly transgressive against formally democratic states still dependent on discriminatory religious categories and widespread clientelist networks to maintain political control.

Civic-minded civil society

Robert Putnam's influential book *Making Democracy Work* stresses "civicness," or a sense of civic community, which is based on a "dense network of secondary associations".⁴⁷ Such a civic mindedness is distinguished by its "active, public-spirited citizenry, by egalitarian social relations, by a fabric of trust and cooperation".⁴⁸ By offering an invidious (and stereotypical) comparison of northern and southern Italy based on 1970 reforms which devolved substantial power to newly created regional governing bodies, he claims to show that "social capital" is stronger in the north than in the south of Italy. Putnam's argument can also be interpreted as a comparison of "modern", civil societally strong northern Italy versus the "backward" society of southern Italy, a kind of Banfieldian "amoral familism"⁴⁹ redux. Modern civil society "bridges" social cleavages, building strong ties that "make democracy work." Backward civil societies build up at most clientelist bonds within ascriptive groups, weakening democratic governance.

Putnam's argument bears a certain resemblance to "Rousseauian" civil society. As we have seen above, clientelist pyramids extending from a corrupted national state down to localities have been used to cow the poor, subordinating them to the wills of local strongmen. Putnam's "social capital" represents the happy ending that results from the decline of clientelism and emergent citizenship in a cooperative relationship with the state. If clientelism primarily involves "bonding"-social capital, citizenship is an expression of its "bridging" capabilities. In this context, Putnam's argument has also been adapted to explain why sectarian violence does or does not occur in different parts of India. Ashutosh Varshney has argued⁵⁰ that where contacts have been made and ties established across ethno-religious communities, tensions have moderated and violence pre-empted. By contrast, where such "bridging"-social capital is lacking, communal violence has been much more frequent. As plausible as the argument appears, it understates the importance of right wing religious extremists in fomenting violence. Recent research suggests the RSS, the National Self-Service Alliance has worked tirelessly to instill hatred among majority Hindus toward the Muslim minority.⁵¹ Yet, the goal of inclusive and tolerant citizenship remains a key one for "progressive," Putnamian civil society.

One final point about Putnam's "civic minded"-civil society argument needs to be considered. What is the relationship between the grassroots where social capital is incubated and the organizational level where civil society is said to be hatched? Some authors⁵² attempt to distinguish Putnam's "social capital"⁵³ from "civil society" itself. The latter is a "higher unit" of analysis that "comprises those organizations that complement (and contextualize) states and markets" while social capital involves the "norms and networks" that allow people to act collectively. Besides unnecessarily complicating the idea of an "intermediary"

or “third” sphere between the state and the marketplace, such a distinction obscures the fact that the very social capital people at the “grass roots” are said to acquire is done so within “civil society” organizations and not as isolated individuals.

Nonetheless, the relationship between the “grassroots” and organizational level of civil society has run through much of the discussion of the supposed decline of social capital in the West (and particularly in the U.S.) and its previously unrecognized strength outside the West (a commonly cited example is Japan). While in the U.S. policy-oriented advocacy groups have proliferated, Putnam⁵⁴ claims civic engagement itself is in decline. Membership of special interest groups may be high on paper (such as of gun ownership associations or environmental groups), but the extent of actual citizen involvement in these causes has generally fallen precipitously. One adverse impact of this trend, aside from a general decline in the quality of “citizen engagement”, has been that debates about national policy in the U.S. have been largely handed over to representatives of (unrepresentative) political interest groups. The proliferation of advocacy groups has not made civil society healthier, but more anaemic. Putnam⁵⁵ worried that while “Americans at the political poles are more engaged in civil life...moderates have tended to drop out.” Such “civil disengagement” in the U.S. by the political centre is a “frightening price to pay and could (!) lead to highly polarized debates without compromise”.⁵⁶ Japan, by contrast, once seen as a place where civil society is obscured behind by the long shadow of a strong state, now looks like a promising alternative. Robert Pekkanen⁵⁷ argues that it has “an abundance of small local groups and a striking dearth of large independent advocacy groups”. This allows social capital to be generated locally without unnecessarily polarizing the national debate. Brad Williams, in a study of irredentist movements in northern Japan, adds a cautionary note, however. He finds that even at the local level Japanese civic groups “designed to aggregate and articulate local interests” are increasingly “finding themselves less representative of public opinion” as they become “bureaucratized and closely linked to the state”.⁵⁸ This suggests Pekkanen’s argument about “grassroots without advocacy” in Japan may be too simplistic, as the grassroots continues to lack even a voice locally with civic groups there also co-opted by the state. A compromise (if bland) position would be to say that a well-functioning civil society requires both policy-based advocacy (holding national politicians accountable beyond elections) and grassroots civic mindedness (without which “bridging” of extreme positions is less likely). Reality is, as usual messy, with deficits in both advocacy and local civic groups all too evident even in two of the richest countries in the world, the U.S. and Japan. It shows that even in “advanced” societies, civil society and civic-mindedness remain a goal rather than an accomplishment. Nonetheless, with all its flaws, both policy advocates and grass roots activists do in many ways help make democracy work better, if still not particularly

well.

Elitist civil society

Gramsci famously shifted Marxism's primary focus on the "bourgeois" state to the societal norms and institutions as the key supports of the capitalist system. Bourgeois political rule was not merely based on force, but also relied on the manipulation of culture justified by a hegemonic ideology ensuring that capitalism was accepted across the class lines. With his emphasis on civil society, Gramsci could plausibly explain the failure of social revolution in Italy and most of Western and Eastern Europe despite World War, financial crisis, working class rebellions, and the defections of many intellectuals to the socialist side.⁵⁹ But like theories of "social revolutionary" civil society discussed above, the decline of anti-capitalist Marxist insurgencies - as well as Islamist movements trying to topple secular governments in Muslim countries - seems to have diminished the relevance of Gramsci's analysis. But Gramsci's thoughts on civil society have recently enjoyed a renaissance in explaining elite reactions to electoral populist movements (also discussed above). Although no longer facing an armed challenge, elite groups have reacted not just with coups and other forms of violence against such populist challengers, but have also tried to mobilize "civil society" in defence of the status quo.

Somchai Phatharathananunth⁶⁰ has coined the term "elitist civil society" to characterize ideas that emerged from a reformist movement in Thailand in the 1990s.⁶¹ It was based on a paternalist ideology espoused by Prawase Wasi and other prominent public intellectuals in Thailand who were at the heart of the "royal liberalism" in Thailand: a moderate wing among the key elites in the Thai establishment made up of the King, the military and leading businessmen with close ties to both.⁶² In the Thai context, "the elite civil society concept emphasizes cooperation between the state and social organizations" claiming that both "are components of 'civil society'".⁶³ Tellingly, such an "elitist" symbiotic view downplayed the importance of "civic mindedness" at the grass roots level. On the contrary, Prawase "believed that building civil society from below had no future in Thailand".⁶⁴ In part this was due to the defeat of the Thai communist party in the late 1970s.⁶⁵ But it was also because of an ideology of "partnership" in which, in order to avoid confrontation, Prawase proposed between the state, business, NGOs, local elite and intellectuals. In an effort to achieve "good governance," civil society should be led by "good" and "capable" elites in order to carry out necessary reforms. Problematically, this idea of an "enlightened" elite was assumed rather than proved. Conceived of paternalistically, civil society would make sure reforms of the status quo were gradual and done in cooperation with the state - despite the fact that the latter was plagued by overcentralism, clientelist networks, and bureaucratic

corruption!⁶⁶

Disillusioned, many NGO activists turned against these populist regimes.⁶⁷ They were supported by capitalists who felt disadvantaged by the regime's self-interested "entrepreneurship". Revelations by close friends turned enemies and major financial scandals were triggers that led to renewed mobilization by student and NGO activists backed by much of the big business community and by religious-moral figures such as Corazon C. Aquino or Chamlong Srimuang, respectively. Once employed against dictators, the elitist discourse of "good governance" now came to be directed against democratically elected leaders by big business, elite moral guardians, and their middle class supporters.⁶⁸ In Thailand, the military overthrow of Thaksin, backed by "tank" intellectual supporters, was criticized for being a "coup for the rich".⁶⁹ Military rule was weak and incompetent, leaving new elections as the only way out. After a pro-Thaksin successor party won at the polls (after his earlier populist party had been banned), "civil society" protests against Thaksin and his supporters were revived. In late May 2008, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) began daily protests broadcast 24/7 live on satellite TV, radio and the internet, a "grotesque mix of reality show and a political campaign" as Kasian Tejapira has aptly described it.⁷⁰ But when PAD protests failed to remove the PPP government during the summer of 2008, the group resorted to more radical action at the end of August, seizing the main government compound and the international airport. But it was not only the PAD's tactics which had radicalized. It abandoned any pretence of protesting to "save" democracy as it had claimed to do in its earlier campaign against Thaksin. They now called for a sweeping "new politics" which would involve an undemocratic restructuring of the political order, with 70% of the seats in parliament to be appointed. PAD leaders said openly and repeatedly said that "representative democracy is not suitable for Thailand".⁷¹

Eva-Lotta E. Hedman⁷² has argued that such counter-mobilization can best be understood in Gramscian terms as an attempt by a threatened elite to restore its hegemony. Challenged by elite but "outsider" populist politicians representing poor voters, royalists, the military, the urban elite and NGO activists in Thailand resorted to extra-constitutional measures to regain their predominance in the political system. Unable to win in the electoral arena, this elite used insurrectionary tactics instead.

Traditionalist civil society

In "elitist civil society" in the Thai context as well as in other developing countries (particularly in Latin America) where populist threats to an established national order emerged, the predominant cleavage dividing the camps was "class" (although also sometimes regionalism and ethnic differences, particularly between native Americans and

the descendants of white settlers in South American countries such as Bolivia). “Burkean” civil society, by contrast is in large part a reaction to efforts to “modernize” society, particular at the local level. By attacking clientelist forms of political authority and religious forms of legitimation, “citizenship”-oriented civil society makes enemies of those who back those authorities and appeal to these traditions.

Burke took Rousseau’s ideas and the results of the French revolution as his foil. In particular, Burke targeted well-intentioned but ultimately disastrous plans to “save humanity” in the name of universal citizenship. He saw democratic levellers of centuries of social and religious tradition as assaulting the very notion of civilization itself, which was something that slowly grew over the years like tree rings of customs, institutions, and practices.⁷³ Unlike the French, whose revolution caused untold damage in a short period to that country’s long history of civilization, the British had been wise enough to understand the value of history and custom, preserving them through the turmoil of the English Civil War and the “Glorious Revolution” which restored the monarchy, albeit with some evolutionary changes. Gradual transformation which preserved the best aspects of a country’s history and cultural traditions was also to be preferred over reckless revolutionary blueprints based on abstract principles.

A religious-based traditionalist civil society has emerged in Indonesia. Muslim leaders played a vital role in the country’s democratization. Different from Malaysia where some factions of the Islamist PAS opposition party had radicalized, key Islamic groups in Indonesia were characterized by their advocacy of “civil Islam”.⁷⁴ John Sidel⁷⁵ has offered a critique of this optimistic view of Muslim “reformers-as-democrats” in Indonesia:

“In the Indonesia of the 1990s, after all, the struggle of ‘reformist’ Muslims was a struggle fought largely through, within, and for the New Order state... In this struggle, the enemy was not so much Suharto himself but rather the ageing dictator’s children, whose advantages in the contest over power, wealth, and the impending presidential succession were increasingly experienced – and resented – as a glass ceiling confining urban Muslim middle-class interests and aspirations. In the end, the call for Reformasi was indeed a call by modernist Muslims for the removal of Suharto, precisely when members of his family were poised to seize control of the armed forces, Golkar, and the cabinet, and, not coincidentally, when ICMI chief Habibie was installed as vice-president... The call for Reformasi should thus not be mistaken for a struggle for democracy or support for the broader process of democratization. Many urban middle-class modernist Muslims, including some of the ‘Muslim democrats’ lionized by Hefner, saw this as an opportunity to create a new regime of more Islamic but still authoritarian foundations.”

Sidel’s critique may seem harsh, particularly a decade later when Indonesian

democracy appears to have consolidated, albeit at the price of its “quality” which is considered by many analysts to be low,⁷⁶ or even “defective”.⁷⁷ This is due to the persistence of clientelist networks and systematic government corruption, which offends those hoping for a deepening of citizenship in the “Rousseauian” sense discussed above. But it also falls short of Putnam’s notion of “bridging” social capital. Many observers have commented upon the implementation of Shariah law in many regions of Indonesia. Muslim “democrats” in Hefner’s telling of the tale of transition have, in many cases, become advocates of restoring traditions neglected or even suppressed under Suharto’s military rule. As this regionally-based legislation related to religious teaching - which “in some instances curtails the democratic freedoms of citizens” – has spread across the Indonesian archipelago, scholars have pondered whether it is “an anomaly” or an exception in Indonesia’s otherwise remarkable process of democratic consolidation.⁷⁸ While the formalization of Islamic law has been rejected on a number of occasions at the national level, local initiatives have pushed through such legislation in local politics. Interestingly, the debate at the level of civil society was less often between Muslims and non-Muslims but among Muslims themselves (Bush 2008). A transgressive civil society movement that removed the Suharto regime is now (roughly speaking) divided between “nationalist”, secular-oriented parties hoping to keep the state out of religion (including a traditionalist Muslim party, Nahdlatul Ulama) and their “Islamist” opponents who want to use state power to legislate Muslim law, if not on the national at least the local level. This Burkean defence of Muslim tradition in the face of perceived secularist “threats” to Islam in Indonesia is a classic example of civil societies in conflict.⁷⁹

Conclusion

This paper, using examples from Asia and beyond, has been a preliminary effort to distinguish various conceptualizations of civil society based upon differing views about what democracy is (or should be). Amongst “transgressive” forms of civil society, much recent literature has focused on “democratizing” civil society based on the liberal democratic view that condemns political despotism and urges popular participation to overthrow non-democratic regimes. But social revolutionary/populist interpretations of civil society instead put class injustice at the centre of their concerns. They ask what is the use of political freedom in the midst of profound social equality that characterizes life in many developing countries. Still another kind of opposition-based civil society stresses an understanding of democracy-as-participation and identifies the chief problem as ethno-religious (including gender) exclusion and clientelist ties that foster dependency. Here NGO-led civil societal activists pursue, often at the local level, what can be termed “citizenship” strategies in

order to teach the oppressed their rights and help them break out of exploitative ties. In symbiotic civil society, by contrast, the relationship with the state is no longer seen as a negative but positive sum one, where both sides profit from mutually beneficial ties. This cooperative form of civil society may be found within a modern liberal democracy in which civil societal social capital contributes to the effectiveness of the democratic system's operation. Alternatively, however, particularly in democracies in less developed countries with strong class cleavages, an "elitist" civil society may side with a weak state confronted by pro-poor groups, parties or leaders demanding or promising social improvements for the disadvantaged. Finally, "neo-traditionalists" may call upon the state to defend older cultural norms against perceived threats emanating from modernity. Rather than conceptualizing a single, normatively homogenous civil society, differentiating ideological streams within it based on varying views about relationship with the state and the nature of democracy enhances the analytical usefulness of this important social science concept.

Differentiating types of "democratic" civil society thus helps us understand why civil society may on some occasions appear part of the classic liberal democratic agenda of introducing civil liberties and then "making them work" in a consolidated democracy. In other contexts, however, particularly in developing countries facing grave social inequalities, such formal democratic institutions may seem superficial compared to deep social divides in society. While secularist NGOs attempt to modernize society - targeting clientelist networks and religious-based discrimination - traditionalists may try to defend both. Rather than conceptualizing a single, normatively homogenous civil society, differentiating ideological streams within it based on varying views about the nature of democracy enhances the analytical usefulness of this important concept.

NOTES

- 1 e.g. Mark E. Warren, "Civil Society and Democracy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*, ed. Michael Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Mark Warren, *Democracy and Association* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Muthiah Alagappa, ed. *Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Alfred Stepan, *Arguing Comparative Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chaps. 3-4; John Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society: On the Predicaments of European Socialism, the Prospects for Democracy, and the Problem of Controlling Social and Political Power*, rev. ed. (London: University of Westminster Press, 1998); *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998); Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton: Nova Science Publishers, 1993).
- 2 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 6.

- 3 Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).
- 4 David Held, *Models of Democracy*, 3rd ed. ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), chap. 5
- 5 Duncan McDuie-Ra, *Civil Society, Democratization and the Search for Human Security: The Politics of the Environment, Gender and Identity in Northeast India* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009), 75
- 6 John Keane, *Global civil society?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- 7 Margart E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, eds (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).
- 8 McDuie-Ra, *Civil Society*, 17.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 10 Neera Chandhoke, "Civil Society in India," in *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*, ed. Michael Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 175.
- 11 Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- 12 Susan Randolph, "Civil Society and the Realm of Freedom," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2000): 1767, quoted in Neera Chandhoke, "Civil Society in India," 177.
- 13 Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein, "Bad Civil Society," *Political Theory* 29, no. 6 (2001): 837-65.
- 14 Chandhoke, "Civil Society in India," 178-9.
- 15 Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society*; Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1992) and, more critically, John Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999), chap. 7
- 16 Ehrenberg, *Civil society: The Critical History of an Idea*, 173.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 193.
- 18 Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 183.
- 19 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1963/1990).
- 20 Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 21 Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," in *The Power of the Powerless (Routledge Revivals): Citizens Against the State in Central-eastern Europe*, ed. Václav Havel and John Keane (Abingdon, OX: Taylor & Francis, 1985/2009).
- 22 Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague*, 1st Vintage books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).
- 23 Mark R. Thompson, *Democratic Revolutions: Asia and Eastern Europe*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).
- 24 Peter J. Schraeder, "Understanding the "Third Wave" of Democratization in Africa," *The Journal of Politics* 57, no. 4 (1995).
- 25 Stepan, *Arguing comparative politics*, 101-2.
- 26 Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*.
- 27 Jack A. Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (2011); also see H. E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, *Sultanistic regimes* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
- 28 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 61.
- 29 Thomas A. Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (London: Frank Cass, 1996).

- 30 Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003); John Gray, *Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern* (London: Faber, 2003).
- 31 Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 32 Keane, *Civil Society*; Jenny Pearce, "Civil Society and Peace," in *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*, ed. Michael Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 33 Berman, *Terror and liberalism*, 93.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Margaret Canovan, "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy," *Political Studies* 47 (1999); Paul A. Taggart, *Populism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000).
- 36 Kenneth M. Roberts, "Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America: The Peruvian Case," *World Politics* 48 (1995); Kurt Weyland, "Neopopulism and Neoliberalism in Latin America: Unexpected Affinities," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 31, no. 3 (1996); Phongpaichit Pasuk and Chris Baker, "'Business Populism' in Thailand," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 2 (2005).
- 37 Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), quoted in Sebastian Barros and Gustavo Castagnola, "The Political Frontier of the Social: Argentine Politics after Peronist Populism (1955-73)," in *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change*, ed. David R. Howarth, Aletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 29.
- 38 Barros and Castagnola, "The Political Frontier of the Social," 29.
- 39 Ehrenberg, *Civil society: The Critical History of an Idea*, 153.
- 40 Jonathan Fox, "The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Mexico," *World Politics* 46, no. 2 (1994).
- 41 McDuie-Ra, *Civil Society*, 16.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid., 23.
- 44 Fox, "The Difficult Transition," 151-2.
- 45 Ibid., 152-3.
- 46 Ibid., 157-8.
- 47 Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 376.
- 48 Ibid., 15.
- 49 Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958).
- 50 Ashutosh Varshney, *Conflict and Civil Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
- 51 Neera Chandhoke, "Civil Society in Conflict Cities," *Economic and Political Weekly* 31 (2011); "Civil Society in India."
- 52 most recently Michael Woolcock, "Civil Society and Social Capital," in *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*, ed. Michael Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 53 which actually draws on James Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1988).
- 54 Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2000).

- 55 Ibid., 342., quoted in Robert Pekkanen, "Japan: Social Capital without Advocacy," in *Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 245.
- 56 Pekkanen, "Japan: Social Capital without Advocacy," 245.
- 57 Ibid., 224.
- 58 Brad Williams, "Dissent on Japan's Northern Periphery: Nemuro, the Northern Territories and the Limits of Change in a 'Bureaucrat's Movement'," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 11, no. 2 (2010): 242-3.
- 59 Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea*, 208.
- 60 Somchai Phatharathananunth, *Civil Society and Democratization: Social Movements in Northeast Thailand*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies monograph series 99 (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2006), chap. 1
- 61 My thanks go to Federico Ferrara for suggesting the relevance of Somchai's concept in this context.
- 62 Michael K. Connors, "Article of Faith: The Failure of Royal Liberalism in Thailand," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1, (February 2008): 143-65.
- 63 Phatharathananunth, *Civil Society and Democratization*, 7.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Marks, *Maoist Insurgency*, chap. 1
- 66 Phatharathananunth, *Civil Society and Democratization*, 7-9.
- 67 Ben Reid, "Development NGOs, Semiclientelism, and the State in the Philippines: From "Crossover" to Double-crossed," *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 23, no. 1 (2008).
- 68 Mark R. Thompson, "People Power Sours: Uncivil Society in Thailand and the Philippines," *Current History* 107, no. 712 (2008).
- 69 Ungpakorn Ji, *A Coup for the Rich: Thailand's Political Crisis* (Bangkok: Workers Democracy Pub. : Distributed by Chulalongkorn University Bookshop, 2007).
- 70 Kasian Techapira, "Kasian Techapira on the PAD's 'general uprising'," <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:OVQBm3eYo9wJ:www.prachatai.com/english/node/789&hl=en&strip=1>.
- 71 Thompson, "People Power Sours."
- 72 Eva-Lotta E. Hedman, *In the Name of Civil Society: From Free Election Movements to People Power in the Philippines* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).
- 73 Ehrenberg, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea*, 157.
- 74 Robert Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Anders Uhlin, *Indonesia and the "Third Wave" of Democratization* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997). For a more optimistic view of PAS see William Case and Chin-tong Liew, "How Committed is PAS to Democracy and How Do We Know It?," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 28, no. 3 (2006).
- 75 John T. Sidel, "It Takes a Madrasah?: Habermas meets Bourdieu in Indonesia," *South East Asia Research* 9, no. 1 (2001).
- 76 Douglas Webber, "A Consolidated Patrimonial Democracy? Democratization in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Democratization* 13, no. 3 (2006).
- 77 Bob Sugeng Hadiwinata and Christoph Schuck, *Democracy in Indonesia: The Challenge of Consolidation*, eds. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2007).

- 78 Robin Bush, "Regional Sharia Regulations in Indonesia: Anomaly or Symptom?," in *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, eds. Greg Fealy and Sally White (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008).
- 79 Another important potential case of this phenomenon is the Arab world after its democratic spring. As of this writing, well organized Islamist parties with broad support in civil society in Egypt and elsewhere are posed to do well in elections scheduled to be held soon. Given their ideological pronouncements, they also appear likely to use the new democratic framework to implement Muslim law in a similar "neo-Burkean" spirit.

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