Debunking Civil Society in Zimbabwe and 'Most of the World'

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Introduction

Until the so-called 'Arab Spring,' the one African country with arguably the most international visibility was Zimbabwe. This was due mainly to its radical land redistribution programme – 'fast track' – which began in the year 2000. Post-fast track Zimbabwe continues to be marked by polarising social conflicts and, over the past decade, Zimbabwean studies have been characterised by acrimonious debates about agrarian transformation and political change. This has brought to the fore important questions about the significance (and indeed very existence) of civil society as a social phenomenon in contemporary Zimbabwe, as well as raising key concerns about the conceptual framing of civil society under its specific socio-historical conditions.

This paper re-visits the notion of civil society in what Partha Chatterjee (2004) calls 'most of the world' (beyond the capitalist metropoles) and, in so doing, uses Zimbabwe (and Africa more broadly) as an entry point into the literature on civil society. The chapter consists of four main sections. First, I discuss literature on civil society in Africa which, in the main, dichotomises civil society and the state empirically without any sustained theoretical reflections. Second, I provide an overview of Zimbabwean society and politics over the past decade and the ensuing debate, which in many ways produces a Manichean dualism whereby civil society is equated with progression and the state with regression. Third, I locate this conceptualisation of civil society within the broader international literature on civil society. These three sections, as a whole, highlight slippages in defining and understanding civil society: between civil society as a set of empirically-identifiable organisational formations and civil society as a social space marked by civil liberties and voluntary arrangements in bourgeois society. Finally, I re-imagine civil society in relation to 'most of the world'.

Civil Society in Africa

Many discussions of civil society and the state in contemporary Africa are rooted historically in the notion of a wave of democratization sweeping across large swathes of the continent (at least sub-Saharan Africa) from the late 1980s, notably with the rise of multi-party states in the face of seemingly intransigent authoritarian developmental states (AACC and MWENGO eds. 1993). The literature is replete with references to the role of civil society (typically understood in an organisational sense and concomitantly reduced to non-membership intermediary Non-Governmental Organisations or NGOs) as an instrument in the process of social and political democratization. Hence, there is talk about a 'revitalised' civil society 'flexing its muscles' (Zack-Williams 2001, pp. 217, 218) or the 'rebirth of civil society' (Monga 1996, p.10), and about a 'rich network of civil society structures' in southern Africa growing 'in strength and experience' (Molutsi 1999, p.188). As a predominant trend then, and particularly in the early literature on Africa, civil society is described in very glowing if not glorifying terms, such as the claim that it is 'now taken for granted that NGOs are probably the leading agents in the democratization process' (Nyang'oro 1999, p. 3). In this sense, civil society organisations are seen to represent the general or universal interest, while the state pursues its own partial and particularistic interests.

At times, though, the civil society literature had a critical edge to it. Some writers therefore were less likely to identify any fixed causal linkages between civil society and democracy, including Ndegwa (1996) and his argument about 'the two faces of civil society' (one progressive, one regressive) as captured in Kenyan case-studies. In this respect, 'civil society may be a significant reservoir of authoritarianism and anti-democratic values' (Okuku 2002, p. 83). A more telling critique, particularly given the conflation between civil society and NGOs, and the assertion that NGOs are built for (and ideal for) empowering local communities, is offered by the secretary of the NGO Coalition for Eastern Africa: '[T]he space for small community-based initiatives to promote voluntary action for local change is drowned out by the cacophony of large, policy-oriented, advocacy-pushing, service provision NGOs' (Jaffer 1997, p. 66). Hence, NGOs undercut democratic possibilities.

This Janus-faced conception of civil society was never articulated through theoretical reasoning of any significance. As a result, any specific instances of regression were not seen as inherent to the very existence and constitution of civil society, but rather simply as (historically-contingent) empirical exceptions which ultimately proved the rule of civil

society's democratising thrust in opposition to the state. The 'rebirth' of civil society accompanied the re-assertion of market forces (under conditions of neo-liberal restructuring) and, like explanations of market failure by modern-day neo-classical economists, civil society failure (in promoting democracy) arose in the main from corrupting intrusions emanating from outside civil society (often in the form of global donors, as discussed below). Cases of failure did not necessarily entail a critique of civil society *per se* as a site involving both social domination and conflict.

The literature focuses primarily on relations between civil society and the state such that the term 'civil society' is deployed instrumentally in a state-centric fashion as a (potential and real) force in democratizing the authoritarian and often neo-patrimonial African state (Chabal and Daloz 1999). Despite (if not because of) their often heavy-handed interventions against civil society, African states are depicted as 'vulnerable' (van de Walle 2002, p.76), 'weak and dependent' (Mandaza 1994, p. 269), and marked by 'institutional incapacity, bureaucratic inertia … and the inability … to initiate or implement policies' (Puplampu and Tettey 2000, p. 251). MWENGO (2000, p. 47), a regional NGO body for southern and east Africa, argues that NGOs themselves perceive the state 'as inefficient, ineffective and unable to make any meaningful contribution to … development initiatives'. The role of civil society in the context of state-driven and –sanctioned authoritarianism therefore is to build a modernising democratic state, with the case of Zambia and the struggles against Kenneth Kaunda's regime considered to be a prime example of this in practice.

In any later period of democratic consolidation, there are said to be potential synergies between state and civil society, with the latter seeking to engage the state in a constructive manner and, in so doing, contributing to the building of national democratic institutions and of organisational capacity for development (Whaites 1998). As Robinson (1994) puts it, 'if state capacity is weakened' for any reason, then 'there is a distinct possibility that NGO efforts to exert more influence over public policy and the allocation of public resources will be undermined'. Hence the needs exists 'to preserve the capacity of the state to determine the policy agenda and to formulate policy while being flexible and involving NGOs and interest groups in policy implementation and policy dialogue' (Robinson 1994, pp. 42-43). Civil society, as consisting of organisational formations, is considered crucial for preventing a return to authoritarian rule once the process of democratic consolidation is underway. Such claims, when examined closely, tend to be normative and prescriptive rather than descriptive and analytical. In this respect, civil society is 'eulogised as the ultimate medicinal compound, capable of curing [all] ills' (Stewart 1997, p. 16).

A similar instrumentalist argument about civil society also exists in relation to global donors and the worldwide development industry. Jenkins (2001, p. 252), in recognising this, waxes eloquently about these foreign interventions: 'Foreign-aid programmes of advanced capitalist "northern" countries have identified civil society as the key ingredient in promoting "democratic development" in the economically less-developed states of the "south". … [A]id to the "democracy and governance sector", as it has increasingly come to be known within the profession, must be earmarked to support ... individual associations' within civil society. More critical observations note that upward accountability to funders is the main source of any regressive practices of NGOs, with alternative forms of funding seemingly purifying NGOs of any bad-habits. Accountability of civil society to international donors therefore may 'corrupt the authenticity of civic action' and 'erodes its potential to be a motor for change, since – as the prisoners of someone else's agenda – civic groups are less likely to take risks, innovate, and challenge' (Edwards 1998, pp. 7, 11; see also Hearn 2001). Downward accountability of NGOs in particular, to grassroots bodies and social movements, becomes severely compromised.

In discussions of civil society in Africa, the concept is not only contrasted to the state; It is also compared, in typical modernist and modernization speak, to communitarian forms of social organization ('the community') which predominated in pre-colonial Africa and which continue to structure (in particular) rural social realities in re-invented forms structured around ethnicity, culture, chieftainships and kinship. In this sense, rural Africa is said to be mired in traditional practices resulting in local democratic deficits. Thus, tradition-based loyalties, labelled in another social context as 'identitarian solidarities of a sub-national character' (Khilnani 2001, p. 28) are portrayed as retrogressive particulars (or as imposed and totalizing solidarities) which work against the formation of civil society or autonomous and contractual modern sociability. They thus undermine the unequivocally progressive and universalizing content of civil society and its democratic endeavours vis-à-vis the nation-state.

Mamdani's influential work (1996) on 'citizens' and 'subjects' in Africa suggests that, under colonialism, civil society was spatially restricted to the urban centres, existing amongst both white colonizers and indigenous petty-bourgeois elements. For post-colonial Africa, because of de-racialisation and the emergence of broader civil liberties, the space for indigenous urban civil society has opened up further; however, the rural population has remained relegated to 'the fringes of civil society' (Sachikonye 1995, p. 6) because of ongoing despotic forms of rule and as democratization has been a largely urban phenomenon.

In making these claims about civil society and customary power, writers normally slip into an understanding of civil society based not on organisational make-up but on civil society as a social space marked by the liberal bourgeois rule of law.

The state in Africa is seen as an instigator or at least an accomplice in reproducing communitarian identities in agrarian areas through reinvented forms of tradition. This means that civil society is up against not only modern authoritarianism but also pre-modern communalism, both of which entail totalizing compulsions and commitments contrary to contractual civility.

Civil Society in Zimbabwe

The literature on civil society in Zimbabwe in certain ways mimics the African literature, though there are differences in emphases. In the context of an increasingly repressive post-colonial state, the former body of literature speaks about the rapid rise of urban civil society in the 1990s. This is based on a NGO-ish organisational understanding of civil society, and one seen as confined to urban centres. Perhaps even more so than the broader African literature, Zimbabwean studies have been marked by a particularly purified notion of civil society mainly devoid of any democratic weaknesses. A Manichean-style struggle between civil society (as good) and the state (as evil) apparently prevails and, in terms of understanding the lack of democratic consolidation, global donors as funders of these NGOs (and imperialism broadly) are left off the hook. The ruling party and state, with their sustained support from rural subjects under the thumb of chieftainship systems, are labelled as solely responsible for the sad state of affairs that marks contemporary Zimbabwe. A minority position in the literature on Zimbabwe, while not disputing the urban-based organisational definition of civil society, comes to a different conclusion. These points are examined in the following overview.

Initially, in the early years of Zimbabwean independence, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party inhibited the growth of autonomous trade unions and social movements, and effectively took them under its organisational wing. In so doing, the state effectively undercut or at least flooded civil society. Independent trade unions and urban civic groups emerged in the 1990s (leading to the formation in 1999 of the opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change – MDC), but they were increasingly met with a degree of repression by the ruling party through the organs of the state (Nhema 2002). In the year 2000, nation-wide land occupations led to massive redistribution of white commercial farms (known as 'fast-track' land reform). The

exact relationship between ZANU-PF and the land movement remains controversial. Supporters of civil society, who are likewise critics of fast-track (Hammar et al. 2003), claim that the land movement was simply an electoral ploy of ZANU-PF and that it was initiated and stage-managed by the ruling party. Others (Moyo and Yeros 2005), and this is the minority position, argue that the land movement cannot be reduced neatly to the party and that the movement had (at least originally) a degree of autonomy from the party-state.

A good entry point into the debate is the claim made by Moyo and Yeros that the land occupations and fast track land reform had a 'fundamentally progressive nature' (Moyo and Yeros 2005, p. 188). The Zimbabwean state, in large part because of its anti-imperialist stance and anti-colonial restructuring, is labelled as a 'radicalised state' (Moyo and Yeros 2007). Other scholars, such as Raftopoulos and Phimister (2004) and Marongwe (2008), make substantially different arguments in highlighting the regressive state-driven nature of political change in Zimbabwe over the past decade. These critics claim that statements by Moyo and Yeros about fast-track entail – almost perverse – value judgments made by 'left-nationalists' (Bond and Manyanya 2003, p. 78) who fail to conceptualize analytically or even highlight empirically the repressive character of state-led nationalism in contemporary Zimbabwe, designated as an 'authoritarian populist anti-imperialism' (Moore 2003, p. 8). For their part, Moyo and Yeros claim that their critics (who they call neo-liberal apologists for imperialism or 'civic/post-nationalists') demote the significance of national self-determination and the agrarian question in Zimbabwe as expressed in the land movement.

The debate tends to reproduce discursively the main political schisms existing in Zimbabwean society, and therefore articulates party-political conflicts in theoretical clothing. A romanticised notion of civil society (laid out by the 'civic nationalists') dominates the literature, and it is clearly exemplified in the writings of Brian Kagoro (2003, 2005) as chairperson of the urban NGO-dominated Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CZC). This notion brings to the fore the institutional make-up or 'organisations of civil society' (Laakso 1996, p. 218) in the form of urban civics or NGOs, as well as their progressive character (Magure 2009); the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), as a critical force for change in the late 1990s, features prominently in these discussions. Civil society, defined as a bounded socio-political space constituted in and through civil liberties (rather than as a discrete set of organisations), is rarely acknowledged. Simultaneously, development NGOs in Zimbabwe working in customary areas dominated by chieftainship systems, notably international NGOs such as World Vision, are effectively seen as seeking to modernise lives and livelihoods in these areas. Likewise, many foreign-funded local NGOs (such as Kunzwana Women's

Association) doing 'development' work amongst farm labourers on commercial farms (and in a self-declared civilizing mission) seek to build civil associations on these farms.

The civic-nationalist position, with its organisational definition, ends up with a cleansed, exclusionary and hollowed out notion of civil society, and it fails to recognise that antagonisms over the past decade have not occurred in a neat and tidy dichotomous – civil society/state – fashion. It downplays tensions which rightfully could be said to occur within civil society and focuses on antagonisms between 'progressive' civil society and the 'regressive' state (or, more aptly, the argument at times displaces the former tensions onto the latter). Fortunately some 'civic-nationalist' scholars seek to rectify this dualism. For instance, Cornelius Ncube (2010) highlights the tensions within Zimbabwean civil society; in particular, he speaks of a hegemonic civil society linked to ZANU-PF and a counter-hegemonic civil society aligned to MDC, and of the struggles between them. In the case of fast track, and the wider political struggles that emerged around it, considerable conflict took place within civil society – including between urban-based donor-funded NGOs (such as the NCA) and the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) linked to the state. But, as McCandless (2011) documents, such conflicts also occurred between (and within) urban civics, notably between the NCA and CZC.

At the same time, civil groups are regularly and 'sadly undemocratic' (Makumbe 1998, p. 311). An ethnography of urban-based civic NGOs in Zimbabwe (notably human rights organisations) from the late 1990s shows that their internal processes are often characterised by un-constitutional (and un-civil) procedures (Rich-Dorman 2001). More recently, the conflict within the NCA and the subsequent formation of the CZC led to serious self-reflection even within urban civil society. For instance, Brilliant Mhlanga (2008, p.2), a human rights activist, wrote in 2008 that Zimbabwean 'civil society is showing double standards' and that it 'has internalised the image of the ruling party, its tactics and general guidelines, and is therefore fearful of freedom of any meaningful change' (see also Tendi 2008). Even those Zimbabwean academics who have long idealised urban civics as the site for transformation recently acknowledge the factionalised nature of the civic movement (Saunders 2010).

Overall, the aim of Zimbabwean civil society is seen as democratising the state because, in the end, the state is the guarantor of democracy. The NCA and aligned urban groups have therefore sought to defend and advance political and civil liberties (i.e. to build civil society, as a rule-of-law social space, though – as indicated – the term is rarely if ever used in this sense) as well as to achieve power through the MDC in the contest for state

hegemony. Civil society, as a set of distinct organisations, is treated instrumentally and the state is perceived as the ultimate emancipator of society. The opposing side in the Zimbabwean debate, which I now discuss, also posits the state as the critical site for social transformation. Intriguingly, the 'radical nationalists' do not dispute the institutional delimitation of civil society but rather challenge urban civil society's supposed progressive status. Like the civic-nationalists, they tend to consider the land movement as uncivil and therefore existing outside the boundaries of civil society – though, unlike the civic-nationalists, uncivil is not used in a pejorative sense. They label it as 'uncivil' to distinguish it from imperialist-supported urban civil society and, in doing so, their definition of civil society slides into a rule-of-law based one.

Moyo and Yeros (2005, 2007), and Ibbo Mandaza in a series of commentaries in *The Zimbabwe Mirror*, stress the prospects of genuine agrarian transformation by means of the Zimbabwean state. At the same time, they recognise the significance of autonomous rural action (the uncivil land occupations) in resolving the country's lingering land questions. They also agree that the state co-opted and subdued what was initially an autonomous movement, but that in the process, it defended the movement against reactionary societal forces (including white agricultural capital and urban civics). Any fixation with the state and transformation arises mainly because of their pre-conceived and fixed understanding of political change, mostly notably in terms of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR).

Moyo and Yeros go on to assert that the process of agrarian change 'did not go far enough within the ruling party and the state to safeguard the peasant-worker character of the movement or to prepare the semi-proletariat organizationally against the reassertion of the black bourgeoisie' (Moyo and Yeros 2005, p. 193). The civic-nationalists would argue, to the contrary, that the agrarian change strategy went too far within the state and was thereby captured by what Raftopoulos (2006) calls the state commandism of ZANU-PF. Despite the significance they often give to movement autonomy, the arguments by Moyo and Yeros seem to be part of a more general state-centred theory of change, such that movement un-civility 'obtained radical land reform through the state and against imperialism' (Moyo and Yeros 2005, p. 179). It may be argued that, unlike the other position in the debate that puts civil society on a pedestal, Moyo and Yeros are mesmerised by the state – which they prefer to label as a radicalised state and not as an authoritarian state – as a source for breaking with the civility of capital and for apparently post-imperialist transformation.

What the critics of Moyo and Yeros roundly denounce is the latter's underestimation (or underplaying) of violence in social change. Thus, Moyo (2001, pp. 325-330) argues that

the short-term pain of uncivil and violent practices during the occupations must be weighed against the longer-term benefits for democratization in advancing the NDR. Mandaza likewise argues that it is a 'politically reactionary position ... to deny the principle of land redistribution simply because the methods being employed are said to be bad' (*The Zimbabwe Mirror*, 27 October to 2 November 2000). In other words, the 'Revolution' is to be defended at all costs, particularly given the penetration of the enemy within, in the form of civil society (and its imperialist funders). For Raftopoulos and Phimister (2004, p. 376), this implies a crude stage-ist notion of change in that 'democratic questions will be dealt with at a later stage, once the economic kingdom has been conquered' (see also Moore 2003).

Both positions accept the same civil/un-civil distinction – with, at this particular juncture in Zimbabwean history, civil society being located in urban spaces and un-civil society in rural spaces. The difference is primarily in the moral judgments passed on the civil and un-civil. This commonality though fails to do justice to the varied kinds and textures of sociability in rural fast track Zimbabwe. When civilities and civil society (as a space for voluntary contractual relations) amongst black agricultural petty commodity producers are acknowledged, it is normally in relation to their involvement in market-oriented forms of farmer production, distribution and consumption. Rutherford (2004) though, in his study of white commercial farms in Zimbabwe, speaks of the existence of more indigenous forms of rural civility.

The land movement is labelled as 'uncivil' because it undermined private property regimes and the prevailing market-based land transactions. However, some ethnographic accounts of mobilisation strategies during the occupations, and forms of organisation on occupied farms even at the height of the land movement in the years 2000 and 2001, show that they often took on an easily recognisable civil form and content, as did the links between the farm structures and the district and provincial war veteran associations (Sadomba 2011). Research on older resettlement areas in Zimbabwe (from the 1980s) indicates that the redistribution of large-scale farms may in fact lead to the development of 'civil social activities' (Barr 2004) – at least in comparison to the customary areas – as resettled farmers seek to forge social relationships in the absence of traditional authorities. However, the seeming imposition of chieftainship systems in the newly resettled (fast track) farms may counter the diverse forms of civil associations which have painstakingly emerged over the past ten years (Murisa 2011).

Theorising Civil Society – A Set of Organisations or a Social Space?

Historically, and with the rise of capitalism in Europe, civil society was generally equated with liberal bourgeois society (as a social space). However, the contemporary view has shifted to an understanding of civil society as an empirically-identifiable set of organisations which may, to some extent at least, exist outside the conditions of liberal bourgeois society (for example, under authoritarianism in Africa). The literature on Africa generally and Zimbabwe specifically, in the context of neo-liberal restructuring, draws on this latter conception. It claims at times the only incipient existence of civil society (particularly in urban spaces), but it does not question – in any strong analytical sense – the usefulness of this notion of civil society to 'most of the world'. And, more fundamentally, it does not offer an alternative theoretical conceptualisation of 'most of the world'. This is pursued more directly in the next section.

In classical European political philosophy and theory, civil society is sometimes contrasted to a state of nature (for example, Thomas Hobbes), more often to communitarian relations (for example, Ferdinand Tonnies) and, most often, to the nation-state (for example, John Locke, Georg Hegel and Karl Marx). Hegel argued that the egotisms and inequalities of an unbridled civil society under modern (individualistic) competitive capitalist conditions were productively managed by the universal nation-state ruling over and pacifying 'uncivil' society, thereby making it more 'civil' (i.e. the state was the solution to civil society egotisms). In Marx's view, any such notion of universality was a mere pretence (or a 'false universal') – Ehrenberg (1998, p. 2) – and the state served the specific interests of the bourgeoisie with its economic dominance firmly rooted within civil society. In Marx's words, 'this slavery of civil society is the natural foundation on which the modern state rests' (quoted in Femia 2001, p. 136). Therefore, the institutional separation between state and civil society under capitalism mystified class domination, with the state being a particular organisational expression of relations of domination existing first and foremost within civil society. 'Bourgeois' civil society, with its particularistic class-based bickering, could only be overcome by the universalizing and emancipating role of the proletariat.

Today's dominant understanding of civil society understands it organisationally as a progressive social force and as antagonistic to both the state and communitarian relations because of the latter's regressive authoritarian or pre-modern inclinations. This is a romanticised conceptualisation which turns both Hegel and Marx on their heads (Baker 2002). Whereas Hegel saw the state as moderating and reconciling the particulars of civil society, this current dominant 'domesticated' notion (domesticated vis-à-vis both state and capital) perceives civil society as the incarnation of reason, the universalizing mode of social

organization and defender of democracy (much like neo-liberal 'free' marketers posit the capitalist market). This approach demonizes the modern state (at least its authoritarian traits) but obscures its bourgeois form.

Hence, the capitalist form of the liberal bourgeois state – and indeed the capitalist market – is treated as a necessary historical given, and is regarded as the very foundation of a strong and vibrant civil society. Capitalist society is compartmentalized, fragmented and partitioned along the tripartite realms of economy, state and civil society, and thus its totalizing logic is undetected and left un-analyzed. This entails a de-economised version of civil society devoid of class relations. Civil society, as Marx understood it, is thereby sanitized and cleansed – civil society comes to represent an unadulterated realm of un-coerced freedom where the oppressed defend themselves against the ravages of the state. Civil society is not a problem; rather, it is the solution to the woes of state-regulated capitalism. This view therefore fails to recognise that civil society itself is in various ways a site of domination, inequality and conflict: the moment of social domination inscribed within civil society is ignored.

This prevailing understanding of, and indeed fixation with civil society (including in Africa and Zimbabwe – particularly the 'civic-nationalist' position), arose in the context of an anti-statist moment globally and is undoubtedly linked to new forms of imperialism. Anti-statism entailed successful struggles against centralised actually-existing communist states in central-eastern Europe, neo-liberal downsizing and restructuring of the Keynesian welfare state in advanced capitalist nations, and sustained opposition to authoritarian and military states throughout 'most of the world'. In this regard, civil society was designed to recover for society a range of powers and activities that states had usurped in previous decades. Ironically, despite the revival of civil society under anti-statist conditions, the dominant interpretation of the concept is statist or at least state-centric.

This interpretation entails an instrumentalist view of civil society as a formidable weapon for democratizing the state and defending liberal democracy, rather than viewing civil society as a site of struggle for hegemony, or as an end-in-itself i.e. a pre-figurative form of politics for a new society. Democracy is conceived as effectively external to civil society and is lodged rather (in statist fashion) in liberal democratic state bodies. Civil society organizations have no legitimate existence independent of their role in interacting with the state, and the strengths and weaknesses of these organizations are identified in terms of their regulatory state-centric functions in building and defending liberal state democracy (for example, many civil society groups promote the realisation of human rights, and the state is

implicitly – but problematically – recognised as the legitimate guarantor of these rights – Baker 2003).

On one level, then, civil society is defined in opposition to (or against) the state. On another level, though, the boundaries of civil society overlap with the boundaries of liberal politics as defined by the state; in other words, civil society, though 'defined in opposition to the state, also ends at the boundaries of liberal politics' (Sader 2002, p. 93). Any antagonism between state and civil society occurs within a broad state-civil society consensual paradigm (the 'consensual state domain of politics' – Neocosmos 2004, p. 11) in terms of which the state delimits and structures what is acceptable oppositional (i.e. civil society) politics. Ultimately, civil society (as conceptualised in this perspective) is supportive specifically of the liberal bourgeois state form, leading to state-civil society collaborative and partnership arrangements which facilitate overall social domination. Politics beyond this consensual domain are viewed by both state and civil society as unauthentic: at best as illegitimate politics and at worst as criminal behaviour.

Insofar as civil society is considered as a social space (namely, liberal bourgeois society marked by civil liberties and contractual relations), then, its validity as a concept for understanding societies where the core characteristics of liberal bourgeois democracy are absent becomes questionable. Further, as Fernandes (2007) notes in relation to Venezuela, the organisational definition of civil society is an exclusionary understanding that is regularly used as a basis for marginalising organisations which are seen as challenging liberal bourgeois society or as acting contrary to bourgeois liberties (hence, the discursive attacks on the land movement by urban civics in contemporary Zimbabwe).

Re-Positioning Civil Society

Some social historians and anthropologists claim that a kind of civility equivalent to liberal bourgeois society existed in pre-colonial societies (in for example India and China) (Hann and Dunn eds. 1996). Whether this argument entails mapping the prevailing notion of civil society onto these other societies, or involves an alternative and extended rendering of civil society (which may or may not push the term's meaning beyond all recognition) is not always clear. Nevertheless, Goody (2001, p. 153) notes that 'there is a kind of moral evaluation attached to the very concepts of civility [and civil society], rationality, and enlightenment, qualities that are seen as contributing to the so-called European miracle and that are necessarily unique to the West'. In other words, positing the existence of civil society and civility under specific historical-social conditions only (and thereby excluding its presence

elsewhere) may be an act of discursive warfare which reveals more about the (ethnocentric) designator than the (supposedly uncivil) designated. It may be therefore that the concept of civil society is open to spatial placement within alternative forms of existing modernity; in this sense, as intimated in my discussion of Zimbabwe, some writers argue for the existence of 'indigenous traditions of "civility" if not "civil society"' (Kaviraj 2001, p. 322).

However, considerable debate continues to exist, and rightly so, about the applicability of the concept of civil society to 'most of the world' and about the pervasiveness and strength of civil society in these regions. This is particularly the case when civil society is understood as referring specifically and only to bourgeois society based on 'un-coerced human action' (Edwards 1998, p. 3) and on liberal notions of equality, contract and autonomy. In this regard, indigenous civil society during colonialism probably was the 'domain of the elite' in urban centres (Chatterjee 2001, p. 174) in that the elite sought to replicate Western modernity in its own lives. In addition, with respect to 'most of the world' (such as Africa), it is likely the case that agrarian civil society (both under colonialism and post-colonialism) does occur in an incipient or stunted character particularly where chieftainships, kinships systems and customary law and tenure were pervasive and continue to be so. In this regard, as suggested earlier, the so-called wave of democratisation in post-colonial Africa may have only opened further civil-type spaces in urban centres.

But it seems that, under post-colonial conditions, the presence of civil society even in urban areas has been hugely problematic – more specifically, post-colonial states have at times undercut the urban spaces of civil society and undermined their liberal bourgeois foundations. In this sense, the distinction between citizens and subjects which Mamdani (1996) posits as an urban-rural distinction in Africa is currently being reproduced, in a certain sense, within urban centres – with urban 'subjects' (as Frantz Fanon's – 1967 – 'wretched' or 'damned' of the earth) having a different set of relations to the post-colonial state as compared to urban citizens.

This possibility – namely, the exclusionary character of post-colonial restructuring – has roots in colonialism, with respect to both the colonial state and the anti-colonial movements themselves. Quite often the overdeveloped colonial state has simply been taken over and reproduced by the ex-liberation movement (Heller 2009, p. 142) and used for an array of social engineering projects not unlike colonial projects. This emanates from a fixation with the state as the site for transformation, such that the 'capture of state power' becomes 'uncritically equated with acquiring the means to transform society' (i.e. 'planned emancipation') (Heller 2001, pp. 134, 151, 157). This resulted, during early post-colonialism,

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in developmental states with authoritarian leanings. These developmental states, with their universalizing clarion call for nation-building, regularly demobilized people's organisations and undercut liberal bourgeois space, as part of a centripetal process of social reconstruction and state-building. This type of manoeuvring by state elites was recognised in the early years of African independence by Fanon (1967).

But this authoritarian streak was also ingrained in many liberation movements during their quest for state power, which made them all the more a-tuned to deploying state power in intrusive and undemocratic ways. For instance, Friedman (1992) highlights the antagonistic relation between civil liberties and anti-colonialism in his analysis of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa in the 1980s, as the movement (notably the African National Congress or ANC) sought to inhibit the flourishing of emancipatory initiatives outside its control, all in the name of 'the struggle' (as defined by the ANC). Kaviraj (2001, p. 314) makes the more general point, which I quote at length: '[T]he secret of the immense power of the [post-colonial] nation-states was not the inheritance from colonialism but from their national mobilization. Through the national movements, these elites laid claim to a right to mobilize all sections of society, and extended the state's influence over all spheres of social life. This is one significant paradox of post-colonial "civil society" or rather its absence'. The dominant political party (such as ZANU-PF or the ANC) claimed to constitute and embody the nation and the struggle for historical redress, and thus an alternative form of universality (embodied in civil liberties for all) seemingly became redundant for purposes of social transformation as defined by the party. Hence, civil space has been closed down or severely de-limited.

Civil society, as liberal bourgeois society, does indeed exist to some extent in 'most of the world'. Its existence involves 'well-structured, principled and constitutionally sanctioned relations' with the state (Chatterjee 2001, p. 178). And civil society, as understood organisationally, is perceived in many ways correctly as trying to pry open further space for civil and political liberties (in other words, to expand the space for genuine liberal democratic relations between state and citizen). Ultimately the aim of these civil associations (or civil societies) is – as discussed in previous sections – to consolidate bourgeois liberal democracy and to join hands with a reforming state in doing so. But any relations which do exist between state and citizen do not in themselves encompass (even in cities and towns) the full range of relations which exist between state and society.

In this respect, Chatterjee's (2004) argument about 'political society' with specific reference to India does have some resonance for 'most of the world'. Political society refers

to the fringes of civil society or – more correctly – spaces beyond it, incorporating urban (and rural) subjects whose livelihoods regularly border on the margins of civility and legality. The state recognises and regulates these populations differently to citizens living within and according to the dictates of civil society. They have entitlements but not rights: 'Rights belong to those who have proper legal title to the lands or buildings … they are, we might say, proper citizens … Those who do not have such rights [subjects] may nevertheless have entitlements' (Chatterjee 2004, p. 69). Because of this, the state may feel obliged to provide, as a welfare-like function, basic services for example to shack-dwellers (such as water), despite the ongoing illegality of the shacks. But state apparatuses may also display their repressive might in seeking to quell any disturbances arising from the bowels of political society. Recent events in post-Apartheid South Africa, including state responses to so-called service delivery protests, are a case in point.

In this regard, both urban and rural residents in 'most of the world' may engage in actions ranging from 'political mendicancy to spontaneous violence' (Kaviraj 2001, p. 317), and these may not only lie outside the niceties of associational civility but may undermine and resist it. As Edwards (1998, p. 6) neatly puts it, '[i]t is difficult to be civil if you are starving'. Further, Chatterjee (2002, p. 70) notes in relation to India that the 'squalor, ugliness and violence of popular life' cannot be imprisoned 'within the sanitised fortress of civil society' as this fortress has been imagined, constructed and defended by the post-colonial state. Hence, there would be serious doubts about the prospects of 'civil solutions to neo-colonialism' (or to neo-Apartheid in South Africa) such that the 'civil domain, by definition, cannot be broadened by civil society' (Yeros 2002, p. 61).

Theorising seriously about progressive social change, in a manner critical of the supposed democratic potentials of both civil society and state-centred politics, ultimately leads to radical or socialist libertarian thinking. Libertarian theory of this kind is not simply about (understanding) the state-civil society consensus which glues capitalist societies together; rather, first and foremost, it is a theory against this consensus and seeks to reason on and identify types of politics beyond this consensus in bourgeois societies. This libertarianism is, in different ways, found in the works of Autonomist Marxism (Holloway 2010), classical Anarchism (Schmidt and van der Walt 2009), post-Anarchism (Day 2005), and a range of ex-Marxist communists such as the French philosopher Alain Badiou (2010).

Central to key strands of libertarianism is an attempt to think politics outside state subjectivities (Neocosmos 2011) and the politics of representation – whether lodged organisationally in parliamentary politics, NGOs or even left-wing and Marxist vanguard

movements. This entails prioritising an autonomist-type of politics at a distance from the state and from non-state organisations that think like the state. And it involves a recognition that the fundamental sources of emancipatory change are outside civil society and within uncivil (political) society. Uncivil political practices, though engaging tactically with the state at times, will by necessity go against the grain of civil society understood – in particular – as a set of identifiable organisations. But they may also directly confront civil society defined as a social space, as radical change challenges in some way key bourgeois rights centred on property and market relations. In this way, it seems that 'the onus lies on progressive uncivil politics' (Yeros 2002, p. 249) to re-define the state-civil society consensus and, in doing so, to wedge open and broaden radical spaces and potentialities for genuine social and human emancipation.

Conclusion

Amid the clamour and debates about civil society in 'most of the world' (not excluding Zimbabwe), there is a deathly silence about whether civil society in fact even exists. It may be argued that, historically, the notion of civil society is linked specifically and exclusively to liberal democratic bourgeois societies and that societies marked by compulsive forms of rule (authoritarianism and traditionalism) are devoid of civil societies. Hence, colonial settler societies in Africa, in which chieftainships dominated agrarian spaces and colonised subjects in urban spaces were racially oppressed, were characterised only by 'white' civil society. Post-colonial Zimbabwe, for example, where rural chiefdoms remain and repressive modes of state rule prevail throughout the country, may likewise be largely devoid of a rule-of-law civil society (despite the marked prevalence of NGOs).

In this light, debates about the pros and cons of (an existing) civil society in contemporary Zimbabwe (and other post-colonial societies) may be displaced or of less significance than initially thought. What may be of greater significance is 'political society', not only in terms of its very existence and the various forms it takes in both urban and rural spaces, but also with respect to theorising about the prospects for genuine social transformation in 'most of the world'. Of course, this is not to romanticise political society any more than civil society, as argued in this chapter, should be romanticised. But if the case of the land movement under fast track reform in Zimbabwe is anything to go by, then it seems that un-civil practices – or those emanating from within political society – may offer certain prospects for significant social change.

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