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A Research Agenda for Civil Society  
*Edited by Kees Biekart and Alan Fowler*

# A Research Agenda for Civil Society

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# 1

## A research agenda for civil society: introduction and overview

*Kees Biekart and Alan Fowler*

### Origin of the volume

Any volume dedicated to civil society faces issues of motivation as well as difficult choices. When considering the invitation from Edward Elgar to put forward a research agenda in this field, we agreed that the task is worth taking on if: (a) while being informed by the past, it is not premised on extending an era of research which mainstreams liberal ‘democratisation’ processes; (b) did something to remedy past research and knowledge biases and gaps; (c) recognises a new era of global political realignments and trends towards ‘auto-crisation’; and (d) opened up opportunities for young scholars to share their analysis and ideas. An intention was to break out of a mould of compendiums, handbooks and guides that typify current publications about civil society and the formally constituted non-profit organisations which feature predominantly. By and large, the 22 chapters in this book fulfil these intentions.

We start by explaining the unusual way that this volume came together. This chapter then provides a contextual framework for future agendas. This objective begins with a brief historical review of civil society research, moving into an emerging era with major rearrangements of power between nation states well as realignments of power between citizens and their governments. While appearing in different ways in numerous chapters, two distinctive processes and interactions between them stand out. One is shifts and frictions between geo-political heavyweights of the United States and the Republic of China, bringing ripple effects across the globe. These appear in open challenges to an assumed desirability and ultimate universalism of liberal democracy over forms of governance associated with more authoritarian systems of politics and leadership. The other feature of interaction is regimes undertaking purposeful limitation to civic space – that is, the practical possibilities of citizens

freely enjoying rights of expression, association and assembly (CIVICUS, 2022).

Constraining civic agency differentially impacts on the constituents and norms to be found in civil society, with incivility gaining adherents and influence. Be they international, national or local in scope, these political realignments are taking place against the backdrop of the potentially devastating impact of climate change on the planet's climate, ecosystem and all of its species. As the November 2021 Conference of the Parties 26 (COP 26) in Glasgow showed, these threats can only be resolved by dedicated collective effort not just of governments but through social contracts with citizens themselves. These perspectives indicate that, while past experience is to be valued, the global and local ambiance for research on civil society is unlikely to be a linear continuation of the past. More probable are complex research parameters for decisions and risks. How today's and tomorrow's scenarios are informing researchers is richly described in the chapters to follow, which are loosely grouped within guiding themes. The final chapter offers a reflexive speculation of where and what next for the study of civil society.

## **Crafting the volume: a positive Covid story**

The proposal submitted to the publisher in June 2020 had a traditional idea about creating and editing a book. This included: making comparisons with and differentiation of this effort from existing publications in the field; an overall approach in terms of process; ideas about chapter length and numbers; structure of potential themes, topics, geographies and contributors, time lines and so on. With this agreed, the search for potential authors initially relied on personal outreach based on familiarity with existing works and leaders in this field of research, studies and debates. That is, an editor-centred process, with inbuilt limitations. Covid-19 offered an opportunity to move to an author-centred approach, paradoxically benefitting from enforced reliance on digital communication for meetings and seminars.

The International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR) had Covid-adapted to serving its members by, inter alia, instituting a series of webinars. With ISTR's active support, webinars were advertised that described the book initiative, inviting sign-up. Not quite crowd-sourcing, but mobilisation of contributors relying on interest and the energy that lies behind individual and (un)funded collective research efforts. The timing of two webinars allowed for participation across the world's time zones.

Those joining the webinars were asked to provide ideas about research topics. Suggestions were collated into 12 themes, shared with all participants inviting them to become authors, but not necessarily limited to a specific theme. The result is a volume where content is driven by those dedicated to advancing this area of knowledge in circumstances unlike a period of major investments by those governing research finance. The chapters speak to conditions, experiences and perspectives of all continents. Themes have emerged from accumulations of topics with implied or obvious similarity. This outcome does not mean that there is now a systematic agenda for future research, typically resulting from centrally constructed and resourced research projects that typify past global enquiry. Rather, this volume provides a bottom-up view of the value attached to new knowledge about civil society by those whose efforts drive improvements in understanding, that better inform and advance debates as well, perhaps, as shaping policies.

## **A brief review of past civil society research**

Civil society research has quite a long history, but has (re-)emerged especially in the early 1970s in the Global South. The past 40-year era of civil society research coincided with widespread civic resistance to authoritarian regimes, notably in Latin America, Asia and Southern Europe in the 1970s (cf. O'Donnell et al., 1986). Political assertion by a polity was reinforced by geo-political shifts in the late 1980s, associated with the implosion of the Soviet Union attributed, *inter alia*, to citizen action in civil society. The stage was set for a post-Enlightenment, colonially informed assumption of the eventual convergence of the world and its countries to a liberal-style democratic order governed by self-interested compliance with an international rule of law. Abundant aid-related resources to funding civil society strengthening programmes did the rest. This context created both an ambiance and motivation to undertake research on civil society, particularly in terms of advancing democratisation and its roles in serving a social contract between citizen and state.<sup>1</sup> Looking back, some 40 years of dedicated research can be characterised in a number of ways.

A first tendency is that theoretical explorations and notions of civil society seldom bypassed Eurocentric origins. Much of the civil society literature points at the Enlightenment as the inspiration of the civil society concept, often elaborated with examples from the French and American revolutions, later followed by practices in other European countries (Cohen and Arato, 1992; Keane, 1998; Howell and Pearce, 2001; Edwards, 2004). In these discussions, the civil society

concept was initially part of a ‘good governance’ debate, relating the concept to the (legitimacy of) a nation state, and (less so) to the market (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992; Clayton, 1996). It is only in recent decades that more local conceptualisations of civil society have been elaborated. Concerning Africa: Mamdami (1996), Lewis (2002), Obadare (2011, 2013), Obadare and Willems (2014), Ogawa (2018). Civil society studies in Asia include: Chandhoke (2001), Kaviraj and Khilnani (2001), Howell (2003), Chatterjee (2004), Lewis (2004), Shah (2004). For Latin America: Alvarez et al. (1998), Avritzer (2000), Stahler-Sholk et al. (2008), Petras and Veltmeyer (2011). And, for example in the Middle East: Bayat (1997), Ibrahim and Sherif (2008), Northey (2018).

A second tendency has been to equate civil society with a Third Sector of formal non-profit entities, particularly non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Korten, 1990; Salamon, 1994; Fernandes, 1994). In a way this was understandable: for a period of three decades NGOs had been the primary recipients of international aid. Research in this area focused first on the Northern-based non-profits, often becoming major donor agencies to fund the establishment of Southern NGOs (Smith, 1990; Thérien, 1991; Smillie, 1995). Soon the research focus shifted to the issue of effectiveness and impact, not in the last place triggered by an earlier report by Judith Tandler who labelled NGO virtues as ‘articles of faith’ (Tandler, 1982). Later studies were building on this critical analysis (Riddell and Robinson, 1995; Sogge et al., 1996; Fowler, 1997), often also adding the problematic accountability of NGOs (Edwards and Hulme, 1992, 1995). Both themes stood central at the range of Manchester NGO conferences (1992 and 1994), later repeated in Birmingham (1999) and again Manchester (2005) (Bebbington et al., 2008; Edwards, 2008). Obviously, a central element in these studies was the role of aid-related agendas (Van Rooy, 1998; Fowler, 2000; Kelsall and Igoe, 2005; Jordan and Van Tuijl, 2006), which was often at the cost of attention to ‘below the radar’ civic formations and associational life (Hilhorst, 2003; Hearn, 2007; Holmén, 2010).

A third tendency in the early civil society studies was a concentration on (support to) Southern civil society actors as key drivers of democratisation, highlighted by human rights groups, progressive social movements (such as peasant organisations) and a range of advocacy NGOs (Clark, 1991; Burnell, 1991; Carroll, 1992; Fisher, 1993; Fowler, 1993; Bratton, 1994; Riddell and Bebbington, 1995; Biekart, 1999). Carothers (1999: 207–9) called it the ‘discovery of civil society’ by Northern donors. In addition, Howell and Pearce (2001) made a difference between mainstream (mostly bilateral and multilateral aid) and alternative (largely European and Canadian NGOs) approaches to civil society strengthening as part of democracy building processes (Biekart, 2023). Studies often focused on country or regional cases, even though ‘global civil

society' also received increased attention (Keane, 2003; Kaldor, 2003). In the transnational sphere of global advocacy networks, it was generally a focus on particular networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) and on international NGOs (Yanacopulos, 2016).

A fourth tendency in civil society research focused on efforts to quantify civil society strength or non-profit density in all societies around the globe. An often cited US-focused effort included an initiative to pin down social capital in civil society (Putnam, 1992, 1995). Another major comparative project was initiated in 1991 in the United States by The Johns Hopkins University with the so-called Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (CNP), led by Lester Salamon. This project in the late 1990s was parked at the renamed Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies (Salamon and Anheier, 1998). The project studied non-profit cultures and densities in 46 countries worldwide, largely in the Northern hemisphere and generated a vast amount of publications.<sup>2</sup> A second major initiative to quantify civil society patterns was started by CIVICUS in the early 2000s. This so-called Civil Society Index project also employed local research teams, but had a clear emphasis on the Southern hemisphere, and looked also more closely at civil society groups (Heinrich, 2004; Heinrich and Fioramonti, 2007). This ambitious project was criticised by some for simplifying civil society and by primarily servicing the donor community (Biekart, 2008).

A fifth research tendency has looked at qualitative investigation of civil society in terms of its many functions and virtues. Examples are the studies on participation and citizen engagement (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010), as part of the range of Department for International Development (DFID)-funded case studies coordinated by the Citizenship Development Research Centre (CDRC) and published in a Zed Book series under the umbrella 'Claiming Citizenship: Rights, Participation, Accountability'. Another example is the focus on civil society and the reconnection of citizens with public life (Boyte, 2004), the role of unruly (or uncivil) civil society (Payne, 2000; Kopecký and Mudde, 2003), the relationship between civil society and online civic participation (Banaji and Buckingham, 2013), as well the link between civil society and markets (Zadek, 2011). These are just indicative examples, as many more studies were completed (see Edwards, 2011).

A sixth set of civil society studies demonstrated a renewed interest in the role of civic agency and citizenship in relation to civil society. An example of this in which we were involved ourselves is the role of civic agency in the process of civic-driven change (Fowler and Biekart, 2008). Rather than looking at changes at organisational levels, the project explored the results of change

processes triggered by civic initiatives, aiming at jointly imagined future outcomes. Research along the same lines was done by Gaventa and Tandon (2010) and Obadare and Willems (2014).

A seventh and final set of civil society studies in recent years explored the notion of ‘civic space’ in the Global South as an environmental context in which civil society actors use (or are limited in their use) of basic civic rights. For example, CIVICUS (2022) monitors the level of openness of civic space by looking at the freedom of association, freedom of expression, and freedom of peaceful assembly. Follow-up studies were realised by Hossain et al. (2018, 2019) and by Fowler and Biekart (2020).

In addition to these research themes, several handbooks on non-profits and civil society were produced in the past decade, providing overviews of civil society-related issues (Edwards, 2011), up to a three-volume encyclopaedia of concepts related to civil society (Anheier and Toepler, 2010, updated in 2020).

## Exploring potentially new civil society research themes

The preparatory webinars in early 2021 as part of this book project generated a range of new urgent research themes, which later formed the basis for the design of the present volume. These themes were clustered in six areas, which we will briefly outline below. Some of these topics will obviously come back in the various chapters of this volume, and certainly inform the conclusions.

One thematic area was around the question how to label civil society and how to arrive at undisputed, commonly used definitions of civil society (or plural: civil societies). This is especially the case in countries with authoritarian regimes where there is very little ‘legal’ organised opposition. More attention is needed for the meaning of specific concepts in different languages, where the core idea of civil society is often lost in translation. It is also clear that civil society needs to be analysed in its complexity of various levels (from global to the family) and in its relationship to governance. Equating civil society with Third Sector is often problematic, needing further scrutiny in how this equivocating (co-)determines analytic frameworks.

A second theme pays renewed attention to values and rights, as the normative premises of civil society need to be specified. There is still a colonial undertone, as we also suggested above, that should be critically addressed. Whose values count, when, where and why? How are norms of accountability and legitimacy



determined and why has this shifted over time? What is the value base spurring volunteering and solidarity? There is increased focus on the ‘civic space’ in which civil society actors operate and often are constrained by authoritarian and autocratic regimes. Basic civic rights are no longer respected because, in various ways, their universality is questioned. It seems important to make a clear distinction between groups that are affected by shrinking civic space, but in different ways. Whose civic agency is benefitting and suffering from changing relations between citizen and state as their ideologies and instruments evolve? Future research will inevitably face issues of values and rights.

Third, a more comprehensive view is required of what civil society really does and looks like in different settings, beyond NGOs and aid, and above (as well as under) the radar of the formal towards the informal expressions of associational life. There is also a complexity of transnational networks like diaspora groups: what types of networks are emerging, who is involved and why? For example, in countries devastated by (civil) war the question of cultural roots of associational life triggers increased attention. On social media, small ad hoc civic initiatives accelerate in no time into massive movements. The issue of uncivility and ‘non-civic movements’ have generated renewed attention with the January 2021 siege of the US Capitol (see Chapter 5 in this volume). What are the drivers of these darker sides of civil society? How can civil society be kept bright as well?

The fourth theme evolves around the need for a serious epistemological conversation about civil society, one that really listens to everyone involved. When and what is on the ‘third bank’ of the knowledge river (see Chapter 3 in this volume)? How is Western and indigenous knowledge blending, and what is eventually the result? Developing a new epistemology on civil society requires questioning power differences in a global knowledge system that has been subjugated by a primacy of North American and Western European academics, publishers, journals and universities. A situation dominated by colonial languages, in particular English, but also French and Spanish. A future epistemology of civil society would have to take these factors into account.

The fifth theme concerns digitalisation and social media. Internet and smart-phones have transformed civil society drastically: the speed of action, the number of people reached, but also the time zones that can be crossed. In particular the Covid-19 pandemic made clear how voluntary action and networking have skyrocketed in the digital sphere. ‘Liking’ seems to have become the digital replacement of ‘membership’, even though it is highly fluid and volatile. How have social media shaped (or undermined) civil society in specific contextual settings? What are the implications for civil society as a whole; how

are digital and analogue forms of organising interacting? This is probably one of the most challenging and urgent agenda items for civil society researchers in the near future.

A final theme identified is the way research on civil society in the future should be done, by whom; where will the finance come from and why? But also: can new (qualitative) methodologies be devised to advance this research field? And a cross-cutting theme in the whole webinar conversation was: are we developing a new research agenda *of* civil society or *for* civil society? If the latter applies, which spaces should be occupied and how can coalitions be made effective? How can researchers and activists work together? Can inspiring practices of academic engagement with civil society be mapped?

While not pretending to remedy these shortcomings, the approach to setting out a future research agenda relies on a different premise, namely a reliance on the insights of those actively engaged with self-motivated enquiry, rather than a pre-defined research initiative to buy into.

## Framing a future civil society research agenda

As alluded to above, to be relevant, any future research on civil society will be within emerging geo-political force fields operating at multiple levels, all inviting conscious consideration. One field is contention about the relative merits of representative democracy as a nation's political system and the geo-historical meaning, place and role of civil society within it. Another is about competition for territorial hegemony, where transnational civil society can be in play, for example, leading to state control of internet access that could otherwise mobilise virtual associational life across borders. A third, more fundamental, issue is not contention about political ideology – technocratic or participatory – that better serves citizens, but about conflicting values that (competing) regimes rely on. Reflected in different chapters, under such conditions, researchers will need to take account of the personal risks, institutional positioning and practical constraints associated with tackling topics at any level.

Allied to the issue of values, and equally concerning, is populist nationalist tendencies illustrated in chapters that openly challenge a normative nature of a civil society that is, indeed, *civic*: loosely understood as a concern for the whole with tolerance for differences between people. Researching incivility – which may cross borders of legality – is likely to require contextual sensitivity,

cultivation of trust, adaptation of methods and an update to ethics. In short, whose norms count?

In sum, implicit assumptions that research and researchers are objective or neutral when investigating civil society are open to question.

## Research themes and chapter clusters

The process described above and the loose themes that were identified collectively led to a set of 20 chapters, next to the introductory and concluding chapters. These were grouped into three main clusters that form the backbone of the book. Below we will briefly outline these clusters.

Part I looks at ‘Studying Civil Society’, as this is the central focus of this volume. In Chapter 2, David Sogge examines the funding aspect of civil society research, a unique contribution as very little research has been done on this. Patricia Mendonça (Chapter 3) and Mário Alves (Chapter 4) focus on epistemologies of civil society, in this case both from a South American perspective. In Chapter 5, Roseanne Mirabella and W. King Mott explore the background of incivility in the United States leading to the 6 January 2021 siege of the US Capitol. Ali Bakir Hamoudi (Chapter 6) takes the perspective from the Middle East and North Africa region and Susan Appe (Chapter 7) the view from Ecuador to map and analyse civil society and its values.

Part II focuses on ‘Civil Society Typologies’, in which the emphasis is on analysing human rights organisations (Chapter 8 by Antoine Buyse and Verónica Gómez), humanitarian diplomacy (Chapter 9 by Dorothea Hilhorst and Margit van Wessel), NGOs and their innovation policies (Chapter 10 by Ana Luísa Silva), and international NGOs and their partners in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic (Chapter 11 by Irene Guijt, Duncan Green, Filippo Artuso and Katrina Barnes). Then, two chapters focus especially on volunteerism and philanthropy from various angles: Chapter 12 by Lucas Meijs and Stephanie Koolen-Maas and Chapter 13 by Philine van Overbeeke and Malika Ouacha. Finally, Chapter 15 by Chris McInerney examines the engagement of civil society organisations with public administration.

Part III, ‘Historiographies of Civil Society’, highlights particular regions where the history of civil society research is elaborated with a view towards potential future research agendas. Some chapters compare several regions on one specific aspect, such as Chapter 16 by John Godfrey who looks at corporate

philanthropy in India and Africa. Some chapters take a regional view on the historical development of civil society: Chapter 17 by Alan Fowler and Shauna Mottiar on Africa; Jenny Paturyan on the Southern Caucasus (Chapter 18); Pablo Marsal on the Southern Cone of Latin America (Chapter 20). And then there are two chapters with a focus on one particular country, with comparisons to their neighbours: Galia Chimiak looks at Eastern Europe from a Polish perspective (Chapter 19) and Mark Sidel focuses on China with comparative insights from Hong Kong and Vietnam (Chapter 21).

Finally, as will be elaborated in Part IV, 'Conclusions' (Chapter 22) as well, we emphasise that an exploration like this can never be complete. This has also not been our intention, as this is probably the first collective effort ever to map civil society research perspectives. Despite this disclaimer, we hope (and trust) that the current volume offers a rich insight and a clear inspiration to those wanting to embark upon future civil society research with a critical mindset.

## NOTES

1. For our purposes, the definition, formulated by Michael Waltzer, cited in Michael Edwards (2011, p. 4) suffices: 'Civil society is the sphere of uncoerced human association between individuals and the state, in which people undertake collective action for normative and substantive purposes relatively independent of government and market.'
2. See <https://ccss.jhu.edu/research-projects/comparative-nonprofit-sector-project/>.

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# PART I

## Studying civil society



# 2

## Funding civil society research

*David Sogge*

### Introduction

Who pays for what research, and why? In a research agenda for civil society, such questions are relevant but remain largely unanswered. The term ‘resource dependency’ appears in scholarly writings about some realms of civil society, yet the role of resources that enable or inhibit research about them is seldom examined. About this arena of knowledge politics – which research gets what, when and how – there is a knowledge deficit.

This chapter discusses the sponsoring and steering of knowledge work about civil society. It takes a wide-angle perspective on research funding both within universities and beyond. Two factors suggest needs for a broad approach. First, mandates and practices to monitor and analyse civic life exist today for many non-academic purposes. They include social interventions at home and abroad, charity regulation, investigative journalism and much more besides. For those kinds of knowledge work, as well as for academic pursuits, funding and overall research governance is at play. Second, beyond non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other ‘worthy’ non-profits that many see as constituting civil society, there exist far larger and more diverse civic constituencies, some of them with non-emancipatory purposes. Across a vast realm of ‘really existing’ civil society, research sponsors routinely marshal and steer resources for scholarly, philanthropic, regulatory and security purposes. In addition to these two contextual givens, this chapter draws on the writer’s own training, curiosity, activism and interests as well as experiences in the foreign aid system.

This chapter approaches resource governance in four organisational settings: (a) the academy; (b) beyond the academy; (c) the aid-and-development system; and (d) statutory agencies. In each of these there are ‘resource ecologies’ consisting of researchers and managers, fellowship grants, networks, conferences, publication channels and, not least, those who control the nerve centres that govern research policy and funding.

In various shapes and sizes, resource ecologies reflect mandates, preferences and entrepreneurship of funders and others affecting research governance. Influencing them are wider forces such as the Cold War, decolonisation, market fundamentalism and nihilistic movements. These ecologies are therefore never stable. This chapter identifies some enablers and inhibitors of change, and signposts issues for further study.

## Sponsorship of civil society research: the early years

In the turbulent early decades of the 20th century, elites grew alarmed about civil activism and social “pathologies”. They enlisted social researchers to analyse those worrying trends. In the USA, the Rockefeller Foundation helped set up the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), which in the mid-1920s warned that the direction of social change should not be left to radicals, but instead be reliably guided by scientists. In the 1930s, the SSRC set up a committee to monitor ‘Pressure Groups and Propaganda’. As an historian of American philanthropy put it, “when capitalism once more came under attack, the foundations quite deliberately employed the social sciences to quell revolutionary fervor” (Dowie, 2001, p. 57). With fears also rising about restive peoples in the colonies, Rockefeller monies helped establish new social research bodies in Europe, notably the International African Institute in London, and a constellation of university units in France.

After the Second World War, political militancy then spreading in Europe and its overseas dominions set off more alarms. Sensing “persistent evils” where people were “alienated from the West”, the SSRC put forward a politically inspired research strategy. Its focus included trade unions, activist organisations and pressure groups whose “civic loyalty” was in question (Almond et al., 1955). That strategy shifted scholarly attention from the state to a wider field of ‘political systems’ in which a leading concept was something called ‘civic culture’ (Nickel, 2016). In promoting that influential Cold War paradigm, the ‘big three’ American philanthropies, Rockefeller, Ford and Carnegie, increased their support to social sciences in Britain, Sweden, Germany and France, as well as in the USA. Acting as gatekeepers, research governors discouraged studies that might embarrass or challenge Western interests (Price, 2003). Their preferences worked to ensure that, in the words of one scholar, “working class and anti-systemic movements in the region remained poxes, irrationalities that illustrate immature ‘political development’” (Cumings, 1997, p. 8). With the advent of market fundamentalism and postmodernism in the 1980s, research sponsors’ preferences shifted towards de-territorialised,

global studies, under vague and uncontroversial rubrics such as ‘sustainability’ and ‘democracy’ (Franzinetti, 2015). Much less vague were intensified elite pressures to shrink the civic space for organised labour and other civic blocs wielding serious political clout. Cutting back public sectors meant recruiting non-profits to fill gaps in welfare services. Funders helped frame knowledge work increasingly in managerial and other ‘applied’ terms. Yet a few scholars managed to find funding for research in ‘foundational’ terms; an example was a ten-year study of citizenship supported by the British aid agency, Department for International Development (DfID) (Jones and Gaventa, 2002).

In the neoliberal era since the late 1970s, new tensions emerged, such as over the social contract and how to repair it, over whether and how to ‘export democracy’, and over the legitimacy of rule-making and public service delivery by non-state actors. These tensions led public and private sponsors to frame research in divergent, sometimes contradictory ways. Some sought to underscore fundamental emancipatory roles of civic activism. A larger number put their money on practical matters such as ‘capacity building’ and non-profit management. Today, multiple research pathways persist. In broad terms, academic and non-academic attention to civic activism has grown robustly. Research sponsorship has affected a wide spectrum of fields and purposes, as indicated in the following sections.

## The academy

University-based research and teaching about civil society have grown apace in recent decades. Non-profits dominate the foreground. Whereas in 1970, studies of NGOs, philanthropy and volunteering were virtually unknown, by 1980 scholarly interest was expanding rapidly. Publications multiplied, as evidenced by a special issue on NGOs in a leading journal, *World Development* (Drabek, 1987). Backed by increased funding, research became institutionalised. Since its founding in 1991, the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project at Johns Hopkins University has been widely influential. Its success stems in part from a sponsorship strategy involving seed money from large American foundations, subsequently multiplied with private and especially public funding in countries surveyed (see funders listed in Salamon et al., 2003, pp. 63–4). Elsewhere, scholars at Manchester and Birmingham universities mobilised academic, philanthropic and aid agency resources to convene, from 1992 to 2005, no less than four major international conferences on NGOs (an overview of those conferences appears in Edwards, 2008). In Europe, under auspices of the member-funded European Association of Development Research and

Training Institutes (EADI), a working group on 'Citizenship and Civil Society in Development' provides a platform for interchange among development studies academics. Today, hundreds of degree programmes and dozens of study centres, associations, networks and scholarly journals are active. These involve many thousands of scholars, tens of thousands of students, and considerable amounts of money.

How is this knowledge work paid for? Beyond tuition fees and alumni fundraising to underwrite new market-driven ambitions of universities, research depends largely on intra-mural, department-based funds, and doctoral fellowships. However, 'unfunded' research often prevails through cross-subsidies implicit in salaried scholars' time released from teaching duties. Substantial research efforts usually require grants from philanthropies and national research councils. These have provided both core support to established units such as Birmingham University's Third Sector Research Centre, and to multi-year projects, such as the Norwegian Institute for Social Research inquiry into political impacts of non-profits as implementors of public welfare tasks. WOTRO, a division of the state-financed Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), focuses on lower-income countries, and has paid for research on such things as organised labour and the social economy as well as broader topics such as 'theories of change' and the governance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In the 21st century, non-profit studies have continued to boom, especially in the Anglo-American sphere (Ma and Konrath, 2018). Many students are ready to pay to gain practical know-how in non-profit management, promotion, communication, auditing and other skills that a 'professionalised' third sector requires. Universities have developed these as market niches, and found ways to subsidise them. As these trends have gathered momentum, political or ethical aspects of non-profits have tended to fall to the margins (Weber and Witkowski, 2016). Graduate schools of business in the USA and Europe have also initiated civil society research, especially where it overlaps with corporate interests. For example, the Partnerships Resource Centre, a research governance body jointly held by Erasmus University and the Rotterdam School of Management, receives money from Royal Dutch Shell and other corporations. Elsewhere, in schools of public affairs and specialised study units, resource ecologies have expanded with monies from private philanthropy (subsidised from public purses via tax privileges), and public research councils. Since 2007, the European Union (EU) has funded research via its seven-year Framework Programmes, which in turn support the European Research Council (ERC), an important governor of academic research relevant for civil society studies.

The longer-term effects of research sponsorship await investigation, although difficulties arise from scarcities of valid information on who paid how much to whom for what kinds of activities and with what results. In publications, disclosure of funding details is uncommon. Websites of most research institutes or networks offer little detail about which studies have received what amounts of money. For their part, grant-makers often fail to specify details of their funding. Explaining that opacity is itself a task awaiting scholarly attention.

#### Fields adjacent to third sector studies

Accompanying the focus on NGOs and kindred non-profits, a few universities promote knowledge work about other constituencies in civil society. Here follows a rapid tour of the horizon:

*Organised religion* has long been a terrain for social scientists. Private philanthropy enabled study centres, journals and networks to emerge. With backing from Harvard, US academics founded The Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in 1949, decades before third sector studies appeared. Today, the rise of faith-based movements in politics, social services, media and armed insurgencies has triggered yet more research funding. For example, foundation monies helped create in 1999 the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton University, and since the early 2000s the SSRC has run a 'Religion and the Public Sphere' research programme with US foundation backing.

*Social movement research*, having shaken off affinities with psychopathology and deviance studies, gained standing in the 1960s. Scholars pursue it today in at least a dozen European and half a dozen US research centres. It relies on several major journals and formal academic networks, such as of the American, European and International Sociological Associations. Since 2000, resource ecologies for the study of digital activism, e-participation and data justice have grown significantly. Faculties of media, communications and systems science are producing critical work (such as Treré, 2018). More celebratory research about social media has found sponsors among wealthy corporate donors in 'Silicon Valley'. Meanwhile, emancipatory action-research has also emerged. For example, legal scholars have analysed constraints and openings for progressive collective action by tenants, debtors and recipients of social benefits (Andrias and Sachs, 2020). Funding for such law-focused issues seems scarce, at least when compared to the well-funded work on 'civic space', discussed below.

On other fronts, such as studies about community-based, informal and non-violent action, and about social apathy, de-mobilisation and withdrawal,

funding is not abundant. The Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, founded in 2001 at the initiative of Atlantic Philanthropies, constitutes a rare exception. “Compared to other social science topics”, according to one scholar, “the study of social movements appears to be drastically underfunded” (Croteau, 2005, p. 29). Inadequacies in knowledge about nativist and fundamentalist social movements (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro, 2019) are evident in the widespread public surprise at the political momentum and electoral successes of such ‘uncivil’ movements in Brazil, Tanzania, India, the USA and parts of Eastern Europe.

*Labour organisations* and their spin-offs for social services and politics have drawn scholarly attention and some funding. The field was once submerged in university faculties of industrial relations, which stress the conciliation of interests of employees and employers. Today, research emphasises workers’ agency and collective action (Schulze-Cleven, 2017). Some labour research thus has instrumental purposes, such as helping workers’ organisations to gain recognition and to bargain, but it often overlaps with reflexive, critical research about this embattled constituency in civil society.

*Business associations* as vehicles for rent-seeking, price-fixing and other ruinous practices have occasionally had scholarly attention (Molnár, 2020). Surveys on employers’ associations, such as Brandl and Lehr (2019), have received funding from the International Labour Organization (ILO). But as actors in civil society, business associations have drawn much less research interest than has organised labour. An EU-funded review of recent literature concludes: “This omission has as much to do with the scientific biases in the production of knowledge within fields of study as much as with the reluctance of EOs [employer organisations] to have their functioning put under scrutiny” (Adascalitei, 2019, p. 3). Their roles as political actors remain poorly investigated despite their obvious influence. Another recent literature review concludes that “how firms coordinate collective action via business associations represents the most significant gap in the literature” (Marques, 2017, pp. 741–2). Hence, a powerful camp in civil society has met scholarly neglect. Evidently, research governors rarely show appetites to sponsor systematic, critical research about it.

*Social enterprises* range from for-profit businesses that claim ethical purposes to collective bodies (such as cooperatives and land trusts) anchored in the ‘social and solidarity economy’. Research ecologies for the profit-driven members of these initiatives have grown in recent decades under patronage from corporate, philanthropic and public sector grant-makers eager to promote ‘social entrepreneurship’. Sponsorship of research in this field looks



almost certain to expand. However, research on the ‘solidarity economy’, despite promotion in recent decades by the ILO and the UN Research Institute for Social Development, faces funding constraints under neoliberalism.

### Knowledge politics in the academy

Civil society studies are not exempt from knowledge politics. Helping drive those politics are the following kinds of factors: relative scarcity of funding, especially in peripheral places; short funding cycles that reward rapid results, thus prioritising studies based on ‘low-hanging fruit’; sponsors’ lack of appetite for issues that risk controversy; intensified monitoring of performance, manifested in ‘audit culture’ (Strathern, 2000); competition among peers, in which those showing higher output of published work, network links and management capacities enjoy advantages; and, above all, alignment of scholarship with preferences of funders. The research funding brokerage office of a major US university shows no hesitation about the power of sponsors. To grant-seekers it makes a “recommendation that will contribute the most to your success in finding future funding is to do the following: PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT THE SPONSOR WANTS TO FUND” (SPO/UC Berkeley; original emphasis). Scholars with stakes in the funding game internalise these kinds of messages; self-discipline to toe the line reinforces external control (Velarde, 2018). Meanwhile, evidence is at hand (De Block, 2022) that the funding game is often wasteful, unfair and productive of research of disputable quality. Competitive scrambles for funding may be only episodically relevant, as most social science researchers go about their work “unfunded” (Edwards, 2020).

Funding of civil society studies beyond issues of non-profits seems to have advanced furthest in Europe. Public research governors in Scandinavia (especially Sweden), Germany and the UK have supported studies showing relative breadth and diversity. Beyond OECD countries, research has been undertaken in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and South Africa. External funding, if provided, is usually project-by-project; research initiatives thus resemble consultancy jobs rather than programmes with extended time horizons. In both richer and poorer places social movement activists have co-produced knowledge with university and think tank scholars (Choudry, 2020). Yet here too, systematic information about the ebbs and flows of resources for such collaboration has yet to be assembled.

Impacts of research sponsors’ preferences about civil society have yet to be studied systematically. Plausibly, in light of knowledge politics at play, their decisions and non-decisions help to inhibit the pursuit of reflexive, critical studies.

## Beyond the academy

Knowledge work outside academia draws on funding that almost certainly surpasses that afforded universities. Much non-university research is intended to promote or contest policy issues, or to assess how non-profits have used subsidies. Moonlighting academics may contribute, but most of this research is carried out by other kinds of knowledge workers: consultants, writers, journalists and others on contract. It takes place through the following:

### Think tanks

While some actors in this diverse category produce first-hand research, most repackage findings by others. As reviewed by Åberg et al. (2020), think tanks can be major players, indeed ‘ideological greenhouses’ in civil society. Many operate in close alignment with sponsors, mainly foundations, political parties or business interests. Some are ‘black boxes’, with little transparency (see <https://onthinktanks.org/>). Among those pursuing civil society research are the Aspen Institute and Urban Institute in the USA, Demos in the UK, and the Bertelsmann, Rosa Luxemburg and Friedrich Ebert foundations in Germany. In Sweden, with funding chiefly from public agencies in Scandinavia, the inter-governmental Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) pursue research through transnational networks. Elsewhere, many think tanks focus on issues of concern to their wealthy patrons, foreign and domestic, often of a neoliberal persuasion. In lower-income countries some think tanks gain foreign public sector sponsorship, as such as the multi-donor Think Tank Initiative from 2008 to 2019, which included research on civil society.

### Official surveys and assessments

Governments have periodically commissioned research on interest groups, NGOs, activists and foundations in order to probe such matters as foreign influences, tax avoidance and public service delivery. In the Netherlands, the Social and Cultural Planning Office, a public sector think tank, analyses social and political participation in its annual report on Dutch society; governments elsewhere carry out similar monitoring (Noll, 2004). Social science research paid by military and intelligence agencies has a long history, certainly in the USA (Rohde, 2009). Activities not classified as secret take place through such things as the Pentagon-funded Minerva Research Initiative. Surveillance systems, facilitated by new technologies and spurred by public health and safety concerns, today enable authorities to monitor citizens’ collective action

and communication. Surveillance of some groupings in civil society looks certain to expand. But given the threats these activities pose to basic rights, improved public knowledge of civil society may emerge only later, through counter-reactions such as whistleblowing, strategic leaks and journalistic exposés.

### Capacity-builders

Imperatives to improve non-profit management and fundraising/marketing capacities have brought forth a large, well-resourced field of knowledge work that ranges from practical courses to educational materials, to consultancy and leadership mentoring (Mirabella et al., 2019). For example, INTRAC, an Oxford-based non-profit founded in 1991, has financed its practice-focused publications, research and evaluation work with private foundation and aid agency grants together with fees for training and related capacity-building services. Partly or wholly self-financed, some associative bodies collect, synthesise and publish information of use to members; one example among many is the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits.

### Givers' advisory agencies

Benefactors looking for suitable ways to donate their money may turn to agencies that assess the donation-worthiness of NGOs. These advisory agencies' research costs are met by philanthropies or by client fees. Among examples are: NGO Advisor, CharityWatch, Charity Navigator and GiveWell. Seitz (2019) critically reviews this 'effective altruism' branch. For wealthy clients, private banks have begun offering similar research services. Needs to manage untaxed inherited wealth, such as among the 'boomer' cohort in the USA, are increasing the demand for such services.

### Civic space watchdogs

Since the early 1990s, donors have sought to safeguard NGOs and independent media facing hostile governments, including their courts and tax authorities. Specialised organisations have assumed tasks of monitoring 'civic spaces' vulnerable to repression. The US government-funded International Center for Not-for-Profit Law and its counterpart in Europe, produce hundreds of research items every year. Bodies drawing both official and private grants such as CIVICUS, the London-based Funders' Initiative for Civil Society and the Geneva-based International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations also monitor threats to NGOs and civic media. These efforts seem assured of continued funding, even as political space for some blocs in civil society

in some countries continues to expand. Flanking the civic space watchdogs are academic initiatives on comparative law and regulation, such as Exeter University's Regulating Civil Society programme, funded mainly by the European Research Council.

### Surveys and consultation exercises

These regional and national initiatives have become abundant in recent years, sponsored by foundations and some public bodies. In the USA, third sector trade associations such as the Independent Sector regularly survey their branch. The Urban Institute's Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy issues an annual *Nonprofit Almanac*. Appearing annually in the UK since 2008 is a Third Sector Trends Study covering the north of England. In the years 2017–18, a consultative survey in the UK entitled *Civil Society Futures* took place with foundation backing. Funded surveys routinely take place elsewhere; for example, the EU–Russia Civil Society Forum, funded by the EU, annually produces a report on the State of Civil Society in the EU and Russia. Special exercises in citizen participation, such as that seen in France, the Citizens' Convention for Climate (2019–20), have demonstrated how, in response to civic activism, government-funded public consultations can impact public policy.

### Labour rights research

An important, albeit politically circumscribed resource ecology exists in the ILO, especially its Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV). Some larger trade union federations fund their own research units, or allied labour support think tanks. In Western Europe, some 32 of these make up the Network of Trade Union Research Institutes. These and others, such as the Worker Participation Europe network, rely mainly on trade union resources. Foundation-supported bodies such as the International Labor Rights Forum, based in Washington DC, complement trade union-backed research.

### Journalism

Coverage in newspapers, documentary films, webzines and other media may not qualify as 'scholarship' but it can generate important findings and strongly affect public views of civil society. Such work can entail large amounts of money, especially when the public relations systems of non-profits themselves are taken into account. Funding powers rest with publishers who commission articles or books and with sponsors of investigative journalism and watchdogs, some of whom may be aligned with one or another camp in civil society.

## Aid and development systems

Foreign aid systems, under public or private auspices, have long affected the study of civil society. Aid donors are vital promoters of NGOs and other non-state actors, and remain decisive to those organisations' survival in both donor and recipient lands. Some scholars (reviewed in Rovaniemi, 2015) argue that the logic of foreign aid and the logic of research are incompatible. Such scepticism notwithstanding, aid system sponsorship of civil society research continues. Most knowledge work can be placed in one of three categories, namely:

### Accountability and performance

Along the chain of aid, the routines of reporting, auditing and evaluating performance reflect rudimentary forms of research and require much time and money. They differ from academic research in that they are mandatory, funded semi-automatically, involve private consultants and accountants, and disclose results to limited audiences only. The instrumental value of evaluation research at the behest of donors has long evoked scepticism. Nevertheless, evaluation findings can be relevant for scholarly research on NGOs linked with aid chains. Major reform, let alone discontinuation, of conventional auditing and evaluation systems seem unlikely.

### Funding of research projects

Some donor governments draw occasionally on their foreign aid budgets to fund research pertaining to civil society. Examples include Britain's Global Challenges Research Fund, the Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development, and Canada's International Development Research Center, for whom 'Democratic and Inclusive Governance' is among five priority terrains. Sweden's aid agency SIDA has been a regular supporter of research. Think tanks such as the UK's the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), funded from aid budgets of the UK and other OECD states, occasionally commission civil society research.

Some larger private but publicly funded aid agencies such as Hivos in the Netherlands have promoted knowledge work on civil society, sometimes in partnership with universities and think tanks. A review of this kind of knowledge work suggests chronic problems of bias and short-termism (Bradley, 2017). Research by Oxfam UK and Oxfam Novib often concentrates on public issues, in support of advocacy. However, most private agency research is for

internal consumption, being focused on their own capacity and programming, as well as their partner NGOs (Fransman, 2019). Auxiliary research on NGO capacities occurs episodically under auspices of official agencies (e.g. IOB, 2011) which often contract academic units or consulting firms.

### Registration and surveys

In 1946, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) set up its NGO Committee, which today continues to publish data and reports on NGOs as well as that Committee's debates about them. The UN Statistics Division has, since the 1990s, promoted data-gathering on non-profits in every nation's statistical system. UN bodies and other multilateral and bilateral agencies routinely compile data and publish analyses. Examples include OECD (2020) and USAID (2021 and earlier years). Tracking achievement of the 16th SDG, on effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, requires that harms done to media workers, trade unionists and human rights advocates be monitored and publicised. These publicly funded mechanisms generate and filter information online, constituting a modest input to knowledge work.

## Regulatory oversight

To verify the bona fides of non-profits, public and private agencies have sought to monitor them in accordance with legislation and policy. These include public regulators of private philanthropy, such as the Charity Commission for England and Wales (founded 1853), which has formal mandates to oversee public benefit bodies. A recent collection of articles (McGregor-Lowndes and Wyatt, 2017) reports on the uneven and often lax state of charity regulation in the USA, UK and Anglosphere countries. Shortcomings abound, but elite interests (especially for tax avoidance) frustrate major reforms. Bolleyer (2018) discusses other examples in Europe and North America. In addition, public registries of non-profits are government agencies are intended to serve public accountability and in many cases tax privileges. France's Répertoire national des associations (founded 1901) is an example.

Finally, in the spirit of self-regulation, non-governmental 'umbrella' bodies monitor non-profits and certify compliance with public rules and norms. Fees charged to charities for membership or certification enable some monitoring bodies to meet their costs, while others depend on state subsidies. Examples include the Pakistan Council on Philanthropy and the Central Bureau on Fundraising (CBF) in the Netherlands.

## Conclusion: knowledge deficits

This chapter underscores the significant, yet under-researched roles of those who sponsor knowledge work about civil society. The powers of research sponsors have long concerned social scientists (e.g. Broadhead and Rist, 1976). Today, both funders and recipients may downplay the fact, but research sponsors' influence is formidable (Hernando and Williams, 2018). Research funding takes place in contexts where citizens' knowledge of political cause, effect and moral choice is skewed by preferences of wealthy interests. Those interests are known to use their funding power as a tool of 'philanthro-policymaking' (Schiller, 2019). Research sponsorship often promotes inequality while claiming to combat it (Maclean et al., 2021) leading some to advocate for 'epistemic democracy' (Bennett, 2020). Because such vital matters remain inadequately studied, paying attention to them is all the more important.

In light of the foregoing, and of evolving political and social contexts, a number of issues merit places on a research agenda about the sponsorship of civil society studies:

- Basic information. How can valid data about the funding of research ecologies be found, inferred or created? In what circumstances (countries, sub-disciplines) and for what civil society camps are gaps in data the greatest, and what factors explain those gaps?
- Patterns and trends in sponsorship. Across resource ecologies, what patterns and trends in knowledge work are detectable, and to what extent do the preferences of resource governors explain them?
- Charting Biases. To what extent is research funding routinely commensurate with:
  - Needs and capacities in resource-scarce settings (countries, regions, neighbourhoods);
  - Size and social salience of distinct blocs within civil society, notably nativist and religious fundamentalist movements, or de-mobilised and wholly apathetic citizenries;
  - Impacts on society-wide 'social contracts' as the influence of wealthy philanthropists grows and as public tasks shift to non-profits and volunteers;
  - Enabling/inhibiting impacts on civil society of alternative and social media;
  - Impacts on political change enabled/inhibited via media attention generated in civil society.

Relevance and effects of research funding should also be considered. What are the payoffs – or deadweight losses – to research? Which groupings in civil society experience what kinds of effects as a result of research sponsorship? To the extent that legitimacy and accountability of civil society bodies are affected by research, in what measure can they be attributed to research governance? Has funding for monitoring ‘civic space’, for example, helped improve legal environments and public attitudes towards all organisations? In enabling or inhibiting wider circulation and uptake of research results, what differences do the various kinds of research sponsors (self-financed, corporate, governmental, philanthropic, crowd-funded, etc.) make?

Finally, there is conceptual knowledge work. To what extent, and in what ways, has research sponsorship enabled or inhibited development of concepts by which civil society can be understood? For example, with the advent of ‘post-democracies’ where public and private sectors inter-penetrate, the concept of a ‘third sector’ needs re-thinking. As material things such as NGO-enterprise hybrids present themselves, and as non-material drivers such as recognition/identity claims emerge, the conceptual agenda is changing. Where and how are research governors intervening to shape concepts?<sup>1</sup>

## NOTE

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# 3

## Epistemologies of civil society

*Patricia Maria E. Mendonça*

### Introduction

There are huge debates in the literature on the definition of civil society (Muukkonen, 2009; Edwards, 2004; Alves, 2004). All are built from the position of civil society on the basis of fundamental social institutions: state, market, religion, family (or private life). For liberal Enlightenment thinkers, writing in a historical context of the emergence of the modern state and the Industrial Revolution, civil society was conceptualized as separate from the State, and mediation between them occurs from representation, one of the bases of liberal democracy. Freedom and individual rights also played an important role in explaining civil society in this tradition. Civil society is the space between the State and individuals, filled by voluntary political associations and economic institutions (Cohen & Arato, 1992).

In the Marxist tradition, civil society was not the space for separation between the State and private life. The state is an instrument of class government, which must disappear. What would really unite human existence and preserve freedoms would be the abolition of these two spheres, and the reunification of civil and political society.

In the 20th century, post-Marxists recovered debates on civil society in response to authoritarian political contexts of closure of civic spaces in many countries. The notion of public sphere appears as one of the proposals, which presupposes a return to the separation between political society and civil society, and to conceive a means of reconstructing social ties outside the authoritarian State.

The debate on civil society also proliferates among the practices of international organizations for the promotion of development, in the form of policies and recommendations, which have as a principle that civil society is a good thing, and, thus, should be strengthened. These recommendations and actions, usually accompanied by international aid, frequently reduced the understand-

ing of civil society to a specific organizational type, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Seckinelgin, 2002; Lewis, 2019).

On the practices of these international organizations, the Brazilian indigenous activist and author Ailton Krenak commented:

Think of our best-established institutions, such as universities or multilateral organizations, that emerged in the 20th century: World Bank, Organization of American States (OAS), United Nations (UN), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Culture (UNESCO). When we wanted to create a biosphere reserve in a region of Brazil, it was necessary to justify to UNESCO why it was important that the planet was not devoured by mining. For this institution, it is as if it were enough to maintain only a few places as a free sample of the Earth. If we survive, we will fight for the pieces of planet that we did not eat, and our grandchildren or great-great-grandchildren – or the grandchildren of our great-great-grandchildren – will be able to walk around to see what the Earth was like in the past. These agencies and institutions were configured and maintained as structures of that humanity. (Krenak, 2019, p. 12, translated freely)

Many criticisms about the application of these concepts in academic debates and policy have already been made, questioning their use outside the Western, or Northern context; additionally, propositions were presented for building epistemologies of the South (Lewis, 2002; Fowler, 2012; Dagnino, 2003; De Sousa Santos, 2006, 2012).

## Civil society in Latin America

In Latin America, roughly speaking until the mid-1980s, civil society was debated on the continent based on Marxist traditions, in which opposition to the State stood out (Dagnino et al., 2000). In this context, although without great internal repercussions, NGOs had great prominence. The use of the term “non-governmental” was appropriate to the struggles that were fought against authoritarian regimes in many countries (Landim, 2002).

NGOs appeared to perform a role as major mediators between grassroots social movements and international development cooperation agencies. Between the 1960s and 1980s this articulation promoted connections with different conceptions and practices about civil society. Landim (2002) defines the understanding of what NGOs in Latin America are as legally established organizations, whose main function is to implement projects that favor popular sectors, and that receive financial support, almost always coming from other NGOs located in industrialized countries in the North. In the articulation with popular

sectors, there is also the participation of the Catholic Church. These religious sectors – both clergy and laity – are involved with Marxist-inspired practices that have left a profound mark on the region and its social movements (Theology of Liberation).

In Brazil, for example, in addition to the NGOs having played an important role in the approval of the new Constitution of 1988, soon after Rio 92 they gained enormous importance. At that moment, they no longer had the character of a counterpoint to the State, gaining the status of “micro organisms of the democratic process, references, places of innovation and creation of new processes” (Landim, 2002, p. 216).

This positive view of NGOs in Latin America is aligned on the international stage with the growing participation in transnational spaces, notably the UN Conferences that followed on from the Environment in Rio de Janeiro (Human Rights – Vienna 1993; Population and Development – Cairo 1994; Social Development – Copenhagen 1995; Women – Beijing 1995; Habitat II – Istanbul 1996).

The notion of citizenship, in the sense of the liberal conception, becomes an important point of reference in the practices of Latin American social movements, reinforcing the sense of legal protection that guarantees democracy. But there was also a subjective dimension, of recognition for diversity, thus making the notion of citizenship an articulatory element: “These movements have found reference to citizenship not only a useful tool for their particular struggles but also a powerful articulating link among them” (Dagnino, 2003, p. 211).

But as we move toward the end of the 1990s, this notion of citizenship is disputed due to the rise of neoliberalism on the continent and the emergence of a new space for the articulation of society: the *Third Sector*. Mainstream media gave great prominence to this “novelty”, not differentiating between the use of the terms NGOs, charities, religious initiatives, corporate social actions or philanthropy.<sup>1</sup> It was common to see criticism from activists about the new expression Third Sector and the claims and apparent innovations that accompanied it.

In one of these texts that reflected on the arrival of the “novelty”, Alves (2004) rescued its use from the international context, particularly after the launch of a large global comparative research project. This research in Brazil was led by Leila Landim, who was an NGO activist and was one of the first academics to use the term NGO in the country. Interestingly, as the concept quickly became commonly used, the Brazilian Association of NGOs (ABONG) rejected the use

of the term Third Sector, not identifying itself as part of it, relating its use to a neoliberal project.

Dagnino (2003) agrees with ABONG's view; for the author there is a new meaning about civil society in Latin America, when the principle of recognition is removed from the notion of citizenship. This subjective dimension of citizenship was reflected in the practices of social participation that were so well documented (councils, participatory budgeting).

The notion of participation also was reframed. The Third Sector was attributed technical competence and a close relationship with various social actors, being a reliable representative among the various possible civil society stakeholders. Third Sector organizations became ideal partners for a state committed to transferring responsibility to civil society and the market.

For Paoli (2002), citizenship gains the connotation of civility and social integration, with a strong appeal to the voluntary and solidary social activism of an individual, organization or company, removing central concern with State accountability.

The Third Sector also became an ideal partner of philanthropy, which in the late 1990s and 2000s took on new forms based on the discourse of corporate social responsibility that circulated quite strongly throughout Latin America (Correa et al., 2004). From this period on, many companies began to structure more programmatic forms of action. In Brazil, Peliano (2001) raises in his study that companies have always had a social performance, often motivated by religiosity. The "novelty" is now an apparatus that accompanies these actions involving institutions, advisory research centers and courses linked to universities that inaugurate a dimension focused on innovation and results in social action.

Certainly, a more focused and technically strengthened philanthropy has many positive points. However, in the face of patrimonialism and colonial legacies, these actions still lack a genuinely conscious vision of overcoming inequalities, and end up producing actions with low social engagement, far from the grassroots and social movements:

The notion of "civil society" was embodied in them and the languages of the conflict, the visibility of popular protagonism and the republican utopias of common decisions made by politically equivalent citizens, although socially unequal, were diluted in a variety of ways. (Paoli, 2002, translated freely)

It then migrates to a definition of citizenship centered on the individual, with solidarity being understood as a strictly private dimension of moral responsibility. The fragile and incipient welfare state imagined by the Brazilian social movements throughout the debates of the 1988 constitution, as a response to poverty and profound inequalities, is rapidly disappearing (Montaño, 2002).

There was a brief attempt to reconstruct this welfare state during the two Lula governments of the Workers' Party, a period that was also marked by the relative economic success of middle-income countries – BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). On the Latin American continent, there have also been other experiences of governments that have managed to expand social protection systems. For example, several countries have created cash transfer programs: Bolsa Família in Brasil; Oportunidades in México; Familias em Acción in Colômbia; and Bono de Desarrollo in Ecuador (CEPAL, 2016).

However, what stands out in the Brazilian experience is the notion of citizenship centered on the individual and on access to consumer goods that cannot be characterized as a complete break with the neoliberal project.

Much has been debated about this incomplete citizenship and the risks that a brief period of growth and economic inclusion implied for demobilizing social movements (Mendonça et al., 2013). As soon as the national and global system that guaranteed this mobilization in the past disappeared, a marked weakening of civil society was experienced. Even the notion of citizenship centered on the individual seemed to shrink afterwards.

Profound changes took place in the field of international cooperation in the first decade of the 2000s. The BRICs became donors for development international cooperation, especially in the experiences of South–South cooperation, although still with small proportional participation compared to traditional donor countries. Other actors such as large private foundations and corporations, in addition to local and community foundations, gain relevance. Northern NGOs, together with development agencies that were configured as traditional donors, repositioned their activities (Biekart, 2013).

In parallel with these international cooperation movements, which represented a decrease in resources for grassroots movements and a struggle for the right to organize, these same movements, which had a brief space for participation after the 1988 Constitution, were now being attacked. The struggle for recognition and denunciations about historical debts owed to black, indigenous groups, women, LGBT and other minorities, which reinforce the

persistent inequalities and poverty in the Latin American continent, were now “criminalized”.<sup>2</sup>

## Epistemological storms

Twenty years after Rio 92, NGOs are experiencing a crisis of legitimacy, not only in Brazil, but also in the international context, with their representativeness questioned, and some under suspicion of illegal practices, ranging from sexual harassment allegations to involvement with corruption in the public and private sectors. Around the year 2013 in Brazil, there was a joint movement aimed at renaming the field of action of civil society. Traditional NGOs, which since the 1970s had been working closely with social movements, did not see themselves as representatives of the Third Sector.

Meanwhile, traditional religious (as well as professional) organizations in the fields of education and health, in addition to the growing hybrid forms of cooperatives and social businesses, shared common agendas with many NGOs and grassroots organizations: regulatory improvements aimed at local mobilization of resources. The term Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) was increasingly used to try to encompass all of them in mobilizations for common agendas. Although all expressions continue to circulate – NGOs, Third Sector, CSOs – they mark different periods, actors, and different notions about what civil society and citizenship mean:

Some of them define the situation as a dilemma, and several are considering the possibility of rejecting any further joint action altogether or being extremely selective and careful with respect to the correlation of forces present in these spaces and the concrete possibilities they present. Under an apparent homogeneity of discourse, what is at stake in these spaces is the success or failure of very different political projects and conceptions of citizenship. (Dagnino, 2003, p. 219)

In this way, civil society in Latin America presents elements of confrontations (against an authoritarian state) followed by elements of unification (aligned with the market), and which can be related to two classic definitions of civil society with a Marxist and liberal tradition. Seeking to resolve dichotomies that still remain on the concepts of classic civil society, public vs. private and political vs. economic, Cohen and Arato (1992, p. ix) conceptualize civil society as

the sphere of social interaction between the economy and the State, composed above all by the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of association (especially voluntary associations), social movements and forms of public communication.



This post-Marxist perspective influences other new debates. But they still bear a mark of Western contexts and thoughts, which carry a specific idea about social progress. Authors from Latin America and Africa, together with other academics and activists, have been seeking to build understandings about civil society from the Global South, mobilizing post-Marxist and post-colonial discussions.

De Sousa Santos (2012) highlights that the liberal perspectives on civil society help to build a specific notion of citizenship, a system of legal protection, which is a central element for the maintenance of democracy. However, the concepts and policies derived from this notion also create spaces of exclusion for workers and blacks, and indigenous people are left out of this citizenship. For the author, it is necessary to rescue the concept of civil society, based on solidarity, volunteering and reciprocity, which would move part of the citizenship that was excluded from the advances of globalization and the market economy.

Authors of post-colonial studies in Latin America, linked to the indigenous movements, argue that modernity should be interpreted from the place of the colonized subject and elaborate a new reading of the historical process (Mamani, 2010; Quijano, 2015; Krenak, 2019). These ideas were initially resisted by local Latin American intellectuals, but recently have found interlocutors more willing to meet with indigenous thinking before talking to European or North American scholars:

First, I would say that Latin Americans have to meet with indigenous people, in order to then be able to dialogue with Europe. Their thinking is not related to the indigenous movement, they made the indigenous movement invisible because they thought he was inferior. They simply imitated Europe. They say Latin America, you know? For us, we are AbyYala, as we have called our continent for thousands of years. And I tell you more: we have more dialogues with Europeans than with Latin Americans. Because Latin Americans want to be like the Swiss, the Germans, the English, the Italians, continue in the process of colonization. The indigenous Amazonian still fights with the prospectors. These destroy forests, destroyed mother trees, father trees, trees of thousands of years, cut them to send to the western world. (Mamani, 2009, translated freely)

How is it possible to move from the indigenous view to Western thinkers, passing through other local Latin American thinkers to produce a vision of civil society that is inclusive and meaningful in the face of complex challenges and phenomena of the 21st century, such as digital life, planetary life and the environment, and political polarization?

The Brazilian novelist Guimarães Rosa (1908–1967) sought to deal with universal themes of the human experience using regional contexts, languages

and narratives. In 1962, he wrote a short story “The Third Bank of the River” about a man who abandoned everything to live alone in the middle of a river in a canoe. Considering that the river only has two banks, the meaning of the third bank can only be understood in the narrative itself. The concept of a universal civil society that was built on one of the river banks is abstract and exclusive, thought from a modernity loaded with world views marked by exclusion legacies and invisibilities:

I do not know if everyone knows the terminologies referring to the relationship of indigenous peoples with the places where they live or the attributions that the Brazilian State has given to these territories throughout our history. Since colonial times, the question of what to do with that part of the population that survived the tragic first encounters between European dominators and the people who lived in what we now call, in a very reductionist way, indigenous lands, has led to a very mistaken relationship between the State and these communities. This is because the state machine works to undo the forms of organization of our societies, seeking integration between these populations and the whole of Brazilian society. (Krenak, 2019, p. 28, translated freely)

## Conclusion

Latin America is marked by a colonial past, indigenous extermination and slavery that has contributed to deep inequalities across the continent. On the other hand, it holds a rich ethnic, cultural and ecological diversity. Contemplating this legacy and differences in the notion of civil society demands constant refreshing and reminds us that it’s an historically built concept. Dagnino (2003) reminds us that a platform of rights must constantly be under construction, balancing demands based on dynamic and current configurations, on everyday life, and receptive to emancipatory speeches.

It also needs to consider laws, pacts, international conventions and social policies, becoming an increasingly everyday experience (Scherer-Warren, 2011). De Sousa Santos (2012) suggests that for intellectual work to contribute to an inclusive emancipatory process of subordinate subjects, not only will they have to be considered as citizens by law, but their reflections on the experiences and knowledge of these peoples, as well as the new discursive formations that are elaborated in their networked political practices, will need to be taken into account.

Civil society is a concept built in the Western world, based on its historical and cultural references. There are political and practical implications for this concept, which unfolds into definitions of citizenship and access to a system of rights, as well as the recognition of forms considered representative of civil

society (most notably NGOs). On the other bank of the river, there are many local demonstrations of various civil societies around the world connected with contingent realities.

The “third margin” needs to integrate visions, build a path, and function as a canoe to cross the river. And its universalizing element should not be solely the individual and its freedom. This challenge becomes even more prominent in the climate crisis scenario:

Why does it make us feel uncomfortable to fall? We have done nothing else recently but plummet. Fall, fall, fall. So why are we cricketed now with the fall? We will take advantage of all our critical and creative capacity to build colorful parachutes. Let's think about space not as a confined place, but as the cosmos where we can plummet in colorful parachutes. There are hundreds of narratives of people who are alive, tell stories, sing, travel, talk and teach us more than we have learned in this humanity. (Krenak, 2019, p. 20)

In this sense, why not imagine being no longer in a civil society, but in a planetary society, whose understanding of rights, freedoms and collectivity is constantly evolving, but still linked to a framework that can mobilize another sense of progress:

- Is it possible to think of a definition of civil society that is not based on opposition to the state? What ways to positively formulate a concept of civil society would be possible?
- What unifying elements could be thought of to build bridges with citizenship and rights, updating what was forged post-World War II with complex transnational and local realities?
- How could we give recognition and legitimacy to the various organizational manifestations and practices of civil society, which do not ignore their historical constructions, local and transnational representation?

Thinking about understandings of civil society has political and practical implications, as well as the need to mobilize research and different actors aligned with development, democracy and human rights agendas.<sup>3</sup>

## NOTES

1. The author followed much of the mainstream media coverage on this subject over the years. For a brief analysis that demonstrates this, see Alves (2002).
2. The term criminalization here does not imply legal action, but rather the construction of speeches that question the legitimacy of social struggles and the very

existence of some manifestations of civil society. See <https://abong.org.br/2019/11/27/a-criminalizacao-como-arma-politica/>.

3. The author, a white Latin American woman, has sought to move between the banks of the river in her personal–academic trajectory. This chapter was written originally in Portuguese; references and literature citations are sometimes difficult to express reliably in translation.

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# 4

## Civil society studies in Brazil: from third sector to uncivil society?

*Mário Aquino Alves*

### Introduction

Since the middle of the 2010s, Brazilian civil society has been going through a degeneration in citizenship achievements, whether in public policies or human rights. The advance of authoritarian forces through legal maneuvers and electoral successes of right-wing populist candidates for both the executive and the legislature creates the conditions for this setback to take place. Such a move, which is recently aligned with the wave of authoritarian and hybrid regimes, threatens advocacy groups and civil society (Toepler et al., 2020).

Thus, some forms of “uncivil society” (Glasius, 2010) challenge Brazil’s secular and democratic policy principles, in the form of extreme right-wing or fundamental religious groups, some latent forms of uncivil society that were present even after the transition to democracy in the late 1980s (Avritzer, 2004). These, and others that recently emerged, have been acting to influence public policy through a challenge to the lay status of the state and othering disadvantaged groups like women and black people and minorities such as the LGBTQI+ community (Segatto et al., 2021; Alves et al., 2021).

However, it is surprising that Brazilian academia, especially scholars on civil society and the third sector, failed to capture this movement or completely misinterpreted it. What would be the reasons for not observing this movement?

The internationalization of studies on civil society organizations fostered their role in promoting economic and social development. It also added to the importance that international funding agencies started, from the 1990s onwards, to place a great deal of emphasis on the role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the construction of democracy both in post-communist countries of Eastern Europe and in developing countries, bringing the term “civil

society” into current use in various spheres of knowledge. The term “third sector” was often used as a surrogate for the concept of “civil society.” This confusion between the two concepts represents a depoliticized construction (Alves, 2004; Silva, 2006; Montaña, 2015).

In the early 1990s, this field of studies emerged mainly in Brazilian business schools. They assimilated the emergent discourse on the third sector, helping to develop an institutional environment that induced a professionalization requiring traditional NGOs and grassroots organizations to deal with contradictory logics and simultaneously fostered the emergence of market-oriented nonprofit organizations (Alves & Koga, 2006).

In the 2000s, the focus of the literature on civil society rested on the relationship between government and civil society through mechanisms of participation (Lopez et al., 2011) and the emergence of social entrepreneurship (Borges Ladeira & Vier Machado, 2013). This shift in focus reflected two phenomena. First, the institutionalization of mechanisms of participation and deliberative democracy in the late 1990s and 2000s, especially from the Workers’ Party’s (PT) experiences in municipal government, attracted much attention from social scientists. Second, with the support of the Ashoka Foundation and the Schwab Foundation, business schools have shifted their attention to the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises.

After the uprising of social movements in Brazil in June 2013, literature analyzed this new form of social mobilization and its connection to social media. However, the academic field of the third sector was negligent in analyzing either these insurgent movements or the mobilization of right-wing social movements.

In this chapter, I intend to contribute to an understanding of the origins of this negligence, showing how the evolution of the academic field of civil society was being configured in such a way that attention was only paid either to traditional nonprofit organizations (equated to third sector organizations in the 1990s) or to grassroots social movements (the positive civil society), leaving aside research on the uncivil elements. My working hypothesis is that this results from the secondary character that the field of studies on the third sector and civil society has assumed in the Brazilian academic field.



## Civil society or third sector?

Some authors (e.g., Falconer, 1999; Coelho, 2000) point to Leilah Landim, a researcher at the Institute of Religion Studies (ISER), as a pioneer in using the expression third sector in Brazil. *Para Além do Mercado e do Estado* [Beyond Markets and State] (Landim, 1993) was the first reference that most researchers cited when dealing with the term third sector.

In *Para Além do Mercado e do Estado*, Landim introduces the term as one of several names (voluntary sector, third sector, charities, nongovernmental organizations, philanthropy, civil society) that can be applied to the nonprofit sector (Landim, 1993).

The objective of Landim's study was to make a historical examination of Brazil's third sector development. According to the author, this survey was not easy. The difficulty resided in the fact that public debate on associations, voluntary work and business philanthropy only started to take place in the 1990s in Brazil. The absence of debate in past decades would be justified because Brazilian civil society has consistently shown itself to be fragile in the face of the high degree of centralism of the Brazilian state and the existence of solid corporatism. Furthermore, sociological and historiographic literature in Brazil has consistently rejected, for ideological reasons, the study of issues such as "nonpolitical" associativism and, above all, business philanthropy (Landim, 1993).

In addition to the historical evolution, Landim investigated the legal status of the nonprofit universe and profiles of nonprofit organizations in Brazil from Brazilian Federal Revenue Service records. This survey served as the basis for Leilah Landim's later work with the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, of which she was a research associate.

Still, it is interesting to note that Landim moved away from this field of studies that she helped to inaugurate. In one of her reports on the size of the third sector in Brazil, the author stated:

(...) evoking not conflict, but collaboration and the positivity of interaction, the term third sector tends to empty the politicized dynamics that mark, by force of circumstances, the associative tradition of recent decades and perhaps of Brazilian history. (Landim & Beres, 1999, p. 9)<sup>1</sup>

She criticized the use of the term third sector, especially in Brazil, whether in focusing too much on the provision of services or by the emergence of market

terms in the field of grassroots organizations, which would contribute to their depoliticization (Landim, 1999; Landim & Beres, 1999; *Proposta*, 1999).

It is interesting to note that the term third sector became associated with research in nonprofit organizations conducted chiefly within business schools.

## **The involvement of business schools in research on the third sector**

As Peter Dobkin Hall pointed out, organizations linked to corporate philanthropy seek to legitimize their power by winning over people's hearts and minds. Analyzing the US case, Hall (1990) stated that it was necessary to create a theory, a theoretical body that supported the practices that emerged in the academic field of the third sector. This theory would translate into a critical symbolic capital for the legitimacy of its position in the field of the third sector and the social world. For this reason, corporate philanthropy created links to the university, which had the scientific capital that can guarantee legitimacy in third sector discourse (Bourdieu, 1989; Hall, 1990).

The Brazilian case did not seem to be different from the US case. Embryonic research on the third sector in Brazil that emerged in the 1990s had been financed by international donors operating in Brazil, especially the W.K. Kellogg Foundation; the dilemmas that arose in the Brazilian context had another dimension (Nogueira, 2014).

As Landim (1990) pointed out, in the 1990s, there was a great deal of ideological resistance on the part of researchers at the Brazilian university – especially academics in the humanities – to investigate issues related to philanthropy and, in a correlated manner, to the third sector. There was an understanding that philanthropic organizations and nonprofit associations constituted an easily “co-optable” civil society, whether by populist politicians or by representatives of the military regime in the 1960s and 1970s; while the new social movements would constitute a counterpoint to confront the military regime and the affirmation of new forms of political demand (Kowarick, 1987; Sader, 1988).

However, this academic resistance to research philanthropy and nonprofit organizations has been bypassed by funding study centers in business schools. Philanthropic donors encouraged and funded research on nonprofit management and corporate social responsibility themes (Alves, 2002; Nogueira, 2014). Thus, in the Brazilian case, business schools, with the support of private

foundations, were more focused on training courses for professionals for the sector than on research (Alves, 2002).

The rapid diffusion of ideas and research from the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project throughout Brazil provoked a particular demand by some segments of the third sector – especially organizations linked to corporate philanthropy – for universities to teach and train the new professionals with concepts and applications for organizations in the third sector. Hence, third sector study centers emerged. For example, the Center for Studies of the Third Sector at Escola de Administração de Empresas de São Paulo da Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV EAESP) was the first created with the support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Merege & Alves, 1998). Following the Center for Third Sector (CETS), the Center for Administrative Studies of the Third Sector (CEATS) at the University of São Paulo (1997) and the Center for Studies in Administration of the Third Sector (NEATS) at Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC SP) (1998) were created. In 2001, there were 35 research centers in Brazil conducting activities in the third sector; 20 were dedicated only to training and consulting, all of which were connected to business schools (Fischer & Sofiatti, 2001).

There was only a tendency to reproduce imported knowledge. The fact that business schools were more committed to creating courses for the training of professionals, using international handbooks, instead of producing local knowledge, reflected the urgency that private foundations and international donors had in consolidating the third sector academic field in Brazil and knowledge dissemination.

## The evolution of the academic field

Despite a strong inclination toward the reproduction of applied knowledge from abroad, from the 2000s onwards, a critical mass of researchers was formed. Whether by their own will or by pressure from the academic bureaucracy, or by demands of the third sector organizations, they started to develop their research on the sector (Marques et al., 2015).

On the one hand, there was an emerging local production of agents within the third sector academic field on issues related to third sector management, such as fundraising, accounting issues, and strategic management of non-profit organizations (Marques et al., 2015). Also, within the scope of business

schools, there has been substantial growth in the literature that connects the third sector to social entrepreneurship and social business (Couto et al., 2020).

On the other hand, after the implementation of the first legislative reform in the late 1990s aimed at civil society organizations and government contracts through “partnership terms,” there was a strong inflection in the field with the entry of legal professionals and academics, who proceeded to predominate (Alves & Koga, 2006; Salinas, 2019).

During President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva’s second term (2007–10) and mainly under President Dilma Rousseff’s first term (2011–14), several corruption scandals involving nonprofit organizations and government contracts created an atmosphere of distrust. To reverse this trend, civil society advocacy organizations, like the Brazilian Association of NGOs (ABONG), created a grassroots mobilization to demand better treatment of civil society organizations, especially those contracted by governments to implement policies and programs. In response, there was strong government interest in promoting research on civil society organizations, especially in participation in public policy councils and the implementation of these policies in co-production with the state (Gohn, 2011; Montaña, 2015; Rocha et al., 2021). For example, the central government think tank the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA) became directly interested in the subject, promoting research and publications on civil society organizations.

In 2016, due to the different studies, conferences and consultations with civil society groups, new legislation established the Regulatory Framework for Civil Society Organizations (MROSC). IPEA started to host the Map of Civil Society Organizations. This work provides a comprehensive directory with information on third sector organizations and civil society in Brazil and serves as an extensive repository of technical publications (IPEA, 2021).

This more official movement to add knowledge about civil society in Brazil was extremely important to give new meaning to and requalify Brazilian scientific production on the subject. The qualitative improvement of work in Brazilian academia on civil society organizations is striking, going from mere replicators of foreign notions and manuals to reflections more applied to the national context.

However, with most of the attention of scholars focusing on civil society organizations, participatory mechanisms, and co-production of public services, other emerging phenomena were left out, such as the protest movements of June 2013 (Vicino & Fahlberg, 2017) and the emergence of right-wing pop-

ulism in Brazil associated with uncivil movements (Souza, 2020; Smith, 2020; Alves et al., 2021).

## Next steps for Brazilian civil society research

The initial movements to create the field of research on civil society in Brazil contributed to creating a separation between research that considered organizational and managerial aspects of civil society in its political dynamics. Treating a “third technical sector” as a substitute for civil society became an ideological operation that promoted a form of distorted reality. First, there was an attempt to reduce the political character of civil society by transforming it into a space of “service provision” to replace, complement or cooperate with the state.

The concept of civil society is of paramount importance in discussions about the future of democracy and its vitality. Therefore, understanding how civil society can effectively contribute to the construction of democratic order and how scholars in organizations can understand it as a multifaceted field of actions that bring together different interests and positions of power is fundamental. The public sphere is not only supported by civil society; civil society and the state form a continuum, separate but interdependent – state institutions reinforce civil society and vice versa. Therefore, democracy also needs a type of state with open institutions, one prepared for the diversity of opinions in society.

In addition to the academy’s themes, we must consider important issues that are still neglected.

First, it is crucial to recognize the advancement of uncivil groups in Brazilian society, to understand their connection to an international wave of right-wing populist movements that seem to have strong popular appeal. Still, within this theme, it is crucial to recognize how these uncivil groups are organized, how these discourses are structured, and why they neglect the very foundations of democracy.

Second, after nearly 30 years of building a deliberative ecosystem of public policies based on participation and accountability, there seems to be an emptying and extinction of these spaces. What are the effects on public policies, on democracy, and on civil society itself?

Third, how is the regulatory space of civil society going? What is its capacity for resilience to authoritarian advances? Would we be heading toward an authoritarian or hybrid regime?

Thus, what we propose here is a future research agenda for the academic field of the third sector in Brazil that considers both the management aspects of their organizations, but, above all, their capacity to contribute to the country's sustainable development, considering the setbacks that the last five years have brought on all fronts of the public sphere.

## NOTE

1. From the original: "(...) evocando não o conflito, mas a colaboração e a positividade da interação, o termo terceiro setor tende a esvaziar as dinâmicas politizadas que marcam, pela força das circunstâncias, a tradição associativista das últimas décadas e talvez da história do Brasil" (Landim & Beres, 1999, p. 9).

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# 5

## Civic deviance and lawlessness: the aftermath of January 6, 2021

*Roseanne Mirabella and W. King Mott*

### Introduction

In the aftermath of the seditious attack on the capitol of the United States on January 6, 2021, officials have identified more than a dozen far-right extremist groups who participated in the riots, among them the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters, groups referred to as Deviant Voluntary Associations (DVA), that is, “an association with one or more major goals or usual means of achieving major goals that deviate from the moral norms or laws of the surrounding society at the time” (Smith, 2017, p. 4009). As scholars engaged in political behavior, the experiences connected to disruptions to the peaceful transfer of power are deeply concerning. This chapter aids scholars who seek to understand civil disobedience and deviance in the 21st century and exposes the dark side of civil society in the U.S.A. stemming from the comfort Americans have with violence as an appropriate means of conflict resolution. The events of January 6 provide a textbook example of the many facets of political expression, and through an examination of the history of civil disobedience in the American republic we come to better understand these organizations, their emergence and strategies, and the repercussions for democratic governance (Keane, 1999).

Believing the presidential election to have been stolen from them, far-right militants stormed the Capitol attempting to take back their government. Most of the groups participating in the Capitol riots have been described as ‘white male chauvinists,’ groups who wrap themselves in religious and nationalist moralities (Kitts, 2020, p. 2), as described in testimony to the January 6 Committee investigating the uprising:

The crowd was overwhelmingly White males ... There were a significant number of men dressed in tactical gear attending the gathering, wearing ballistic vests, helmets, goggles, military face masks, backpacks, and without identifiable visible law

enforcement or military patches, they appeared to be prepared for much more than listening to politicians speak in a park. (January 6 House Select Committee Hearing Investigation Day 1, 2021, 58:26)

Over 90 percent of those involved in the Capitol riot (Gupta, 2021) had no connection to an organized militant group and were motivated to ‘stop the steal’ by Fox News and other right-wing media, particularly social media (Gupta, 2021; Kydd, 2021; Luke, 2021; Munn, 2021). “These insurrectionists came to Washington after years of gorging on internet conspiracies and simple-minded memes, and after so much time experiencing political life through a screen, they were weirdly disconnected from the gravity of their actions” (Nichols, 2021, p. 160). Telling his supporters since before the election that “the only way we’re going to lose this election is if the election is rigged” (Chalfant, 2020), the president ‘invited’ his supporters to disrupt the counting of votes and certification of the election (Luke, 2021, p. 150). This invitation went out through his speech but was also sent out as an alarm through social media to encourage thousands of his supporters to march on the Capitol. The assault on the Capitol on January 6 cannot be understood, therefore, without an understanding of the role of social media and its impact on democratic institutions. As Tom Nichols warns us, “liberal democracy requires patience, tolerance, and perspective, but torrents of sensory experiences assault those virtues” (Nichols, 2021, p. 162).

Trump’s rhetoric regarding the fictional steal aligned completely with social media platforms that are designed to reel people in and keep them hooked with outrageous and shocking content targeted to their personal beliefs. In effect, individuals seek out specific websites in line with their ideologies along with their deep concern regarding those with whom they disagree (Kydd, 2021). Bonding social capital is formed through the activities of the network through the “trust and shared values” that connect them (van Deth & Zmerli, 2010, p. 634). As they go deeper down the social media ‘rabbit hole,’ they connect more and more with those like them and become angrier with and lash out against those with different belief systems.

As a result, the public square has been drained of civility and the capacity for reflection and reasoned debate. Certainly, human history has featured no shortage of ethnic and religious violence, but social media readily inflame identity divisions and enable outraged mobs to be mobilized with a new speed and virality (Diamond, 2021, p. 180).

Individuals going down rabbit holes is not in and of itself a threat to democracy, but there can be negative consequences of this type of social capital when

interactions compel individuals to action putting democratic institutions at risk, as happened on January 6.

While we certainly must focus on the role Deviant Voluntary Associations played in the storming of the Capitol, we must also bring attention to the outsized role social media played in forming social capital bonds between individuals who went to Washington on that fated day. Therefore, our exploration of the role of associations in the January 6 attack will bring into sharp relief the role played by social media. This chapter proceeds as follows. In the first section, we explore the dark side of civil society, or uncivil society. We next examine how social media was used by Trump and other right-wing extremists to bring protestors to Washington to ‘stop the steal.’ Following this, we explore the theoretical roots of the American political system particularly and liberalism more generally to better understand how the events of January 6 are deeply enmeshed in American culture, concluding that while the system held, the threat to the Republic by those seeking power outside of the law has always been an aspect of American politics and will continue to be a threat to the Republic in the future. We end with suggestions for ways in which we might better understand and counter incivility and deviance in the future.

### **‘Uncivil’ civil society**

In the American tradition, the influence of the writings of de Tocqueville after visiting the United States in the early 19th century have become central to our understanding of associations. He wrote, “America is, among the countries of the world, the one where they have taken most advantage of associations and where they have applied that powerful mode of action to a greater diversity of objects” (2002, p. 180). He felt our unbounded freedom and ability to form associations with others to pursue ‘common undertakings’ was central to the protection and success of democracy in the United States. People everywhere would form associations which, in his opinion, was quite unique to America and an essential component of democracy and a strong civil society. He further noted that “(I)n a country like the United States, in which the differences of opinion are mere differences of hue, the right of association may remain unrestrained without evil consequences” (2002, p. 184). He made these observations in the 1830s when the body politic<sup>1</sup> was quite homogeneous, comprised of members of the bourgeoisie, all white men. What de Tocqueville could not anticipate was an America that became much more diverse where mere differences of hue became great chasms of color.

As American society became more diverse as a polity in the 20th century, particularly with the extension of voting rights, divisions between the liberal and conservative wings of the country grew. While those on the left were proponents of Roosevelt's New Deal programs and the Great Society programs of the 1960s, most significantly the passage of civil rights legislation, those on the right were not happy with the changes they saw in their country. Conservative associations began forming to save the nation and restore it in the image of the founding fathers (i.e., white Christian men) (Kydd, 2021). The 1970s witnessed "the explosive growth of what's often called the conservative infrastructure, the network of nonprofit groups (think tanks, training academies, etc.) that pushed the Republican Party to the right" (Tomasky, 2019, p. 116). The backlash to the successful enactment of progressive policies, particularly the granting of rights to more citizens, was fierce and steady. Buttressed by the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, civil society associations on the right worked behind the scenes to build a movement designed to counter these policies (Lyman, 1989) and reclaim their nation.

#### Conservatism in transition

Over the next 20 years, conservatives with extreme ideologies began to supplant traditional conservatives, most specifically through the rise of the alt-right. Referring to it as "whitopia," Stern describes the beginnings of the alt-right movement as a new ethnostate looking to reclaim the country for "free white persons' of 'good character'" (2019, p. 51). The alt-right is hostile to identity politics and resists any narratives suggesting the country needs to atone for how it has treated people of color, women, immigrants and other marginalized groups. For example, the Proud Boys rejects these narratives while maintaining that everyone is free to join their group if they reject the notion that "white men are the problem" (Kitts, 2020). While the New Deal, Great Society programs and civil rights legislation were social movements comprised of associations to advance human rights for all, those in the alt-right are also part of a social movement that seeks to eclipse these rights through a "tribal solidarity" toward the goal of creating a white ethnostate (Stern, 2019, p. 125). As de Tocqueville observed, the first purpose for forming an association is that it "gathers the efforts of divergent minds in a cluster and drives them vigorously towards a single goal clearly indicated by it" (2002, p. 181). Clearly the formation of alt-right associations such as the Proud Boys, the Nationalist Socialist Club, the Oath Keepers, the Three Percenters and others were behaving in ways that de Tocqueville would recognize.

The United States is not the only liberal democracy to have seen this turn toward populism and illiberalism. Elsewhere in the Americas, for example in

Brazil and Nicaragua, we have seen executive power bolstered by the populist undermining of government institutions employed to strengthen these leaders' grip on power. In the past decade, the Brazilian population has become more distrustful of established institutions and political polarization that led, in part, to the election of Bolsonaro, a "law and order," anti-corruption candidate (Hunter & Power, 2019, p. 70). While Bolsonaro's anti-institutionalism was one factor in his rise to power, de Albuquerque argues that the institutions responsible for systemic accountability, particularly during the 'Car Wash' investigations, "turned against the healthy representative institutions" such as the "lavajatism" campaign that challenged the authority of judges as populism spread (de Albuquerque, 2021, p. 3). Nicaragua similarly continues to turn away from liberal democracy particularly with the 2016 re-election of Daniel Ortega as president along with the election of his wife, Rosario Murillo as vice president, with concerns that a new dynasty has been installed similar to the Somoza family dynasty of the 20th century (Thaler, 2017). The democratic backsliding taking place reflects in part Ortega's keen use of a populism attacking feminist and LGBTQ+ discourses aligning him with far-right, conservative Christian groups. In effect, Ortega and Murillo are capitalizing on anticolonial messages that work "in the service of illiberal populism by demonizing global elites and claiming to come to the defense of ordinary people worldwide" (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, pp. 797–8). Ortega and other autocratic leaders have tapped into a new populism prioritizing morality issues of concern to the Christian right – LGBTQ+ rights, abortion and gay marriage – while undermining Christian views in other areas such as social justice (Steigenga et al., 2017). The actions of the autocrats in these countries and others have brought about a democratic backsliding in the 21st century, threatening the future of liberal democracy (Gandhi, 2019; Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Pérez-Liñán et al., 2019).

The central rhetorical question is whether populist associations are 'good' for liberal democracy or threaten it (Chambers & Kopstein, 2001). Iglíč provides guidance here, finding that social tolerance is decreased when "members of voluntary associations build particularized trust rather than generalized trust ... reinforcing civic as well as *uncivic* [italics added] orientations of association members" (2010, p. 717). Smith contends that while those who are members of Deviant Voluntary Associations might see themselves as doing the right thing, others may see them drastically departing from social norms (Smith, 2017). Applied to the case of January 6, we must examine the extent to which those storming the capital to 'stop the steal' were operating outside of existing democratic norms. In his speech before they marched to the Capitol, Trump called on the crowd to "fight much harder" against so-called "bad people" (Luke, 2021, p. 150), actively encouraging uncivil behavior to reclaim that which was

taken from them (i.e., the election). A central tenet of liberal democracies, particularly in a winner-takes-all two-party system such as the United States, is the willingness of those who lose elections to accept defeat with the knowledge that they can return in the next cycle to prevail (Kydd, 2021). The storming of the Capitol to stop the steal ran counter to this basic principle of liberal democracy. Truly convinced that the election was stolen from them, those involved in the January 6 revolt felt they were doing what was right to restore their democracy. Their actions, however, were uncivic, outside the bounds of liberal democratic frameworks constituting bad civil society.

The alt-right groups in the United States rail against black, women's and queer liberation, multiculturalism, and religious pluralism, advocating hate and violence toward those in these groups and with those they disagree. Bad civil society results when one group does not grant "reciprocity" to the other group or grant them "equal moral consideration" (Chambers & Kopstein, 2001, pp. 839–40). The events of January 6 are a manifestation of the schism created in American civil society by the alt-right when groups such as the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters showed no ability to accept the legitimacy of the election or to recognize those who voted differently from them as equal citizens in the polity. Unable to make their voices heard in the voting booth, they resorted to violence make their position clear and 'stop the steal.'

Before turning to a discussion of the ways in which Americans may be predisposed toward violence for conflict resolution, we first discuss the ways in which social media incited and supported the social bonding among those eventually participating in the insurrection.

### Social media and social bonding of the far right

Countless studies have detailed the ways in which social media has been used as a tool for social bonding in support of change on both the left and the right. From the #BLM and #stopthesteal movements to recent protests in Hong Kong as well as the attack on the Capitol, social media has been shown to be essential to mobilizing groups quickly and effectively (Lee et al., 2017; Mundt et al., 2018; Munn, 2021). Twitter posts to #BLM and #metoo brought the ideas of these movements to different communities around the world and were able to make great strides toward changing attitudes and policy as a result. Gupta (2021) reported that 90 percent of those arrested during the January 6 insurrection were not members of alt-right groups and were brought together through social media content. In effect, social media became the thread

binding these individuals together in a collective identity, encouraging them to go to Washington to defend the country (Munn, 2021).

There are several specific ways in which social media has been used to support the development of the far right generally and the assault on the Capitol in particular. First, mass self-indoctrination of individuals occurs through social media when people seek out and obtain information to support their belief systems, creating an echo chamber that reinforces their fears about the ‘other’ (Kydd, 2021). Next, the use of tactics such as shock and awe compel us to return to these platforms again and again (Diamond, 2021, p. 180), the more sensational and extreme the better to reel us in. Third, Republican leaders, in particular, have used all sorts of media to convince the public that the government has been working against them, particularly in the actions and statements of Mitch McConnell and other prominent Republicans in response to the election of Barack Obama, the nation’s first black president. Republican leaders and others on the right have weaponized social media to encourage individuals to join in the revolt against the deep state (Luke, 2021). Social media becomes, in effect, an online version of the public square, albeit a public square “drained of civility” (Diamond, 2021, p. 180) where individuals post untruths and promote conspiracies with impunity on websites such as Parler or Gab where users can speak freely, drawing in extremists who appeal to the prejudice and bigotry of users (Greenblatt, 2020). Social media provided the venue for openly violent right-wing extremists to employ these outlets to create and mobilize extremists to the Capitol on that fateful day (Luke, 2021).

One method successfully used by the far right to indoctrinate people is the use of conspiracy theories connected to the ‘deep state’ such as child abduction, sexual abuse of children in a pizza parlor, and most recently conspiracy theories about Covid-19. Conspiracy theories have always been part of politics in the United States (Uscinski & Parent, 2014) and have played an outsized role in mobilizing those on the right. In the next section, we explore the history of conspiracy theories in the American political system, along with the propensity of individuals and groups toward violence.

## **An examination of political disruption in American political thought**

(T)he primary goal of the American Revolution was not the overthrow or even the alteration of the existing social order but the preservation of political liberty threatened by the apparent corruption of the constitution, and the establishment in principle of the existing conditions of liberty.  
(Bailyn, 2017, p. 19)

Bailyn's classic work on the mindset of American colonists leading up to the revolution precisely captures the crux of events at the U.S. Capitol on January 6. The American Revolution, he argues, was brought about by the colonists' loss of confidence in the English Parliament, seen as politically and socially corrupt. Interestingly, the colonists' understanding of this corruption was based to a large extent "from the flood of newspapers, pamphlets, and letters that poured in on them from opposition sources in England" (Bailyn, 2017, p. 132), much like the social media feeds of the 'patriots' attacking the Capitol on January 6. Bailyn's account of the history of the American Revolution provides a direct line to the mindset of the insurrectionists on January 6 who experienced their violent participation as part of a larger plan to protect against corruption of the Constitution by groups conspiring to alter American life and values. Clearly there are many ways of deconstructing the actions on that day, as well as countering intellectual arguments in American political thought, but one important element requires particular attention: American propensity for violence and conspiracy theories. Though violence and conspiracy are ideas often avoided in the consideration of motivations that inform American political action as it exposes an ugly anti-intellectualism. It is evident in the writings of Americans across time and from most every intellectual corner that violence and conspiracy are unmistakable options employed when challenges to a particular kind of American life are present.

Since its founding, U.S. political ideas are comingled with religious practice and orthodoxy. The result is a belief that political ideas are morally correct and beyond debate. In short, Americans often associate their political position as 'truth.' Historians have recognized that the colonists during the time of the American Revolution relied upon loosely interpreted theological justifications for treason while others depended upon economic and social experience (Bailyn, 2017). Regardless of the 'evidence' used to justify this 'original act of violence,' the struggle was framed by the colonists in a magical historical narrative that continued to expand throughout the nation's history and into contemporary times. Those who participated in the January 6 attack firmly believed this historic narrative, portraying themselves through social media and the press as 'patriots,' quite frankly even dressing themselves in military garb. All political, economic, social, and religious ideas are filtered through this frame, understood as manifest destiny.

Americans are comfortable with violence as an appropriate means for the resolution of challenges on an existential level and certainly as a tool for political action. In fact, Dawson suggests that the Second Amendment "preserves the right of the individual to *engage* [italics added] in violence to defend 'true Americans' from evil of a tyrannical government or other threats to security"



(2019, p. 4). The comfort with violence is grounded in a history of oppositional politics where the ‘other’ is not simply a political adversary but also a moral enemy. While elites from both political parties have accomplished a ‘centrist’ posture on issues of governance, the American people remain polarized and increasingly open to extreme activism. The availability of immediate communication with social media and social group identification brings this historically consistent American political posture into greater visibility. It is more honest to recognize that the political extremes in American political culture are omnipresent and it is only with the advance of minority visibility that the disruption appears more severe.

Political ideas operating during the American Founding not only recognized but advanced the threat for violence toward their respective opposition. The authors of *The Federalist* and *Essays of Brutus* establish boundaries of contention that are disruptive to civil society. Their prediction for the Republic is pessimistic. None of the political writers of this time would have been surprised by the events of January 6. In fact, it is quite clear that this was expected and recognized as a constant social reality. Interestingly, these writers utilize the same claim when discussing the potential for civil disobedience (i.e., “the subversion of liberty”) (Yates, 1787, n.p.).

Consistent with the propensity for violence is a cultural commitment to conspiracy. Jeffrey L. Pasley details the “interpretation of conspiracy theory that emerges from the scholarly literature.” The most important historians of the American Revolution recognize a “habit of suspicion” that was particularly important in understanding individual citizens and their relationships to elites and the new national government (Pasley, 2000, n.p.). Later Americans continued to view their own struggles with power (Church/state/economic) fitting within a quasi-mystical historical narrative. Americans across the centuries often view themselves as the last, best bastions of hope for defending the American way of life. This ideological legacy sets up a deep mental framework or intellectual prism through which colonists, and subsequently the new Americans, interpreted all current actions.

What is more striking is that these beliefs, these conspiracy theories, placed individuals in absolute moral conflict with important aspects of society. For example, Americans have historically found themselves convinced of the nefarious intentions of Native Americans, Roman Catholicism, immigrants, African Americans, feminists, Muslims and LGBTQ+ individuals and the threat posed to American values. Gordon Wood argued that “American secular thought – in fact, all enlightened thought of the eighteenth century – was structured in such a way that conspiratorial explanations of complex events became

normal, necessary, and rational” (1982, p. 421). From this vantage point, social, economic and political events have a constructed meaning where individuals and groups view outsiders as perpetrators of assault upon and threats to liberty. Belief in these theories was not perceived as irrational, “but a rational attempt to explain human phenomena in terms of human intentions and to maintain moral coherence in the affairs of men” (Wood, 1982, p. 429). January 6 appears ‘crazy’ only to those operating outside of a particular belief system, as conspiracy theories justified violence and self-proclaimed patriots responded. A ‘magical’ moral narrative informed the hearts and minds of the individuals marching upon the Capitol building.

Contemporary political activist Steve Bannon, a key strategist in the election campaign of Donald Trump and Chief Strategist and Senior Counselor to Trump after his election, proclaims how this ideology devolved into an interpretation of world events (Feder, 2016). Far-right extremists accept these ideas that increase the frustration and anger that is produced with a conspiratorial and violent historical narrative. The rhetoric of former President Trump consistently employed violent narratives in his 2017 inaugural address when he insisted that “The time for empty talk is over. Now arrives the hour of action” (Kramnick & Lowi, 2019, p. 1517). Language throughout his address communicated a narrative of conspiracy and was made accessible to individuals who have a particular belief about American exceptionalism and to those that advocate an alternative view of American life. Trump continues, “These are just and reasonable demands of a righteous people” (Kramnick and Lowi, 2019, p. 1516). Further, his use of the ‘Bible’ confirms for listeners the source of his administration’s action, a type of intellectual determinism often substantiated by a particular version of Christianity. Trump speaks directly to a particular constituency and divides the American people into those who will “open their hearts to patriotism” and those who are responsible for the “carnage” (Kramnick and Lowi, 2019, p. 1517).

This pattern continued throughout the Trump presidency and culminated in the language used by him on January 6. There is incontrovertible evidence that Trump was part of the insurrection. Those present came at his bequest. Their regalia, political signage, social media and violent actions were aligned with the former president’s expressed words. And it is one way to view how painted individuals wearing horns and animal skins could feel so free standing in the Senate having forced elected officials into hiding. It is equally important to note that this kind of enthusiasm is also part of a long tradition in American political thought. Former President Trump is not unique in his deployment of violent political rhetoric and conspiracy; U.S. politics is replete with secrecy and lies to achieve political ends from Nixon’s Watergate to the Bush wars in

Iraq. However, he is without a doubt the most transparent high-level political actor to do so. Violence and conspiracy are part of American history and have now entered onto the American political stage without apology or nuance. Trump may not be the source of this, but he certainly has amplified and continues to expand the use of violence and conspiracy.

## Conclusion

This analysis has shed light on the American political experiment to the core. What the Founders sought and what they created was a government of laws, not of individuals. The stated purpose for the primacy of the legal process was then and remains today to prevent powerful people from being able to undermine the law. The history of the United States includes numerous examples of political actors gone bad. We just need to look at historic and current patterns of immigration, empire building and political domination for evidence of this. The attempt by the former president to maintain his hold on power and his encouragement to his followers to ‘stop the steal’ was thwarted. In the aftermath of the insurrection, with more than 550 individuals arrested (NPR Staff, 2021) and the insurrection halted, we know that the Republic held even as further efforts to de-legitimize legal processes on all levels continue to pose a threat to the Republic. Though we conclude that the system did work and did hold, the threat to the Republic by those seeking power outside of the law has always been an aspect of American political thought and American politics. A major tenet of philosophical liberalism is that the human person and ‘human nature’ are mixed: there is good and bad in all of us. With the knowledge that people will sometimes do ‘bad’ things for political gain or power, those who penned *The Federalist Papers* (Hamilton, Jay & Madison, 1788) clearly addressed this inclination among powerful leaders by making it impossible for them to access all the power in the legal system.

The legal system in the United States has once again prevailed and from that vantage point is important to conclude with measured optimism. Former President Trump was undone by a legal process that removed him from office with the stipulation that the outgoing president will be removed from the District of Columbia immediately upon the swearing in of the incoming president. The legal statutes are unapologetic to visions of grandeur and glory. However, Trump will not be the last advocate for personal aggrandizement and power grabs, as he was not the first. The legal system and the problems associated with it regarding race, gender, class and wealth remain, but those are topics for another writing. In conclusion, separation of power and federalism

did work and force a transition upon one previously holding the power who was refusing to go. This was accomplished even as the United States Capitol Building was under attack.

However, as explored throughout this chapter, the rise of the alt-right and incivility has increased the prospects for democratic backsliding, both in the United States and globally. The scholarship on backsliding cautions us to investigate these phenomena and their potential impact on democratic governance more thoroughly. Toward that end we offer the following recommendations for further examination of civil deviance and its connection to lawlessness drawing the nascent literature in this developing field. First, initial research on democratic backsliding have found them to be the result of no single cause (Abdullah, 2020; Lorch, 2021; Waldner & Lust, 2018) with a call for future research to “investigate the interrelated impacts of social, cultural and economic factors on elite–civil society relations” (Lorch, 2021, p. 94). Next, given that social media has emerged as a major factor in the growing uncivility within civil society, Oh and colleagues suggest more in-depth studies of the use of incivility and intolerance in social media “to further illuminate the strategic employment of incivility and intolerance in our online political discourse” (Oh et al., 2021, p. 117). Finally, because of the complex character of civil society and the actors within it, Cianetti et al. call for an interdisciplinary approach to understanding incivility in liberal democracy bringing “insights from adjacent fields such as political economy, political theory” (2018, p. 252) to interrogate democratic backsliding more effectively and more holistically.

## NOTE

1. People of a nation or state considered together as citizens.

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# 6

## Measuring the values of civil society in the Middle East and North Africa region

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### Introduction

Is the study of values a vital element of civil society research? Today's current environment, wherever one looks in the world and at whichever of civil society's components – from its formal organizations to its informal social movements and processes – suggests that a deeper understanding of its value structures is greatly needed. Renewed discussion about what has been termed “uncivil” civil society or its “shadow side” with its “extremisms, inter-group intolerance, xenophobia, and the capture of politics by narrow interests” (Fowler, 2011, p. 13) has become commonplace in forums and discussion groups among scholars in the field.

Perhaps, where this discussion is most poignant and where interest surrounding it has never quite dissipated is in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In this context, scholars of organizations and social movements have recognized the presence of actors within the sphere of civil society who do not quite adopt the assumed values of tolerance and moral autonomy (Berman, 2003; Cavatorta & Durac, 2011). The discussion usually surrounds Islamicism and Islamic groups (Clark, 2004). However, more nuanced research suggests the issue is more encompassing (Bayat, 2002; Cavatorta & Durac, 2011). Furthermore, the normative concepts of civil society acting as a voluntary and autonomous sector in the region have been challenged early on (Carapico, 1998), and these challenges are echoed throughout the literature (Atia & Herrold, 2018; Clark & Salloukh, 2013; Herrold & Atia, 2016).

Internationally, challenges to normative assumptions in civil society definitions have always been present. Fowler (2002, 2011) discusses these challenges in detail. Likewise, CIVICUS' civil society mapping project was developed to move away from the normative assumptions found in the widely cited Johns

Hopkins Nonprofit Sector approach (Heinrich, 2005). Nonetheless, there has not been a great deal of development in the realm of measuring civil society's value structures, besides using data from national surveys such as the World Values Survey (Anheier, 2004).

Value measurement is crucial to civil society research as it allows researchers to develop better theoretical frameworks. It is also central to key lines of inquiry in civil society research such as the relationship between civil society and the state. The purpose of this chapter is to make the case for developing new and updated instruments to measure specifically the value structures of civil society actors. Below, I will argue why I believe such a measurement system is important in the MENA region and how it can be implemented within this context.

## Measuring values cross-nationally

The major frameworks behind value structure measurement were developed within the social sciences much around the same time as interest was emerging in non-profit and third sector research. Early pioneers of this work produced frameworks with noticeable similarities (Kaasa, 2021). From a cross-national perspective, Inglehart's work is perhaps the most influential as it became the basis for the World Values Survey, which is administered every five years currently in 120 countries around the world (World Values Survey Association, 2020). This survey allows researchers to measure a wide-ranging set of values among citizens and residents of various countries over time. Furthermore, the World Values Survey allows researchers to move beyond essentialist arguments that suggest specific cultures are inherently opposed to civil values such as pluralism and tolerance, and examine what external factors might influence these values instead.

Despite the development of value system measurement in the broader field of social science, value measurement has hardly been adopted in civil society research. First, extant civil society research originated in contexts where normative assumptions about civil society were embedded into its definition (Corry, 2010). Furthermore, specific research agendas promoted prescriptive normative assumptions about civil society even as researchers began examining civil society in contexts where such assumptions were more difficult to sustain (Fowler, 2002). In essence, since researchers assumed certain values were intrinsic to civil society, it made little sense to study civil society actors' value structures.



Certainly, civil society research does not ignore the question of values altogether. For example, a major question that scholars consider is the normative isomorphic pressures affecting civil society development around the world (Bromley, 2020). Likewise, early sociological and cross-national work on civil society recognizes the role of cultural values on its development (Anheier & Seibel, 1990; DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990; Dunn & Hann, 1996). Nonetheless, further research on what exactly the roles these values have on civil society development are considered mostly within institutional frameworks and focus on specific political and socioeconomic phenomena. The social origins approach (Salamon et al., 2017), one of the more widely cited of these frameworks, barely examines the role of beliefs and values in civil society development, beyond briefly dismissing essentialist arguments.

Another avenue by which civil society research examines value structures is in the literature on non-profit and non-governmental organizational governance, and specifically accountability. Building off earlier scholars who found traditional concepts used in public and for-profit sectors unsuitable for the peculiarities of non-profit and non-governmental organizations, researchers in this field challenged the neoliberal values and norms widely accepted by researchers and practitioners dominating the literature. Instead, among actors where such norms are not necessarily widely accepted, such as civil society actors, “numerous types of accountability battle for recognition and legitimacy” (Weisband & Ebrahim, 2007, p. 12). Current research describes the practice of accountability within civil society as based on competing value systems (Kilby, 2006; Knutsen & Brower, 2010; Onyx, 2008; Romzek et al., 2012). By examining to whom civil society actors hold themselves accountable and how they do so, scholars gain insights into civil society actors’ value systems.

The major shortcoming with examining accountability as a method for value system measurement is precisely because there is no standard definition. Due to the numerous competing frameworks, conceptualizations and definitions surrounding the research on accountability, it is nearly impossible to compare value systems between studies within one regional context, let alone across different contexts. There are attempts to amalgamate research on accountability to come to one core set of definitions and measurements (Blagescu et al., 2005; Lindberg, 2013). To date, such attempts do not seem to be widely adopted.

A notable exception to the general lack of value measurement frameworks is the CIVICUS framework proposed by Anheier (2004) and Heinrich (2005). Heinrich (2005) argues for the adoption of a framework to measure civil society actors’ values cross-nationally, rejecting the normative assumptions prevalent in previous definitions. Since civil society actors can uphold or

denounce “civil” values such as tolerance and trust, values should be considered a measurable dimension when mapping civil society. Anheier (2004) describes this framework in detail incorporating indicators from the World Values Survey to gauge the level of trust and tolerance among civil society actors. Such indicators would measure civil society values on a national level, allowing for cross-national comparisons. The framework could not be used to compare values on a smaller scale, however.

## Measuring values within MENA

Current research on civil society within MENA generally acknowledges the presence of actors outside the realm of governmental and for-profit institutions that do not adhere to the normative assumptions inherent in traditional definitions of civil society. Scholars either accept these actors as resting within the definitional boundaries of civil society or reject them as external actors. The latter group of scholars tend to describe these actors as “traditional”, “tribal” or “primordial” (Ibrahim, 1995; Jabbar, 2006). Likewise, some proponents of the former viewpoint describe these actors as “illiberal” or “antidemocratic” (Berman, 2003, p. 266). Nonetheless, a set of important comparative studies, crossing a wide range of academic disciplines, takes a more nuanced approach and describes these actors’ value structures as something more closely resembling a continuum (Ben Néfissa, 2004; Cavatorta & Durac, 2011; Ibrahim & Sherif, 2008; Kandil, 2015).

Despite a growing body of literature taking more nuanced approaches to civil society actors’ value systems, comprehensive theory-building is still limited. Instead, there is a noticeable disconnect between civil society theory and empirical research. Kandil (2011) elaborates, arguing forcefully that theoretical assertions about civil society in MENA countries have been empirically disproven. Nonetheless, she does not resolve this apparent divide beyond suggesting that civil society in theory and civil society in practice within the MENA context are not the same thing. Effectively, there is wide acceptance among scholars that new theoretical approaches must be developed to understand civil society in the MENA context more accurately. Attempts at developing comprehensive approaches are being made, but theory-building in this regard is still at a nascent stage (Cavatorta & Durac, 2011; Haddad & Al Hindy, 2018; Kandil, 2015).

Arguably, a major impediment behind theory-building when examining civil society value systems in MENA concerns viewing civil society as an inde-

pendent sector. Many scholars argue the unsuitability of such an approach for building theory, especially in developing contexts (Dunn & Hann, 1996; Fowler, 2002, 2011; Holloway, 2011). I specifically make this claim because civil society takes different forms with differing value systems within any national context. Major cross-national and comparative studies and reports view civil society as a single entity within one specific nation and compare it to civil society within another nation (CIVICUS, 2020; ICNL, 2021a; Kandil, 2015; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2004). By doing so, this approach excludes an examination of differing value systems among civil society actors within a single nation, let alone cross-nationally. Furthermore, it prevents us from asking the major questions necessary for theory-building: why do different civil society actors adopt different values and what underlying factors affect these values?

### The problem with measuring values in MENA

As alluded to above, a major impediment to measuring value systems among civil society actors in the MENA region is finding a suitable unit of analysis. If the civil society sector is an inappropriate unit by which to measure civil society actors' differing values, what would be a better approach? Some theorists suggest adopting a conceptual view of civil society as a set of processes instead of a set of actors (Dunn & Hann, 1996; Fowler, 2011; Uphoff & Krishna, 2004). I do agree such an approach would allow for theory-building more aligned with empirical findings. Still, there are serious impediments to using such an approach in the MENA context. I say this mainly for two reasons: the first is related to operationality and the second is related to ethics.

A major problem affecting civil society in MENA today is that relevant legal frameworks are best described as what Fowler (2011, p. 13) calls an "exogenous frame on endogenous phenomena". Samad (2007, p. 4) argues in his legal analysis that governments of MENA countries "have not considered the CSO [civil society organization] sector from an analytical point of view when creating legal structures" and that this has led to civil society's underdevelopment. Such a situation has led many civil society actors to operate outside of the legal framework or forced others to depart from their original operations and missions to adapt to the legal framework.

Focusing specifically on Iraq where I am currently conducting research, this problem is quite manifest. According to the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) in the Civic Freedom Monitor report on Iraq, the current law regulating civil society is regarded as relatively less restrictive than other laws in the region and the government is prohibited from preventing or

suspending CSOs' registration arbitrarily (ICNL, 2021b). Nonetheless, governmental instructions for implementation of the law require civil society actors to register as an organization before being allowed to operate (Government of Iraq, 2010). Such instructions have led to serious complications with many actors failing to register due to its burdensome process (Ali, 2018). Furthermore, my own research is finding actors, especially religiously based ones, refusing to identify as a part of civil society to avoid the registration process. Other registered organizations describe developing relations with governmental officials and powerful political parties to overcome the bureaucratic burdens of the state. These findings are similar to patterns observed in other MENA countries in which bureaucratic burdens are placed upon civil society actors in order to control, weaken and co-opt them (Herrold & Atia, 2016; Wiktorowicz, 2000). Likewise, in weaker states such as Lebanon, political parties, through their control of resources, coerce civil society actors into patron–client networks (Clark & Salloukh, 2013; Kingston, 2001).

The nature of this legal framework seriously complicates how civil society's value systems can be mapped. First, it is reasonable to assume that civil society actors fear revealing their own value systems that are not in line with the values of their patrons or the regime in power. This understandable lack of transparency among civil society actors creates serious obstacles for researchers to collect reliable data. Moreover, researchers are faced with an operational dilemma. Due to the legal and operational environment, certain civil society actors' value structures are amplified creating significant bias. On one extreme, researchers may be inclined to dismiss these amplified voices altogether. For example, Ali (2018) argues that registered civil society organizations in Iraq should not be considered part of civil society due to the pervasive nature of patron–client relations. Such an approach, however, would prevent researchers from including the value systems of a large portion of civil society actors operating in Iraq. On the other extreme, focusing simply on registered organizations would prevent researchers from unearthing the diverse array of values among different types of actors. Finally, if the legality of civil society actions as a definitional boundary is to be relaxed, and actors who adopt violence are accepted into updated concepts, definitional boundaries become much more ambiguous. This point is discussed further below. Whatever the case, such a research environment creates serious obstacles to finding an operational definition that positively identifies a wide array of civil society actors and their diverse values.

Further complicating civil society's definitional boundaries are the related ethical issues. Nickel and Eikenberry (2016) discuss some of these ethical issues quite powerfully through their examination of civil society mapping

exercises. They argue that researchers may be assisting governments in controlling civil society and impeding the autonomy of its actors. Similar to how Wicktorowicz (2000) describes MENA governments' efforts to control civil society, Nickel and Eikenberry discuss how mapping "may be employed as a means to discipline civil society" (p. 395). Their main argument is that researchers should recognize the implications of mapping which are "incompatible with a scholarship that makes claims on the democratic legitimacy of civil society" (Nickel and Eikenberry, 2016, p. 406). Though Salamon and Sokolowski (2016) raise counterarguments, highlighting the benefits of mapping, Nickel and Eikenberry's argument is highly relevant in the context of authoritarian regimes. Counterintuitively, researchers should sometimes refrain from forming definitions which are as broad and encompassing as possible. Describing civil society mapping attempts, Holloway (2011) suggests that unmapped civil society actors are likely to have greater societal impact than those that are being mapped and concludes that "assessments would be more helpful if they sought out this larger universe" (Holloway, 2011, p. 26). Nonetheless, when considering Nickel and Eikenberry's ethical concerns, researchers should recognize that some of civil society's actors and activities are better left unmapped and consequently should be left outside the scope of any operational definition.

Additionally, there are ethical concerns with mapping civil society's illegal activities or actors. Within authoritarian settings, much of what is considered illegal are the legitimate and rightful aspirations of autonomous actors (Toepler et al., 2020). Excluding them from definitions of civil society for the sole reason that an autocratic leader is displeased with them is methodologically unsound. However, when legality is no longer considered an ethical boundary to civil society research, researchers must clearly delineate what the ethical boundaries should be. The issue at stake is that researchers can actively confer legitimacy upon groups by considering them a part of civil society. For example, Harb (2008) and Robinson (2004) find that key questions are ignored when excluding specific actors from the research agenda. Yet, Hezbollah and Hamas, the actors Harb and Robinson study, respectively, hold the view that the targeting of civilians is a legitimate act of war (Human Rights Watch, 2007, 2021). Certainly, researchers can study actors while denouncing any of their actions. Nonetheless, there must be a point where civil society scholars declare that certain actors are wholly outside the bounds of their research. As an extreme example, the group ISIS has reportedly committed genocide and created incredible amounts of cultural, psychological and physical destruction upon entire populations (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2016). To what extent would it be acceptable to consider any of their claims legitimate?

The above discussion is meant to illustrate that research in contexts where the research environment is underdeveloped, like MENA, civil society scholars must navigate murky and difficult terrain laden with operational and ethical dilemmas. This is not to argue that mapping civil society's actors and their value systems should be abandoned altogether. Instead, it is a call for researchers to develop methodologies and definitions which incorporate the diverse and vibrant mosaic of activities and actors that form civil society without causing it harm.

## **A way forward**

As stated from the outset, I believe that measuring and understanding civil society actors' differing value structures is an important part of an updated research agenda. Gauging actors' views on values central to civil society and its processes, such as tolerance, trust, autonomy and human rights, will illuminate our understanding of civil society around the world and especially within MENA. Moreover, I argue that such analyses should not take a national or sectoral approach, but rather one that allows for more detailed measurement of a wide set of values among a diverse set of actors. However, I have identified several problems with taking such an approach. Below, I offer a few ideas on how researchers might be able to move forward based on my experiences researching civil society organizations in Iraq.

### Beginning somewhere: legally registered CSOs

Due to the ethical and operational considerations listed above, I suggest beginning the process of mapping civil society value systems by taking a more cautious approach. Civil society actors can face legal repercussions for not registering and the government could make decisions to limit their activities. Undoubtedly, ethical researchers would take numerous precautions to protect the identities of these actors. Even so, placing a spotlight on their activities and their value systems may bring unwelcome attention. Moreover, a systematic mapping of these various actors could lead to more harm than good. Focusing on actors that are already in the open about their activities is a helpful starting place to expand upon as research develops.

There are concerns that such an approach would lead to further amplifying more dominant voices and overlooking nondominant ones. Nonetheless, preliminary analysis of data I am collecting offers promising results. Instead of organizations reiterating the views of powerful patrons, I am finding

organizations seeking an opportunity to express what many of them describe as a systematic silencing of their voices, both by the government and powerful political parties. Furthermore, they demonstrate a wide range of values. By listening to these actors instead of dismissing them as pawns of their patrons and the state, these registered organizations may offer researchers the important groundwork to further study civil society value systems. Similar mapping studies in MENA which focus only on registered organizations do indeed offer important – if imperfect – insights on the state of civil society in MENA. The crucial issue is understanding that registered organizations are only a very specific subsector of the greater civil society universe, and they should be studied as a stepping-stone for developing more encompassing definitions and frameworks.

#### Listening to actors' voices

Theoretical research on civil society in MENA, as it is in most contexts, is extremely normative in nature. Adopting theoretical frameworks from exogenous contexts, theory of civil society value systems in MENA does not match empirical realities. Likewise, empirical researchers adopt normative standards as a type of measuring stick to see how near actors are to these values or how far they depart from them. By doing so, however, researchers are unable to successfully determine what civil society *means* to these actors and what values they promote as elements of it. For this reason, I contend that any empirical analysis which measures value systems in MENA should approach the field with an open ear to allow actors to define and illuminate their understanding of these normative concepts.

#### Using a multi-dimensional approach

Scholarship on value systems developed by early theorists and further refined by later scholars finds that some values are complimentary to one another while others are contradictory. In this sense, it would be beneficial to measure values as part of a multi-dimensional framework instead of independently from one another. Obviously, scholars of civil society would build on value system frameworks already developed, but further analysis would help develop measurement tools that are specific to civil society.

#### Observing actions instead of words

There are reasonable concerns that heavy reliance on survey questionnaires would lead to unreliable results. Especially in MENA, where normative concepts are built into definitions of civil society, researchers would likely find

great difficulty in finding actors who identify as part of civil society describing their values as anything different than these normative concepts. Therefore, I suggest approaching the issue of values through an alternative lens. Through my study of accountability, I have found the concept a useful method to measure values. This is only one method, though. Generally, observing civil society actors' behaviours may offer researchers the ability to gain more reliable data until better frameworks and tools are developed.

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is to encourage researchers of civil society, especially in MENA, to develop new methods and definitions by which to measure and map value structures. Certainly, civil society scholars in MENA have taken great strides in both mapping civil society and theorizing about value structures. More nuanced concepts are replacing the normative assumptions related to civil society and there is wide acceptance that civil society actors have a wide and diverse range of value structures.

The major shortcoming is in the lack of systematic measurement of the wide array of civil society actors' diverse value systems and the development of comprehensive frameworks. To better measure a civil society's values, systematic measurement tools developed for civil society from similar tools in other disciplines will allow for more inclusive mapping of this diverse field. While the difficulties in mapping value structures – especially within MENA – are many, a cautious and responsive approach can pave the way for the advancement of future research. I hope the suggestions in this chapter have offered researchers some ideas on how we can move forward.

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# 7

## Mapping civil society

*Susan Appe*

### Introduction

I first arrived in Quito, Ecuador in 2009 for preliminary dissertation research after having spent several years working in development in the region. At the time, I was developing my dissertation proposal and I sought to explore state–civil society relations in the Andean region. My goal for this first trip was to understand the landscape of organized civil society in the country. I had read about the key role that organized civil society had in ousting several unpopular presidents, its association with the largest indigenous movement in the region and high-profile legal action brought forth by civil society in the environmental policy field.

As a student of public administration and policy, I aimed to understand the government agencies that interfaced with organized civil society. I came across the Secretary of People, Social Movements and Citizen Participation, a national-level government agency created in 2007. At a meeting with an official at the agency, I learned about the agency’s efforts to compile information about civil society in Ecuador. At the time, I was focused on setting out the scope and approach of my research. I remember thinking, ‘Yes! If I can get my hands on this information – compiled information on organized civil society in Ecuador – this would be a huge jump start to my dissertation research and provide me an immediate picture of Ecuador’s civil society.’ After a pleasant meeting with the official, he saved an Excel spreadsheet file for me of Ecuador’s Registry of Civil Society Organizations that included the almost 2,000 organizations that had formally registered at the time with the Ecuadorian government.

This registry and how I came to understand it indeed shaped my dissertation (Appe, 2012), but in surprising ways. Initially I thought I had hit the jackpot. Even though the registry at that point was online, the platform was not all that user friendly. I could search based on an organization’s name and find some information related to its mission and address. But now I had the back end of the registry, the list of organizations with information such as: (a) year of for-

mation; (b) public entity where legalized; (c) number of paid staff; (d) number of members; (e) organizational mission statements; (f) use of technology; (g) annual budget amount; and (h) fiscal information. I thought it was straightforward; I would use this as a sampling frame for the qualitative research I intended to conduct about state–civil society relations. And I did just this, but this approach did not last long.

As I started meeting with civil society organizations from my random sample based on the registry, I was also scanning local media reports about civil society activities. I was reading about associations of indigenous women in rural areas of Ecuador who were vocal about their objections to the registry given the digital divide that limited many rural associations from being able to register online. I also read about the organizations that were working in democracy promotion and voting rights that were raising questions about the government's intentions with the registry. These two groupings of organized civil society in Ecuador were active and relevant. But a quick search in my Excel spreadsheet suggested they did not exist. That is, they were not part of what I came to understand as the official 'map' of civil society through the eyes of government. I started asking civil society leaders about this and after some skirting around the topic, they were forthcoming about their concerns about the registry – even many of the organizations which were actually registered. My overarching questions about the registry (e.g., when did you register and why?) were actually responded to with further questions; civil society leaders asked me: Why was government collecting information? What was to be done with the information? Soon I started to understand that the registry was part of a bundle of regulatory reforms rolled out in 2008 by the national government and that it was interpreted by organized civil society in Ecuador as not only an administrative, technical instrument, but also laden in politics.

This experience not only underlines the importance of preliminary fieldwork (a topic that is worthy, but would be a different chapter), but also highlights that I took for granted what I thought was the authoritative universe of (legally recognized) civil society organizations in Ecuador. That is, the requirement of registration created a particular constellation of organizations. I soon learned that it was not representative of all of the civil society organizations operating in the country. To make sense of what I was hearing in my preliminary interviews and reading in media accounts, I started reading about the role of mapping, data availability on civil society and about how what might seem like an administrative requirement can have serious and multiple ramifications for organized civil society.

As a result, my dissertation was reconceived and centered on a government policy tool – a registry of civil society organizations – targeted toward organized civil society, how organized civil society responded to the policy tool, and how it influenced the development of civil society. This work posed critical questions about civil society mapping, drawing on James Scott's (1998) seminal work on *maps of legibility*, where mapped units are more seen and the unmapped, unseen. Mapping civil society seeks to count, classify and define organized civil society, the third sector, the nonprofit sector, and/or the nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector, all of these terms (and others) are used in the gray and academic literature about mapping. I settle on the term 'civil society' to underscore the connections of mapping to the broader project of constructing state–civil society relations. The selection of term and definition of what is to be mapped by a mapmaker (e.g., governments, research communities, donors and even civil society organizations themselves) depends on choices, such as using practical definitions (e.g., established by governments or international organizations), that can create objects of study but with significant bias included.

Over the years, I have examined civil society mapping through several lenses. I draw on critical geography (Appe, 2013, 2018) in order to understand the power of maps in shaping civil society. That is, by counting and classifying organized civil society, mapping civil society as a metaphor and practice places definitions and boundaries around the subject or subjects being mapped. I am informed by scholars in political anthropology and political science (namely, James Scott) whose work helps to capture the role of statecraft in mapping (Appe, 2013; LePere-Schloop et al., 2022). I have also approached mapping as a potential regulatory transparency mechanism (Appe, 2015) and as a policy tool which shapes institutional and policy contexts (Appe, 2019). My work seeks to illuminate assumptions within mapping exercises that relate to any combination of the rationalization, legitimization and disciplining of organized civil society. Indeed, my position is that mapping can threaten organizations that do not meet what becomes a one-size-fits-all definition of organized civil society (Appe, 2018, forthcoming).

## Continued calls for better civil society maps

My contribution here considers the continued calls for and efforts to map civil society. While, as noted, there are several actors that can be considered mapmakers, here I will focus on governments and research communities as they seem to be increasingly overlapping in practice. There is an assumption and

bias that mapping civil society is inherently good for government, academia and society at large (e.g., Litofcenko et al., 2020, p. 228). I raise concerns that by standardizing, measuring and registering, governments make subjects (here, units of civil society, usually organizations) more legible and easier to manage, regulate and discipline. For academics, mapping helps to legitimize the sector and thereby their areas of research, and the academic field tends to demonstrate uncritical support for mapping efforts – often justified based on data needs.

Maps, and particularly maps derived from government-collected data, create symbolic contours that often miss or revise key features of civil society organizing, and can put at risk the rights and values of freedoms of association, expression and speech. Registries of civil society organizations, for example, are related to barriers to entry and legal requirements in many contexts (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, 2016; Rutzen, 2015) and these registration processes are documented as having the ability to constrain and obstruct civil society organizations' operations (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019; Christensen & Weinstein, 2013; Glasius et al., 2020). Recent empirical data show that tools like the registries occur across the regime type spectrum, that is, the trend of tools targeting civil society organizing is “not only or even primarily [an] authoritarian phenomenon” (Glasius et al., 2020, p. 458; see also Appe, forthcoming).

Besides government registries and databases, data used in civil society research can come from additional sources. Databases used by civil society researchers include the international data produced by the Union of International Associations (UIA) or the European Union Transparency Register (EUTR) (Bloodgood, 2011, 2019). And, like any data source, they come with caveats. The data in both the UIA and EUTR are self-reported, leaving room for missing observations and social desirability bias. For researchers, the data from the UIA is costly, and the EUTR is limited to organizations that choose to register and want access to European Union agencies. Other sources include newer data collection methods using software to collect information from organizations (e.g., web scraping). However, the applicability of these data beyond their initial research designs and collection often prohibit their reuse (Bloodgood, 2019).

Perhaps the first global mapping project of civil society produced by academic researchers is the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, which sought to create comparative country-level data of organized civil society and deserves mention. The Comparative Civil Society Project focuses on civil society organizations defined by organizational attributes, including four



key variables: expenditures, employment, volunteers and revenues (fees and charges, public sector payments, philanthropy or private giving) (Salamon & Anheier, 1998; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016). The Comparative Civil Society Project has joined the United Nations Statistics Division, United Nations Volunteers and the International Labour Organization to develop new official procedures for governments to collect data on the nonprofit sector, philanthropy, and volunteering that intend to provide data to policymakers and academics alike, even as it has been criticized for its data limitations (Morris, 2000; Steinberg & Young, 1998).

Furthermore, data collection on organized civil society has tended to focus on the data available, and as a result more studies have been on “older, larger, richer, and more visible organizations” (Bloodgood, 2019, p. 209). Research questions and designs are often tailored to data availability. For example, in the U.S.A., the availability of information from Form 990, a requirement for tax-exempt designation, has shaped a generation of research in the field. Form 990 in the U.S.A. has allowed researchers to have data on financial activity and has also produced classifications within the U.S. nonprofit sector, which is a significant part of the mapping process.

Related, as an example, in the U.S.A., the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) is the clearinghouse of the nonprofit sector, allowing access to online information about nonprofit organizations. It aims to educate about the nonprofit sector, allow users to find information about nonprofits in geographical areas, analyze financial data and trends of giving, and download Internal Revenue Service (IRS) forms, among other things. Large amounts of data are available. Additionally, the NCCS developed what has become an authoritative categorization system for nonprofits in the U.S.A., known as the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE). The categorization system is primarily used by researchers. Globally, the U.S.A. is highlighted and hailed for its available data. While imperfect because the nature of the information is collected for tax purposes and not academic research, it still has come to be arguably the most comprehensive data source of a national-level nonprofit sector in the world.<sup>1</sup>

However, the authority of these data is increasingly questioned, all the more so because of even newer data collection methods. Emerging concerns about the validity of NTEE classifications in particular are relevant to this discussion. As Fyall, Moore and Gugerty (2018) reflected, the NTEE codes have become “a definitive organizational classification without delving into the implications of this choice” (p. 678). In contrast to the NTEE codes and classifications, they use an automated dictionary approach to classify nonprofits based on

self-reported mission statements. They found twice as many housing and shelter nonprofits than were coded in the NTEE. They used computational methods to map civil society in new ways to better capture organizations in the housing and shelter policy field, in this case in the state of Washington (for more about computational methods and mapping civil society, see LePere-Schloop et al., 2022). Fyall et al.'s (2018) study effectively illustrates that findings are divergent and dependent on the data that are produced and used.

Still, for research communities, a rather persuasive argument for making civil society data available, and creating an 'authoritative' database for organized civil society, is that it can make civil society research on par with other social science projects, such as "democracy studies, conflict processes, electoral studies, or humanitarian development, each with their own high-profile datasets (e.g. Polity, Correlates of War, and V-Dem) that have enabled a related research community to flourish internationally and advance community research agendas" (Bloodgood, 2019, p. 209). Researchers argue that in the absence of data on organized civil society, a coherent and relevant research agenda is compromised. Our colleague Beth Bloodgood has provided a lot of commentary on this, often focused on NGOs, which can be considered a small subset of organized civil society. While I am hesitant about some of the initiatives spearheaded by Bloodgood and colleagues, I recognize the challenges that they are trying to address. Namely, that without an authoritative source of data, a global research agenda is hindered, that our findings and knowledge production are limited given the data, and that the lack of sound comparable data makes (quantitative) comparative studies nearly impossible (see Bloodgood & Schmitz, 2013).

#### New mapping? The global register of nonprofit data sources

To address these issues, researchers have continued to make use of government-derived data. While government data on organized civil society have been "notoriously unreliable" (Sokolowski & Salamon, 2005, p. 237), researchers are convinced it is the only way to get global data on civil society compiled. Thus, the Global Register of Nonprofit Data Sources (GRNDS) is being rolled out. This is an awesome, in terms of size and effort, initiative coming out of Canada and with several key partners. GRNDS is:

(...) a register of official data collected about national nonprofit sectors around the world which lists and describes the official national data sources such as tax returns and annual filings. The fields and information in these data sources form an 'official' metadata schema to describe nonprofit and charities in these countries. (<https://www.grnds.org/>)

In addition to our colleagues/researchers leading this charge, it is supported by Ajah, a Canadian-based tech company with the objective to use (better) data in the nonprofit sector. GRNDS compiles government-derived data on the sector; currently it includes data from eight countries and intends to grow, having the information already from ten additional countries which will be added. While Ajah's objective is limited to making information on the global nonprofit sector available, the academic collaborators of GRNDS want to eventually combine the compiled fields to make a global database. The intentions of the academic collaborators, again, result in an awesome endeavor but it still relies heavily (read: completely) on government data, even as we know all the challenges to such 'official data' – both from researchers who have used it (e.g., Sokolowski & Salamon, 2005), and also from critical perspectives that are hesitant about government's power in constructing 'the sector' (e.g., Appe, 2013). Of course, our colleagues at GRNDS recognize the challenges: that these data are still subjective as they are self-reported and/or compiled by government agencies which set out to prioritize information that meets their goals, not the objectives of researchers (Bloodgood et al., 2021). They also note that some organizations in particular might not participate in information disclosure because they are worried about what it might be used for (this was certainly true in the Ecuador case in the introduction).

When GRNDS is complete, Bloodgood asserts that the data it contains will “supply a common language for defining and measuring NGOs and a universal sampling frame to test current hypotheses in a rigorous and systematic fashion against representative samples of NGOs transnationally” (Bloodgood, 2019, p. 215). Indeed, for academic researchers, this is a tantalizing proposition.

## **Further observations about mapping and data for civil society research**

So, we have continued calls for better data for civil society research, and GRNDS is one response to this and sourced by government data. The use of government data, of course, has implications. Government data collection (through registries) claim policy goals such as greater transparency, efficiency and accountability as related to the provision of goods and services (Appe, 2015), and these claims occur in a range of regime types, including established democracies, hybrid regimes and autocratic systems (Appe, forthcoming). The availability of information and communication technologies and a growing interest in big data intend, at least in theory, to help to further achieve these policy goals. Thus, governments are taking a lead in data projects: to use for

government oversight when applicable, to allow for avenues of research and to provide information to the public for decision-making. All of this and how it plays out is consistent to the Open Data movement, which Mayer (2019) explains as getting “governments to release information proactively in order to facilitate accountability, transparency, and private–public collaboration” (p. 1299). Governments increasingly have the ability to “produce and commission huge quantities of data and information.”<sup>2</sup>

Open Data and its reliance on big data brings up several issues when considering data for civil society research. First, organizations “lose the ability to control data about themselves and that no one is ultimately controlling the use of those data since it is readily accessible to anyone for almost any purpose” (Mayer, 2019, p. 1318). Mayer draws on the privacy expert David Solove when discussing organized civil society data, as an issue that quickly emerges with such data is that they often “fail to tell the entire story” (Solove cited in Mayer, 2019, p. 1317). Further concerns include the “invasion of privacy, improper discrimination, increased government power, and violations of constitutional or statutory protections more generally” (Mayer, 2019, p. 1310). Additionally when large sums of data use classification schemes, discrimination and opacity issues arise (Burrell, 2016). As Bowker and Star (1999) reflected in their work on classification and its consequences, “each category valorizes some point of view and silences another” (pp. 5–6).

Indeed, classifications can aid in shaping what is being mapped. For example, government data tends to be on financial indicators, which often leaves out smaller organizations that do not have the capacity to report (Ely, 2021; Mayer, 2019). Bloodgood also underlines such implications about data on organized civil society. Smaller organizations, she observes in several publications, often do not get mapped (my word). She explains what we miss with this: “These may be the most dynamic and varied organizations, with the greatest sources of innovation and the most grassroots expertise” (Bloodgood, 2019, p. 213) and they often do not have the capacity to report and, therefore, for data collection efforts, “[r]epresentativeness is an ongoing problem, given that smaller and poorer organizations are omitted” (Bloodgood, 2018, p. 124).

Mayer (2019) provides tangible implications of data collection in shaping the sector in the case of the U.S.A. He explains:

By asking certain questions on the required annual information return, the [U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS)<sup>3</sup>] may influence nonprofit behavior in a way that goes beyond what the law requires. For example, a little over ten years ago the IRS added return questions asking whether the nonprofit completing the return had

certain governance practices, even though federal law does not require those specific practices. (p. 1324)

Debate ensued if this would signal and then pressure nonprofits to adopt certain practices. Mayer continues:

The increasing ability of both the IRS and outside parties to search return information and identify correlations between the answers to these governance-related questions and compliance with federal tax law increases the risk that tax-exempt nonprofits may feel pressured to adopt such practices not because of their inherent value but because the lack of them might be perceived as increasing the risk of IRS audit or adverse public attention ... This underlines the dynamic nature of correlations; just asking certain questions might cause a change in behavior, which might in turn be correlated with greater, or less, legal compliance. (p. 1324)

## Moving forward

I admire our colleagues of GRNDS for identifying the data challenges of civil society research and proposing ways in which to address them. The GRNDS initiative is an enormous undertaking. My concerns as laid out in my previous work suggest a healthy dose of skepticism related to ‘mapping’ civil society and the premise that government registries are authoritative, and apprehensions about new data collection (and compiling) techniques. In terms of a civil society research agenda, I continue to be cautious with the latest developments by research communities curating new (and old) types of data on civil society. Over 15 years ago, Lewis and Opoku-Mensah lamented that research in the field was disregarding the need for theoretical-contextual analysis. This discussion was not in the context of big data and was more specific to development NGOs, but the arguments are relevant here. They suggested the need to draw further on (social science) theory and the operational contexts in which organized civil society functions in order to “do justice to the complexity and diversity of NGO forms and contexts” (Lewis & Opoku-Mensah, 2006, p. 670). As a scholar who has done comparative work, I recognize the value of comparison and its role in knowledge production. However, with some of these trends toward big data currently, I remind us of Lewis and Opoku-Mensah’s (2006) warning to the field: do not disregard context.

We have emerging examples that might better take into account context and which can inform mapping projects globally. Examples include InnovaSocial in Mexico which is working with the Giving Tuesday Data Collaborative and the Mexican government to produce better data on organized civil society and includes civil society organizations in the process (Gallagher, 2019). Another example is an initiative in India led by Candid and the Centre for Social Impact

and Philanthropy (Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy, 2021). These examples include civil society organizations in the design and execution of registries and mapping initiatives. As a consequence, they allow for further attention to context and even ‘ground truthing’ in order to be validated by and even perhaps owned by civil society organizations themselves. That is, in these instances, civil society organizations are explicitly involved as agents in the creation and administration of such registries/mappings versus being treated as objects to be counted, measured and, at worst, disciplined.

Those associated with GRNDS, as seasoned social scientists, also underline where context needs to be considered, especially in regard to transparent decision-making: “NGO scholars should be precise and clear about what specific parts of this sector they are investigating, why they made that choice, and how this choice affects the significance of their results, rather than attempt to impose counterproductive universal labels” (Bloodgood & Schmitz, 2013, p. 72) on the field. I most certainly agree.

Mapping projects seek to count, classify and define (Appel, 2018). In the context of mapping civil society, we see a standardization of information and, at times, these data are more regularly publicly available through information technologies and innovations like GRNDS. Many scholars have suggested that mapping can enhance the understanding of the size and scope of organized civil society, facilitate useful comparisons across contexts, and improve social coordination and efficiencies (e.g., Never, 2011; Roudebush & Brudney, 2012; Salamon & Associates, 2004). Perhaps the strongest assertion is that mapping civil society helps to *legitimize the sector* (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016). However, serious concerns remain about the extent to which data collection, or mapping, can discipline organized civil society into what best suits the mapmaker.

We need to continue to problematize mapping efforts that, intentionally or not, come to prioritize certain values of organized civil society. I have outlined briefly some of the potential implications that mapping is having and will have for civil society research and civil society itself. Had I not critically assessed the assumptions I had about Ecuador’s government registry (i.e., my mistake to assume that this *was* Ecuador’s civil society) back in 2009 when I was first conducting research, my dissertation findings would have looked very different and frankly would have been very incomplete. While the organizations registered in the government map provided important services to communities in Ecuador, they certainly were not the only organizations operating in this space and were only ‘part of the story.’ Assuming that mapping civil society is here to stay compels me to contribute to the conversations about how data collection, government policy tools and other initiatives (even with all their caveats)

might make civil society research better and maybe most importantly better serve civil society itself. I expect and hope the conversations will be ongoing.<sup>4</sup>

## NOTES

1. The Nonprofit Open Data Collective is an initiative that is working to improve the quality of data in the U.S.A. (data from completed Form 990s) and Canada (data from T3010 forms): see <https://nonprofit-open-data-collective.github.io/index>. It is a developing example of academics seeking to establish an authoritative data source on nonprofits and keep these data open and thus freely available to research communities and other actors.
2. See <https://www.oecd.org/gov/digital-government/open-government-data.htm>.
3. The IRS is the federal government agency that collects taxes and implements the tax code in the U.S.A. Nonprofit organizations register with the IRS for their tax exemption.
4. The author would like to thank Alan Fowler and Kees Biekart for guidance and suggestions for this chapter. The author gives a special thanks to Elizabeth Bloodgood for her comments on an earlier draft and for her very insightful suggestions. Any remaining errors are the author's own.

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# **PART II**

## **Civil society typologies**



# 8

## Human rights organizations and civil society

*Antoine Buyse and Verónica Gómez*

### Introduction

Are human rights organizations potentially ‘foreign agents’, that is, spies, or ‘undesirable’, as two restrictive laws in the Russian Federation of the last decade would have it (European Parliament, 2017)? Or are they key for their “contribution to the advancement of human rights and the development of a pluralistic society”, as the Council of Europe – of which Russia was until recently a member by the way – solemnly stated (Council of Europe, 2018, III.C)? Civil society may be one of social science’s most contested and elusive concepts, as this book amply shows, but human rights organizations face a very different much more practical contestation in daily life. Very often, their work is criticized but also restricted by laws and policies or even violently threatened.

In this chapter, we will highlight the place of human rights organizations as a particular part of civil society. In our view, a number of specific features distinguish them from most organizations within civil society. First off, they are almost always policy-oriented organizations rather than service providers and their work thus by its very nature can be more visible, and unwelcome for state authorities, who are often the main targets of human rights critique (Buyse, 2018, p. 970). Second, one could argue that many of them are not just part and parcel of civil society, but that they also often work to defend the civic space of civil society as a whole. They do so by lobbying for human rights protection and promotion, both at the national level in the form of laws and policies and at the international level in the shape of standard setting and the adoption and enforcement of legally binding norms. In the case of the adoption of international treaties, from the United Nations’ Convention against Torture to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, much of the current international legal framework has materialized thanks to the lobbying and advocacy of human rights organizations. And they also do so by advocating the importance of freedom of expression, association, assembly and participation. It could be argued that many of these organizations are the guardians of civil

society's 'infrastructure' and civic space. Due to the impact of these activities, human rights organizations are more vulnerable to state efforts to reduce civic space than other sectors of civil society and they are often the target of specific measures in this regard.

In the following sections we will first delve into the different types of human rights organizations. Subsequently, we will identify a number of key challenges and dilemmas for these organizations, all necessitating further research. Finally, we will go into the specific connection between human rights organizations and normative frameworks, more specifically, international and domestic human rights law. We will end with a short conclusion.

## **The many shapes of human rights organizations**

From a global perspective, different types of human rights organizations are active and seen as part of 'global civil society'. Among the human rights organizations with a relatively broad scope of work (organizations without an explicit focus on a specific right or theme), there are, in the first place, large membership-based organizations, with constituencies in a variety of states, such as Amnesty International. Second, organizations with a global orientation, but functioning as expert-based advocacy organizations, of which Human Rights Watch is the most famous. Third, umbrella organizations, bringing together large groups of local organizations. Both the International Federation for Human Rights (IFHR) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) are examples of these (Glasius, 2013, pp. 146–7). CIVICUS, based in South Africa, is a global network of cooperating civil society organizations and also has a strong human rights emphasis in its work around freedom of association and related rights. At the regional level, the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) has been working for three decades in the area of strategic litigation before the Inter-American System, in association with numerous local organizations in the Americas. Among the more thematic human rights organizations, such varieties also exist. There are specific human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in the field of business and human rights, the fight against impunity, children's rights and much more. Some of these have evolved from ad hoc coalitions that came together for a specific campaign.

This expanse of regionally or globally active international NGOs, however much on the increase in the past decades, is dwarfed by the even larger growth of national or local groups. On the waves of what was dubbed a "global associa-

tional revolution” by civil society scholar Salamon as early as 1994, the number of local human rights organizations has also grown significantly (Salamon, 1994). The large majority of human rights organizations are thus currently active as national or local entities rather than at transnational level.

Apart from these human rights organizations in the stricter sense, there is an even larger group of organizations that are cross-overs between human rights and other themes or organizations that do identify as human rights players, but who may frame (part of) their endeavours as human rights work (Glasius, 2013, p. 147). For example, organizations of indigenous people, solidarity groups, climate activist organizations and others could be seen as human rights organizations in this looser, wider sense. At times they may invoke rights, and use legal frames, rights-based approaches or human rights procedures to further their cause without fully becoming human rights organizations.

This brings us to the issue of the connections between human rights NGOs proper and much wider social movements that have sprung up across the global, especially since the early 2000s, from social justice movements in Latin America, to the #MilkTea Alliance of democracy movements in South East Asia, the #BlackLivesMatter protests against racial discrimination and the #FridaysforFuture protests of children and teenagers against climate change in many places. As Lettinga and Kaulingfreks (2015) have shown, these forms of activism have been much more vocal, often more radical and certainly much more visible and locally rooted than the work of human rights NGOs. At the same time, their success has varied greatly, often because street tactics do not always easily translate into policy or legal changes and may be difficult to sustain. On the other hand, the traditional advocacy, lobbying and research work of human rights NGOs has been perceived by such movements as too slow, too moderate and too much intertwined with existing power structures. The professionalization of human rights organizations in the last few decades, including the preferred methods of action and a partial shift to paid staff as opposed to volunteers, may have increased their effectiveness within international institutions, but at the same time have widened the gap with grassroots movements (Schmitz, 2014, p. 357). The need for rootedness for human rights NGOs and the need for long-term effect for social movements makes for a plausible argument for more cooperation, also because many of the demands of social movements could be translated into and framed as human rights issues. However, the very different ways of organizing, the specific goals and the tactics used make for two uneasy bedfellows (Lettinga & Kaulingfreks, 2015). Their interconnections and concrete case studies of successful and failed cooperation certainly merit further research.

A final point of note is that, just like not all human rights work is *organized* in formal human rights NGOs, not all of it is *collective* either. Much human rights work is done by individual human rights defenders, who are not necessarily members of or speaking on behalf of organizations. They may speak up for a certain issue or community, but do so as an individual. Of course, most of these individual defenders do function in wider networks of support and solidarity. Acknowledging the continuum between collective and individual action for human rights, the United Nations adopted the human rights defenders' declaration as early as 1998 which covers all these different actors (UN General Assembly, 1999). In line with that, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) speaks of civil society *actors* in recognition that both collectives and individuals are protected by the same human rights enabling their work within civil society (UNHCHR, 2014, pp. 3–4).

## Key dilemmas and changes

The shape, setup and activities of human rights NGOs are also closely linked to one of the current big debates on the issue: their independence and accountability. In this respect, many organizations have to walk various fine lines. The first is between gathering sufficient sources of income and other support and at the same time remaining critical and independent. To avoid the famous saying 'who pays the piper, calls the tune' becomes a reality, many human rights NGOs are at pains to set their own course and not to become too dependent on a single donor. In a reflection of civil society as a sphere of activity separated from the state and from businesses, some human rights organizations have an official policy not to accept funding from governments. An additional reason for this may be to avoid being perceived as the extension of specific governments' foreign policies. A separate phenomenon to note in that context is so-called GONGOs: Governmental Non-Governmental Organizations. These are NGOs in name and shape, but not in practice, as they are created by governments, usually to crowd the field in the interaction of civil society with international (human rights) mechanisms and to thus have government-friendly – in practice government-guided – voices to the detriment of speaking time and space for critical human rights NGOs (McGaughey, 2018).

For human rights NGOs, trying to remain independent from states moves the independence dilemma to private funding sources. There again, though in different ways, the preferences of funders play a role, both in the choices of which organizations to fund in the first place, but also by the fact that NGOs



may themselves adjust their thematic priorities in order to obtain more easily accessed funding.

Another fine line is that between setting one's own course and priorities and being accountable to the outside world. The issues of independence and accountability are closely linked, as often those who fund require some accountability from NGOs. But discussions have gone beyond this in a more general trend of requiring transparency, internal policies in line with the mission and vision of human rights organizations, and more democratic internal structures. Indeed, being transparent in one's functioning and operations may help to prevent being delegitimized by the state or in the media (ISHR, 2016, p. 14). The – in itself valid – call for transparency has already been abused by some states in order to restrict the space for civil society to operate by creating very strict and burdensome reporting obligations. An example is Hungary, where elaborate requirements on data of individual donors of organizations were imposed. These issues may be more palpable for donor-based organizations than for member-based ones. Indeed, member-based, bottom-up organizations are not just less dependent on large funders, whether public or private, but also more rooted in local and national communities. The model is not easily applied everywhere, however, as both global and domestic wealth disparities may make building up a base of thousands of donating members more difficult on some countries than in others. As a final note on this point, many human rights NGOs rely to some extent and sometimes entirely on volunteers.

A key and unavoidable global challenge for human rights organizations is the shrinking or closing of civic space since around 2005–06 in many states across the globe. In a nutshell, civic space is the room for civil society to act, to come together, to speak out and to participate. This shrinking space, which happens most severely in but is not limited to less democratic states, manifests itself normatively, in discourse, and in practice. First, normatively, many states have started to enact restrictive laws, ranging from setting up burdensome taxation and other reporting requirements to limiting cross-border funding or even banning certain types or fields of work entirely. Second, human rights organizations have been targeted by words, in the discourse of politicians or pro-government media or social media trolls, vilifying these organizations as traitors, extremists or even terrorists. Finally, the practical space to function has been directly affected by the prosecution of staff of organizations, by threats against family members or even by the killing of human rights defenders (Buyse, 2018).

Human rights organizations have struggled to react effectively to these increasing limitations and pressures. Some have gone underground or even

entirely left certain countries or shifted their work to less politically sensitive issues – one could summarize these as tactical or even strategic retreats. Others have tried to form new alliances with broader social movements to stand less on their own. Still others have actively sought to create new narratives on the positive value and importance of human rights to gain more public support for their work.

States have not only sought to limit national civic space, but also tried to limit access to international human rights mechanisms for NGOs, for example at the United Nations. It is crucial to further investigate how this affects not just these NGOs but also the mechanisms to which they contribute, as will be elaborated in the next section. After all, many of these international human rights bodies are to a large extent dependent on input from human rights organizations to function. This may explain why an increasing number of international mechanisms, either in their case law or in other monitoring, have spoken out on the shrinking civic space as a human rights issue affecting human rights organizations.

## The linkages with human rights law

As has been noted above, many human rights organizations seek to influence the adoption of domestic legislation and/or international treaties to further engrain human rights protection. This normative connection tends to be a central strategy within a wider array of advocacy, naming and shaming, mobilizing and lobbying, pursued in order to fulfil the goals of these organizations. The linkage with human rights is both normative and procedural.

From a normative perspective, it is evident that a number of rights are of particular importance to human rights organizations themselves. The freedom of association enables the founding of organizations. The freedom of expression protects advocacy work. The freedom of assembly makes mobilization in the streets and online a protected activity. And the right to participation creates entry points for involvement in decision-making by public authorities. The assessment by international human rights institutions, such as regional human rights courts, may also vary according to the activities and goals of specific organizations.

In the European context, for example, the European Court of Human Rights has declared inadmissible applications by organizations whose aims are contrary to human rights (*Hizb Ut-Tahrir and others* decision, ECHR, 2012). By

contrast, the same Court has recognized that when civil society organizations, including human rights organizations, function as ‘watchdogs’ by critically following the actions of the state or informing the general public of issues of general interest, they deserve a higher degree of protection under human rights law (*Vides Aizsardziˆbas Klubs* judgement, ECHR, 2004). To put it differently, when they perform such essential functions in a democratic society their freedom is wider.

In the Americas, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has highlighted the key role of human rights organizations and activists. With the increasing violence against human rights defenders in a number of national contexts in the 1990s – including internal armed conflicts, environmental and indigenous peoples’ protection vis-à-vis large economic interests, and LGBTB+ advocacy, among others – the Commission focused on standard setting on the protection of human rights defenders and “the right to defend rights”. It also submitted cases to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the violation of the right to life and physical integrity of human rights defenders usually working in NGOs.

From a procedural perspective, it is important to emphasize that human rights organizations can play a number of roles (and are formally allowed to do so) in most existing international and regional human rights mechanisms. They can of course assist others – human rights victims – to lodge complaints or, under some systems, like the European Social Charter, litigate in the general interest. Next to this, they also have the possibility to complain about violations of rights that affect them, for example when an organization receives a fine, is threatened or even disbanded.

In the Inter-American System, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights – early on in its mandate as a monitoring body in the 1960s and 1970s – established a strong relationship with civil society and human rights NGOs at the local and national level in the Americas. Historically, these organizations have been instrumental in providing reliable information on the situation of human rights during the Commission’s in loco visits and in special country hearings at headquarters. NGOs legally recognized in any member state of the Organization of American States can lodge petitions on their own behalf or on behalf of third parties (even without a proxy if the victim is disappeared or at risk) before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. An important number of human rights NGOs and umbrella regional networks in Latin America specialize in strategic litigation before the Inter-American System.

A number of human rights systems also allow for so-called third-party interventions – including for human rights organizations – in ongoing procedures, for example to provide background information or comparative analysis to regional courts. And once a regional court has issued a judgement, human rights organizations can provide input in the stage of monitoring implementation or use a judgement for agenda-setting and mobilization within a country (see e.g. Simmons, 2009).

While many of these procedures take years, sometimes action is urgently required. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has frequently issued precautionary measures requesting states to prevent irreparable harm to the lives and physical integrity of individuals working for NGOs under threat because of their human rights work. Precautionary measures have been issued in the context of pending claims – when the members of an organization are under threat because of their involvement as petitioners in a case – as well as in situations where the threat is unrelated to an individual case before the Commission.

## Conclusion

We have described above in broad strokes of the brush that human rights organizations are a specific yet crucial element of civil society more broadly. As applied as much of the research done by human rights organizations themselves is, all the more reflective should the academic study of these types of organizations be. We propose that at least the following issues would merit further research in this field. First, human rights organizations are just one piece within the wider mechanisms of international protection of human rights. Competition for funding does not just exist between NGOs but also between NGOs and international human rights mechanisms. For example, the European Union and a number of individual states have made available international cooperation funds both for human rights inter-governmental agencies or organs (UNHCHR, the Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, among others) and for human rights NGOs petitioning those very same institutions. Does this hamper the functioning of the whole or not? Also related to funding, some human rights NGOs are very dependent on large donors, while others explicitly avoid them. At the same time, funding is often assigned to specific projects rather than to the organizations themselves (Pousadela, 2019). In those cases where NGOs fully depend on international donors will the benefactor's agenda impact the objectives, priorities and activities of the grant's recipients?

Another crucial aspect is cross-border connections. The acknowledged importance of international cooperation among human rights organizations can also be used against them. The increasing legal restrictions on cross-border funding as part of shrinking civic space can make all policy-oriented NGOs, including those focusing on human rights, weaker in operational terms and therefore more vulnerable to pressure. More research is needed on whether this affects different types of organizations differently.

Another element to be considered is the extent to which human rights organizations are networked (nationally, regionally, globally): how do the more formally established civil society organizations connect, or fail to connect, to local grassroots groups, indigenous peoples and afro descendant communities, confessional groups and new social movements, also in a Global North–South perspective?

Beyond the generally positive narrative about human rights organizations within, for example United Nations' discourse, the impact of the increasing diversification of human rights organizations warrants more research. For example, litigation before regional human rights courts is no longer the sole domain of progressive NGOs. Organizations and movements pursuing conservative agendas have also found their way to such forums and more generally use similar strategies to promote frames and world views contrasting with those of mainstream human rights organizations (Polizzi & Murdie, 2019, pp. 261–2). How does this affect the normative development of human rights law and its interpretation? And on a related point, how should we deal with and make sense of the rise of so-called GONGOs in the field of human rights? How does their advent affect the work and effectiveness of genuinely independent human rights organizations?

Finally, digitalization raises a whole range of new possibilities and challenges for human rights organizations. It has multiplied the amount of new human rights violations, ranging from privacy breaches and surveillance of human rights defenders to online censorship and the effects of discriminatory algorithms. But it has also enabled the fast spread of advocacy reports, mobilization across borders and much more. It also relates to issues of (in)equality, since connectivity and electricity are not resources to which everyone has equal access, thereby influencing the accessibility of organizations and influencing their reach. Civil and political rights also touch socio-economic rights aspects in the online world. The research question then becomes: how does the increasing emphasis on the digital sphere affect the work of human rights organizations?

Cross-cutting to all of this is the global trend of shrinking civic space. Here, the restrictions themselves, their spread and effects, as well as the counter-mobilization by human rights organizations, including counter-narratives, have spawned a whole new field of study for the years to come.

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# 9

## From humanitarian diplomacy to advocacy: a research agenda

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### Introduction

Humanitarianism has historically emerged from advocacy campaigns for the protection of civilians in conflict (Dromi, 2020) and the abolition of slavery, amongst others. In recent decades, attention has shifted to what is now commonly referred to as humanitarian diplomacy, defined as ‘maximising support for operations and programs, and building the partnerships necessary if humanitarian objectives are to be achieved’ (Régnier, 2011). The work of humanitarian diplomacy has been described as

persuading decision-makers and opinion leaders to act at all times and in all circumstances in the interest of vulnerable people and with full respect for fundamental humanitarian principles. It encompasses activities carried out by humanitarian actors in order to obtain spaces from political and military authorities within which they can function with integrity. These activities include, for example, arranging for the presence of humanitarian organizations in a given country, negotiating access to civilian populations in need of assistance and protection, monitoring assistance programs, promoting respect for international law and norms, and engaging in advocacy at a variety of levels in support of humanitarian objectives. (De Lauri, 2020, p. 45, based on Minear and Smith, 2007)

Humanitarian diplomacy is grounded in international humanitarian law (IHL). It is the remit of humanitarian actors that claim space for their impartial, neutral and independent status to provide life-saving services and protection to people affected by crisis. Humanitarian diplomacy is increasingly under pressure (De Lauri, 2020). On the one hand, humanitarians today deal with many political players that are not signatories to IHL. These range from the Taliban and other authorities that are also conflict parties, are not recognized by or choose to stay outside of the international community of states, to new humanitarian donors like Qatar, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates (Sezgin and Dijkzeul, 2015) that do not recognize humanitarianism as inde-

pendent from foreign policy. On the other hand, the traditional signatories of IHL are increasingly seen to be disrespectful of humanitarian space, that is, the space for humanitarians to access populations in need and operate according to their principles. The way in which the European Union, for example, has securitized migration and as a result deals with refugees that seek shelter in Europe is a case in point (Jaspars and Hilhorst, 2021). These pressures have led to calls to up the game of humanitarian diplomats, and recent years have seen several initiatives, for example by Harvard University, to better train humanitarians in IHL and the art of diplomacy.

While humanitarian diplomacy continues to evolve, this chapter wants to go back to the humanitarian tradition of advocacy in a broader perspective. It will argue that it will be increasingly important to develop a more diverse practice of humanitarian advocacy. Revisiting and revitalizing humanitarian advocacy is especially pertinent in view of three current changes in humanitarian action that can be summarized as a change towards resilience humanitarianism (Hilhorst, 2018). This comprises interwoven shifts that together de-centre classic humanitarian action: a broadening of service providers especially at national and local levels; more attention to the agency and roles of affected communities; and a focus on the nexus between humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding. It is also pertinent in view of changing practices in advocacy. First, there is a nascent practice of advocacy directed *at* humanitarian actors to influence their definition of who is eligible for aid and their course of action. Second, there has been an unfolding practice of humanitarian advocacy in relation to the solidarity crisis in relation to refugees and migrants in Europe. This comprises broader sets of actors, ranging from refugees, community-based initiatives, new groups of volunteer humanitarians and humanitarian actors; their advocacy is broader in scope with a focus on human rights more broadly (Brkovic et al., 2021; Jaspars and Hilhorst, 2021; Hilhorst, Hagan and Quinn, 2021).

To capture this broadening of advocacy beyond the sphere of humanitarian diplomacy, we define humanitarian advocacy as ‘the activities of affected communities and their advocates to articulate, advance, and protect their rights (i.e. entitlements to assistance and citizenship rights more broadly), needs, views, and interests’. This chapter argues that we need to shed new light on the idea of humanitarian advocacy in line with current trends in humanitarian action and advocacy, and proposes an agenda for research.

## New directions in humanitarian action: resilience and localization

Humanitarian action has traditionally been associated with external interventions by international agencies into exceptional crises, guided by humanitarian principles. It was driven by the intention to save lives *for* people, rather than *with* people. Humanitarian agencies comprise the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), yet has usually been seen as a separate domain from, on the one hand, the political bodies of the UN and, on the other, civil society and social movements. There have, however, been significant changes in recent years in the discourses of humanitarian action that can be summarized as a profound shift to resilience humanitarianism. This becomes apparent in a number of interlocking trends in relation to affected populations, national and local service providers, and the scope and boundaries of aid.

### Resilience of affected communities

After roughly 150 years of top-down, principled, internationally oriented humanitarian action, there is a competing paradigm (Hilhorst, 2018). The resilience paradigm rests on the notion that people, communities and societies (can) have the capacity to adapt to – or spring back from – tragic life events and disasters. Resilience programming began in the realm of disaster management, whereby the resilience of local communities and the importance of local response mechanisms (ranging from self-help groups to authority-driven action and civil society initiatives) became the core of the Hyogo Framework for Action in 2004. In the past few years, resilience humanitarianism has spilled over to conflict areas and refugees. New trends can usually be pinpointed to a hallmark crisis, in this case the Syria crisis, where 90 per cent of refugees in the region lived outside camps. Humanitarian actors at the beginning of the Syrian crisis operated strictly on the basis of offering their assistance to people in camps but had to quickly adapt their services to this situation. The refugee camp as an icon of aid is giving way to a notion that refugees are resilient in finding ways to survive.

A key tenet of the new way of thinking of resilience is that crisis response is much more effective and cost-efficient when it builds on people's capacity to respond, adapt and bounce back, known as 'the resilience dividend', a concept coined by the president of the Rockefeller Foundation (Rodin, 2014). It is found in all key international policies today, including the report of the United Nations General Secretary of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) of

2016, the 2016 Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), and – to a lesser extent – the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM).

#### Focus on the nexus between humanitarianism, development and peacebuilding

Whereas humanitarian action was designed on the premise of a strict separation between crisis and normality (hence the *status aparte* of humanitarian actors), resilience humanitarianism builds on continuity between crisis and normality. UN reports now often refer to ‘crisis as the new normality’, for example, in reference to areas where climate change and other factors have resulted in semi-permanent crises. This profoundly changes the core of how humanitarian aid is conceptualized. Rather than viewing humanitarianism as a separate form of intervention, the 2016 WHS proclaimed the need to bridge humanitarian action to development and to peacebuilding and the resolution of crisis (Ban, 2016).

#### Localization

The humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality were often translated into an aversion to work with institutions, including civil society actors, local NGOs and local authorities that were present in the landscape of intervention. Humanitarian actors would either have a blind eye for those institutions, assuming war had stripped society from functioning institutions, or they would be wary in the assumption that all institutions were caught up in the political economy of war.

After decades of critique on this mindset of humanitarianism, coming from within and outside the sector and much evidence about the crucial role played by local and national actors in the survival of and care for people affected by conflict or disaster (see Anderson and Woodrow, 2019), these assumptions have been eroding and humanitarian action has changed its narrative. This is in line with the resilience paradigm, as a consideration of crisis as the new normality brings along that these should as much as possible be dealt with in the country. National authorities are given more central importance in humanitarian programming and national and local state and non-state actors such as NGOs providing relief and capacity development to communities are often seen as crucial service providers. Humanitarian action is set to ‘localize’ and become as ‘local as possible, as international as necessary’ (see e.g. Schmalenbach et al., 2019; Patel and Van Brabant, 2017; Gingerich and Cohen,

2015). An elaborate agenda has evolved that should shift power, funding and capacities to national and local humanitarian players.

## Localization comes with old and new problems

The profound shift in the narrative of humanitarian action is apparently hard to internalize for many international humanitarians. Reports addressing the extent to which organizations localize in practice commonly express disappointment (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018; Stephen and Martini, 2019). The superior way in which many international humanitarians related to local actors in the past (the so-called white saviour syndrome) has not changed overnight. International humanitarians have to redefine their roles and are less willing than proclaimed to give up their implementing capacities. Whereas they commit to localizing humanitarian action, they can be reluctant in handing over, often with the argument that their partners lack capacities to provide services according to standards. Another trend observed is that international actors may use language respecting national society in general, but may express suspicion once individual agencies claim a role (e.g. through applying for funding), because the agency is considered to be too much embedded in local realities and politics. Twijnstra found, for example, that a donor programme specifically meant to support national entrepreneurs in South Sudan, never got off the ground because none of the eligible companies passed the test of scrutiny and suspicion (Twijnstra and Hilhorst, 2017).

There are also new problems with the trend towards resilience and localization. In policies aiming to localize humanitarian action, there is little eye for a critical reading of what is happening in the settings of humanitarian crisis and to differentiate the local. The 'local' in localization is often translated as the government, even though in most humanitarian crisis settings governments have authoritarian tendencies, while the space for civil society and human rights is shrinking worldwide at an alarming pace. In addition, there is an ongoing debate about international NGO offices at country level taking up roles as local actors, arguably squeezing out more locally rooted organizations, even competing with them for funding and access to policymakers (see e.g. Mathews, 2021).

### From humanitarian diplomacy to advocacy

The notion of humanitarian diplomacy is part of the classical humanitarian paradigm. It remains important, especially in areas of high-intensity conflict

where access to people in need is crucial. However, humanitarian diplomacy concerns advocacy by humanitarian actors to obtain access, and hence has a limited gaze. It is focused on negotiation of access, whereas humanitarian advocacy may also be directed elsewhere and with different objectives, for example in relation to the international community to secure funding. It also has no eye for other actors involved in advocacy. This makes the idea of humanitarian diplomacy too narrow to reflect the changing paradigms and realities towards resilience and localization as discussed in the previous section. For this reason, we focus on a notion of humanitarian advocacy, which comprises humanitarian diplomacy, yet is broader in scope and sets of actors involved.

As explained, we propose to define humanitarian diplomacy as the activities of affected communities and their advocates to articulate, advance, and protect their rights (i.e. entitlements to assistance and citizenship rights more broadly), needs, views and interests. This definition expands on classic humanitarian diplomacy in four ways. First, it broadens the scope of advocacy to comprise not only the needs of affected people but also their rights, views and interests. It is in line with the idea of recognizing people's agency and entitlements, and evolving ideas on accountability (Van Zyl and Claeyé, 2019). Second, by focusing on the activities of affected communities and their advocates, the definition opens the possibility to direct our gaze at advocacy activities of affected communities themselves (cf. Schramm and Sändig, 2018). Bottom-up advocacy or activism is rarely considered in humanitarian studies. Studies in accountability, for example, usually focus on invited spaces for accountability rather than claimed spaces (Hilhorst et al., 2021). Third, it enables researchers to direct their focus on other actors than those agencies that label themselves as humanitarian. People in need are being serviced by a large range of actors, including local and national service providers that may or may not identify with humanitarianism *per se*. Yet, they may also speak out and advocate about people's needs in very effective ways. When these advocacy efforts remain invisible, this forfeits the possibility for humanitarians to join efforts and work together with these actors in realizing more effective advocacy. A final important difference with more restricted views on humanitarian diplomacy is that our definition is open to the possibility that humanitarian agencies can themselves be a target of advocacy. In the context of their interventions, humanitarian agencies are usually powerful players, who may be thought of as duty-bearers (Gready and Ensor, 2005), as they often assume governance functions (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2012). People seeking to influence humanitarian programming – by means as varied as holding up their hands, to breaking into a warehouse, to rallying in the streets – can be seen as actors advocating with humanitarian agencies. A striking example is the case of the Liga de Mujeres Desplazadas (Displaced

Women's League). This Colombian organization started a campaign for food aid based on their own research and succeeded to convince the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme to provide food assistance. They later also sued the Mayor of Bogotá for having failed to implement a municipal plan to assist internally displaced persons (Sandvik and Lemaitre, 2013, p. S46).

## **Towards a research agenda on humanitarian advocacy**

There has been research on possibilities and practices of advocacy that can speak to the above, concerning advocacy in areas of crisis or conflict and beyond, but this research has rarely been brought into conversation with debates on humanitarian action. Drawing on this research, this chapter aims to bring about a research agenda that can capture a large diversity of advocacy activities by affected communities, civil society actors, and (international) humanitarian agencies. We sketch this research agenda from five angles, providing illustrations and examples of potential questions.

### Actors and their collaborations

Research about advocacy has been skewed towards work led by INGOs. There is little research on advocates in national and sub-national contexts, in particular outside of 'aid chains' involving (mostly Northern-based) donors, INGOs, and country-based civil society organizations (CSOs) in contractual relations. We therefore know little about the spectrum of actors that could be involved in humanitarian advocacy. Publications on national and sub-national-level advocacy in areas of crisis or conflict thus far still focus mainly on funded, formal and relatively professionalized CSOs (Katyaini et al., 2021; Syal et al., 2021; Van Wessel et al., 2021). However, these same publications do suggest important roles for informal forms of civil society, such as social movements and community-based organizations (CBOs), with which more formal and professionalized organizations work, as supporting allies and as sources for agendas and understandings of issues. It would be important to study these relations further, including their tensions and complementarities, and explore the more autonomous roles of social movements – taking these two questions as connected. Studying CBOs and social movements is not only completing the picture, it may also change the picture. Formal, professional civil society organizations often have limited accountability relations with the people they work with, and they cannot be taken as proxies for the people they work with. Such organizations may have various ways in which they can in some (specific

and limited) way represent groups (Katyaini et al., 2021). In these roles, they can be supportive and facilitate forms of inclusion in various ways, but often also seek to protect their own relatively privileged positions (Katyaini et al., 2021). A second reason for focusing on CBOs and social movements is their potential capacity to articulate emergent needs and issues, less tied than many formal, professionalized CSOs are to contractual relations with states and donors defining work focus for years ahead, and may therefore be more closely rooted in local and group-specific understandings and priorities (Van Wessel et al., 2021; Rajeshwari et al., forthcoming). It would be important, however, not to simply assume that CBOs and movements provide a voice for populations, as is often claimed, but also questioned (Betancur, 2021).

Looking beyond these actors, informal leadership, which may be individual or collective (Potluka et al., 2021) may also shape important advocacy roles for, for example, religious leaders or individual activists. Such roles may be rooted in various forms of legitimacy and recognition such as activism, knowledge, religious authority, sacrifice or age (Verkoren and van Leeuwen, 2014; Sengupta, 2012).

Complementary roles between these national and sub-national actors deserve further attention, as well as between them and international agencies (Van Wessel et al., 2020). Recent research of a Cordaid programme for strengthening social contracts in fragile settings brought out that domestic advocates saw important and diverse roles for international advocates, within their country settings and beyond. However, these roles would have to become much more facilitative, supporting country-based advocates in their national- and international-level advocacy in various ways (e.g. by coaching them in strategizing and using their connections to help gain access to decision-makers) (Van Wessel, 2021).

Newly emerging research questions are, for example: what types of actors have, or could be supported to take up, roles in humanitarian advocacy? What are their various capacities to address affected populations' rights, needs, views and interests? Based on what types of relations with these populations? Through what types of collaboration?

### Political contexts

Advocacy literature commonly assumes stable advocacy targets to influence – primarily states, multilateral institutions and multinational corporations. The same literature also commonly assumes a liberal state, except for two small subfields of study of constraints on advocacy in authoritarian/hybrid



and fragile settings. When it comes to advocacy in humanitarian settings, such assumptions may not hold. Targets may or may not be stable and/or open to civil society advocacy, depending on context, with important consequences for engagement of advocacy targets. Recent research in India, where the national government is relatively stable and increasingly authoritarian, indicates that many CSOs doing advocacy on disaster governance invest much energy in building relations with government agencies on the basis of their performance and 'play along' with official policies and projects as a way to survive and pursue their agendas to the degree possible (Syal et al., 2021). In more fragile contexts, where authority and executive power are more dispersed, CSOs may spend more energy on building working relations with a wider variety of authorities, state and non-state (such as competing power holders and religious authorities) and be closely involved not just in advocacy but also the shaping and implementation of interventions together with state agencies and other non-state actors. Advocacy and service delivery can then closely be intertwined (Van Wessel et al., 2021).

In such political contexts, boundaries between state and society, and formal and informal structures shaping governance, may be more open and less relevant than in settings where a strong state is in control (Verkoren and van Leeuwen, 2014). How advocacy and governance relate can then become an important issue. The instability of the state in such contexts, in addition, looms large in such contexts, easily threatening whatever hard-won gains were made (Van Wessel et al., 2021). New research questions on these issues are, for example: what role can humanitarian advocacy play in various types of political context, given dimensions such as instability, lack of security, or constrained civic space? To what extent can international allies provide support given questions of civil society autonomy and risk, and what kind of support?

### Spaces

Given the potentially informal and fluid nature of much civil society organizing in humanitarian settings, it is also important to consider the spaces in which advocacy takes shape, and is conducted. Granting importance to questions of accountability also suggests shifting the study of advocacy more to the stage of organizing and articulation of voices in the various spaces in which this may happen. This can be at tea stalls, mosques, community health centres, or Twitter, to name just some possibilities. But also the ways in which more formal and professionalized organizations relate to the emergence of voices is of critical importance. This may also help to address the problem that country capitals and international arenas invite attention to advocacy in formalized policymaking arenas, whereas rural spaces and the voices that can be heard or

potentially organized there may remain out of view. Research questions that emerge here are, for example: what spaces turn out particularly relevant or potentially for humanitarian advocacy and why? How can ways of engaging various spaces support engagement of the needs, rights, views and interests of diverse and especially potentially marginalized populations?

### Strategies

Given the political context in which advocacy takes place, advocacy strategies will vary depending on the status of civic space as well as the ways different CSOs engage with this space. A recent small study of advocacy in fragile contexts brought out that the development of advocacy strategies took shape there through close readings of the varied and fluid contexts in which it was to happen, drawing closely on sophisticated capacities of local actors to seek out who can be influenced how and when, and by what means, making use of varied relations and ambiguity of rules and roles (Van Wessel et al., 2021). Strategizing was thus attuned to the fragility of the context, and rooted in advocates' interpretations of the possibilities and constraints they faced given the instability and insecurity of these contexts, while also identifying opportunities. Important here is that context specificity of selected strategies does not apply uniformly across actors in a given context. For example, in India, social movements still vigorously protest government actions and inactions, while CSOs collaborating with the government are often careful not to disturb their carefully nurtured relations with authorities. This may not only impact the extent they dare to be critical of these authorities but also, for example, their selection of partners. Such self-censorship can be strategic, as trusting relations with the state can open up spaces for CSOs to insert their agenda points, be it without rocking the boat too much (Syal et al., 2021).

Relatedly, service delivery roles within authoritarian settings can provide spaces for advocacy, as the shaping of such services can go beyond the implementation of pre-defined and imposed objectives. Research questions that emerge here are, for example: what forms of strategizing can be identified as important in humanitarian advocacy? How can nurturing of relations be done while safeguarding the objectives of protection of vulnerable populations? How do humanitarians strategize to address the fluidity and multiplicity of relations and authorities involved? Or are forms of strategizing more comparable to other types of settings?

## Aims

In the study of advocacy, influencing the agendas and decisions of policymakers is often central. Advocacy largely seems to centre on drawing attention to issues, defining of issues in certain ways, and the selection of certain types of solutions. These are different stages where formal, professionalized CSOs seem to have the most important roles, and these are also the stages most reported on in literature. The stages before and after agenda-setting and policy development receive much less attention: articulation of views and interests to be advocated for, and implementation of the policies and services as decided on. For the study of humanitarian governance, all 'stages' of policymaking or service delivery may be relevant. Considering accountability in the context of shifting and unclear relations between affected populations and actors taking decisions, articulation of views and interests of affected populations requires prominent attention. There is a need to research to what extent and how aims of civil society advocacy are or can be rooted in interaction with constituencies, and what sources of legitimacy, and in whose eyes, CSOs build and draw on in this (Saward, 2010).

An additional domain of interest is the stage of implementation. As a stage of policymaking, implementation is widely problematized (O'Toole, 2000). Much policy does not reach the stage of implementation, and much implementation differs in important ways from 'what was originally decided'. Both divergences are fraught with politics and may be for the better or worse when it comes to the question of how they relate to peoples' views and interests. For humanitarian action, however, implementation is evaluated, perhaps, but often not assessed and accounted for in interaction with affected populations. The fact that the implementation stage is where advocacy impact on people finally becomes concrete is more reason to pay close attention to it. This can also move away from the technocratic understanding of implementation, and embrace a more political view, including not only accountability for past actions, but also, for example, the opportunities this stage offers for including affected populations' rights, views, needs and interests in the final shaping of a policy or service, for example by the final identification and selection of individuals, groups or localities.

Relatedly, temporal horizons of humanitarian advocacy come in, ranging from present-focused addressing of immediate needs, to advancing long-term objectives of transforming structural human rights conditions. As Vandevordt and Fleischmann (2021) show, defining focus can be determined by circumstances and involve important dilemmas, given that working with short- or

longer-term temporal horizons can have important implications for advocates' legitimacy, scope of action and transformative potential.

When it comes to aims, it is also important to acknowledge that not all civil society actors seek to influence or advance humanitarian principles. For a part, civil society, reflecting dividing lines in society, may be 'uncivil' (Belloni, 2009), seeking to undermine the rights of certain populations, delegitimize their views, interests, or recognition of their needs, or contribute to deterioration of security. Considering this, advocacy can be seen not just as articulation and channelling of societal inputs to work with in humanitarian governance, but as a (partial) reflection of diversity and conflict in humanitarian settings, and as offering a site where these are to be engaged.

Research questions that may emerge on these issues are, for example: what sections of affected populations manage to articulate agendas for humanitarian advocacy, and what groups less so? How do agendas then reflect the rights, needs, views and interests of certain sections rather than others, and why? In what stages of policymaking or service delivery can humanitarian advocacy play what kinds of roles? How are temporal horizons of advocacy defined, with what consequences for that role and potential contributions of humanitarian advocacy?

## Conclusions

This chapter has aimed to revitalize a broad conception of humanitarian advocacy beyond classic humanitarian diplomacy, as the activities of affected communities and their advocates to articulate, advance, and protect their rights (i.e. entitlements to assistance and citizenship rights more broadly), needs, views and interests. This notion is in line with trends in humanitarian action around the roles and resilience of affected communities, the nexus between humanitarianism, development and peacebuilding, and localization. It is cognizant of current trends where humanitarian agencies are often the target of advocacy, as they are in their context often powerful actors and duty-bearers, as well as current practices evolving around the solidarity crisis in Europe in relation to migrants and refugees. Our notion enables the study of advocacy practices of different actors aiming their messages at different targets.

This chapter has proposed a research agenda that is open to discover the meaning of advocacy in a bottom-up manner by exploring actors and their collaborations, political contexts, spaces, strategies and aims. An open question is

how such an agenda can be realized in a world where funding for research is still predominantly flowing from governmental institutions, especially from countries in the North.<sup>1</sup>

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# 10 NGOs and innovation

*Ana Luísa Silva*

## Introduction

The word ‘innovation’ is today used extensively in many different contexts and spheres of human activity, from business, science and technology to government and civil society (Hall & Rosenberg, 2010; van der Have & Rubalcaba, 2016). Increasingly seen as a multi-disciplinary field of research, especially in the face of global sustainability challenges (Schot & Steinmueller, 2018; Voegtlin & Scherer, 2017), the concept of innovation as we understand it today in research, policy and practice is nonetheless deeply connected with the very concept of ‘development’. The reasons for this go back to the origins of innovation studies as a field of research in the 1960s and its consolidation in the couple of decades that followed. The research on innovation was then closely linked to the contemporary and similarly popular research on industrialisation, technological change, and economic growth (Fagerberg, 2009). Inspired by the mid-twentieth-century work of Schumpeter, innovation is today primarily seen as the independent phenomenon in capitalism that brings about change itself or, in other words, ‘creative destruction’ (Fagerberg, 2003; Schumpeter, 1947). Along the same lines, innovation is equated to the entrepreneurial function in economic activity. The entrepreneur breaks with social and economic routine and is thus able to transform an idea (or an invention) into practice by introducing it into the market, therefore creating economic value. Innovation means commercialised invention.

Since innovation is deeply connected with the idea of ‘development’, the fact that it has been a resurging topic in the field of international development cooperation (hereafter referred to as ‘development cooperation’) over the years (Heeks, 2014) is not surprising. Nevertheless, this does not mean that innovation in development cooperation is seen, throughout the decades, exclusively from a classic innovation studies lens. Development cooperation is not a homogenous field. The sector’s many and diverse actors (bilateral donors, recipient governments, United Nations agencies, Bretton Woods institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs)) have their own agendas and often do not see development issues with the same eyes. There is not just one devel-

opment discourse; there are instead many development discourses (Gasper & Apthorpe, 1996). Regarding innovation, in the period between the 1950s and 1990s innovation in development cooperation was broadly approached from two different perspectives (Chaminade et al., 2011; STEPS Centre, 2010): (a) innovation as technological change for economic growth, following the classic innovation studies tradition; and (b) social innovation, that is, innovation to address the needs of the poor in developing countries and tackle the shortcomings of mainstream economic development. These two perspectives illustrate a wider debate and counter-debate on what development is and/or should be, but also a discussion on the role development cooperation (and its actors) should have in promoting such development (Verweij, 2017; Chang, 2009).

Since the early 2000s, innovation has resurged as a 'hot' topic in the development cooperation sector. The idea of innovation gained a prominent place it did not have in the past, establishing itself as an agenda in its own accord. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a first global framework for the expanding 'innovation for development' narrative (UNDP, 2016), following the steps of the previous Millennium Agenda and its ambitious Millennium Development Goals (UN Millennium Project, 2005). In development and humanitarian policy and practice, UN agencies have taken the lead by launching innovation initiatives (Figure 10.1) and landmark reports (e.g. OCHA, 2014; UNDP, 2016, 2018; UNICEF, 2014). Similarly, bilateral aid agencies have launched innovation departments, labs, and coalitions (Figure 10.1), and produced their own reports and policy documents on the topic (e.g. G7, 2018; IDIA, 2015; Sida, 2013; US Global Development Lab, 2015). Nonetheless, academic debate on the innovation agenda emerging in the last two decades in development cooperation is still in its infancy and, as such, the topic has yet to become a systematic field of research (Silva, 2021a; Ramalingam & Bound, 2016). So far, the main focus of existing academic research has been the sub-topic of humanitarian innovation (e.g. Bloom & Betts, 2013; Sandvik, 2017; Scott-Smith, 2016). This is also the area where most grey literature has been published (e.g. Ramalingam et al., 2009; James & Taylor, 2018), even if the line between development and humanitarian innovation is not always clear-cut.

This resurgence of innovation happens against the backdrop of a profound transformation occurring in the field of development cooperation. While the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s saw the sector expanding and turning into what some authors have called the 'development industry' (Ferguson, 1994; Powell & Seddon, 1997), the trajectory of the first two decades of the twenty-first century has challenged the very foundations of the sector. Trends such as the proliferation of actors engaged in development cooperation

# Innovation in international development initiatives

## Timeline 2000-2018



Source: Silva (2021a).

Figure 10.1 Innovation in international development initiatives: timeline 2000-2018

(namely private sector actors and Southern donors), a decline in importance of Official Development Assistance (ODA) against other financial flows for development, as well as an upsurge in new ways of delivering aid (Janus et al., 2015; Mawdsley et al., 2014; Gore, 2013), slowly changed the playing field for traditional development actors such as northern donors, UN agencies, and development NGOs. Debates on aid effectiveness have multiplied, in light of the aid-unrelated success stories coming from Eastern Asia and fuelled by the slow progress of many African nations, as well as the perceived failure of the Millennium Development Goals (e.g. Riddell, 2008; Moyo, 2010).

Over this period, international relations evolved into an interwoven arena of actors, coming from multiple centres of power and legitimacy, and no longer dominated by Western liberal democracies (Acharya, 2017). Simultaneously, multidimensional and complex macro-challenges such as climate change, financial crises, migrations and pandemics (of which Covid-19 is perhaps the best example) emerge as global problems that need transnational responses (Klingebiel & Gonsior, 2020; Leach et al., 2021). One of the development cooperation system's reasons for existing, the divide between the so-called Global North and Global South, is eroding. Innovation studies and development studies are thus brought together in a way that had previously not happened in research, policy and practice (Schot & Steinmueller, 2018), along with calls for responsible and inclusive innovation to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It is in this context of global and sectoral transformation that innovation is pushed and advocated for, as a key resource in solving global challenges, as well as the development field's own internal challenges (Voegtlin & Scherer, 2017; Mulgan, 2016; Silva, 2021a). Authors have noted that the current innovation narrative driven by 'traditional' Western development actors (OECD-DAC bilateral donors, UN agencies, big philanthropy organisations) shows inward and outward intentions (Bloom & Faulkner, 2016). *Inward*, by pushing for systemic transformation in development cooperation (e.g. new financing mechanisms, new implementation approaches, organisational innovations). *Outward*, by calling for creative solutions for sustainable development challenges, particularly the ones touching the lives of the global poor, in contexts of increasing uncertainty and complexity (e.g. developing new services and products, using new technologies to solve development problems). This is therefore an agenda primarily concerned with the development and delivery of solutions to both change international aid and solve the problems of the poorest people in the poorest countries. If one refers back to the two lenses through which different actors have seen innovation in development cooperation over the

decades, this is an agenda that sees innovation from a lens that is much closer to social innovation literature than classical innovation studies.

## Development NGOs and innovation

Development NGOs have become established actors in development cooperation. These organisations grew rapidly in number and funding mobilisation capacity in the 1980s/90s due partially to wider development policy trends (Fowler, 2011). In the 1980s, the liberalisation agenda paved the way to the privatisation of social services in developing countries and NGOs were favoured by donors as more efficient and innovative service providers than state-based systems. The end of the Cold War led to the democratisation and good governance agenda of the 1990s, which increased the support available to organised civil society worldwide, particularly in former Soviet nations. It is virtually impossible to produce reliable statistics on the actual number of development NGOs operating worldwide or the funds they mobilise (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). Nonetheless, official aid flows through NGOs can give us an idea of their importance in the sector. The 2018 figures from the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC) estimate that DAC donor countries channelled close to USD 21 billion through (mostly donor-country-based) NGOs that year, or 15 per cent of total bilateral aid (OECD, 2020).

In the context of the development sector's ongoing transformation described in the introduction above, development NGOs, particularly international development NGOs, are currently facing an identity crisis, worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic (CIVICUS, 2020; ICVA, 2020). As these organisations face ever growing challenges of legitimacy, accountability, and vulnerable dependence on government funding, their perceived role as precursors of alternative development models, natural social innovators and catalysts of international solidarity movements is increasingly being questioned (Banks et al., 2015). Innovation was a regular topic in a body of research on learning in development NGOs, which arose in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Britton, 1998; Edwards, 1997; Fowler, 1997; Roper & Pettit, 2002). In fact, the ability to provide alternative approaches to the mainstream development policies and practices has been seen by donors and governments as a distinct feature of these organisations (Bebbington et al., 2007), in line with the view of innovation in development cooperation as social innovation. Drawing from their early origins in wartime emergency relief, social movements, and protest against war, colonialism and injustice in the 1960s/70s (Davies, 2014),

development NGOs can also be seen as catalysts of (positive) social change. Development NGOs themselves have nurtured an image as natural innovators or as catalysts for social change. Authors have further noted that these organisations, as a key development actor in most developing countries providing common goods and services, should also be looked at as part of developing countries' innovation ecosystems, towards a more inclusive and sustainable innovation process (Altenburg, 2011).

Despite this long existing link between innovation and development NGOs, current academic research on innovation in development cooperation has kept these and other civil society actors on the side-lines. There seems to be a lack of interest in academia (likely linked to the well-known difficulties in accessing data from this type of organisation) on documenting and understanding how NGOs are innovating to change internally as a response to current challenges (*inwards* innovation). When it comes to *outwards* innovation, existing research on innovations produced by development NGOs, both by academic researchers, donors or NGOs themselves, tends to focus on documenting specific, usually successful, innovations or ways to innovate (e.g. Seelos & Mair, 2017; Whitehead, 2015).

The current state of the art therefore leaves a lot of room for academic and/or collaborative research on this topic. Below, we identify several open research questions and a few possible avenues for research on innovation in development cooperation, with a focus on development NGOs.

## What type of innovation and why?

Starting with definitions, rationales, and motivations is always a good first step when analysing a concept as troubled as innovation. In development, where discourse helps shape policy and practice (Gasper & Apthorpe, 1996; Cornwall & Eade, 2010), it is a natural first step. Since 2015, a limited body of grey literature, produced by national NGO platforms<sup>1</sup> located in the Global North mainly as a response to an increasing interest by bilateral aid agencies in the topic, has started addressing these issues (Partos, 2016; Peach & Inventium, 2016; Reilly-King & Charles, 2018; Whitehead, 2016). These documents show, perhaps unsurprisingly, that both NGO platforms and their members have different ways of approaching innovation. Finding consensus on a definition of innovation from a development NGO perspective is difficult. Nevertheless, a common trend that can be observed is that innovation for development ends up being generally classed as 'social innovation' with an *outwards* direction

(i.e. a new or improved solution to solve a shared human need/goal/socially relevant problem).

In a recent study that looked at innovation perspectives from a sample of 20 national NGO platforms (16 of which were located in the Global South), both *inwards* and *outwards* directions emerge from the definitions collected (Silva, 2021b). Platforms innovate primarily *inwards* to improve how they work and the support they give to their members. At the same time, they aim to find creative solutions, often in the advocacy/campaigning realm, to achieve wider goals of social transformation and systemic change (i.e. innovate *outwards*).

This limited body of work has also started to explore different rationales and motivations to innovate in national NGO platforms (Reilly-King & Charles, 2018; Silva, 2021b). The findings provide a first broad answer to the question ‘*why* do development NGOs innovate?’, primarily linking innovation rationales to external factors: crisis such as the 2008–09 financial crisis and Covid-19, shrinking civic space, a push by donors, information and communication technologies (ICTs) and digitalisation (working as innovation enablers).

Existing research is therefore limited, both in size and in scope. There is space not only to conduct more research on individual organisations, but also (and especially) to conduct more systematic research to better understand innovation trends and their relation to internal and external factors. A better understanding of innovation definitions, rationales, and motivations to innovate (or to not innovate) across the spectrum of NGOs working in development (from different geographies, working in different thematic areas, and playing different roles) should therefore be a priority for future research. There is currently a sense of urgency in rethinking NGO identities, roles and strategies, and their overall place in the development cooperation sector. Understanding current innovation perspectives and rationales is not only important to help organisations define their innovation strategies and pathways, but also to help them reflect upon their identities and their overall place in development cooperation and social change.

## How to innovate

Existing research on innovation by development NGOs is episodic, scattered, and lacks systematic review. There is always an appetite to identify and document ‘recipes’ to innovate (e.g. Seelos & Mair, 2017; Chang, 2019; James & Taylor, 2018), but at best NGO innovations are included in wider reviews of

innovation for development initiatives like donor and UN innovation labs (e.g. Duflo & Kremer, 2015; IDIA, 2019). It is difficult to isolate and analyse the innovations produced by development NGOs. In addition, there seems to be a focus on private sector actors (including foundations and companies) and the rush of social entrepreneurs entering the development field (e.g. Chang, 2019; Csíkszentmihályi & Rodrigues, 2018). Traditionally, NGOs work with different funding structures and incentives from private actors (are these less conducive to innovation?; might they lead to different ways to innovate?). How do NGOs collaborate with different actors, both private and civil society, and what does that tell us about how they innovate? There is clearly a push from funding structures to finance innovation by NGOs, but if their current innovation methods, strategies, barriers and opportunities are not understood, it will be harder for these funding structures to support successful innovation and foster further collaboration to address complex, multidimensional challenges at scale. Systematic research is needed to move beyond single case studies, in order to identify overall trends across different types of organisations, different geographies and different areas of work.

## Innovation by whom, with whom, and for whom?

Innovation policies at national and international levels raise questions that relate to the very politics of innovation: not just “what innovation?”, but “innovation for whom” and, most importantly, “innovation by whom?” (Heeks et al., 2014; STEPS Centre, 2010). In the 1970s (and until recently), the debate was generally framed around a *distributive* justice lens, that is, science, technology, and innovation (STI) must be available for diffusion among all countries so that all can reap the benefits it brings. Today, there is a need to move towards a relational justice imperative, that is, challenge the processes of knowledge and innovation production to effectively change the unbalanced power dynamics in STI policies for developing countries (Papaioannou, 2018). Along with calls for responsible and inclusive innovation to reach the SDGs, innovation studies and development studies are brought together in a way that had previously not happened in research, policy and practice (Schot & Steinmueller, 2018).

The origins of innovation are at the centre of a discussion about power, politics and inclusion in knowledge creation. Similarly, power and politics are at the centre of the debate around development work itself, as the recent #ShiftThePower debate advocating a power shift from international (i.e. Northern) to local (i.e. Southern) NGOs reminds us (Doane, 2019). And therefore, it urges the question: which NGOs are innovating and where? Who



do they collaborate with? How do they include those affected by the problems in the innovation process? To answer these questions in a way that recognises that NGOs are part of a larger ecosystem, a possible avenue for future research on the origins of innovation is understanding the relationships between NGOs and different actors when it comes to innovation (governments, communities, private sector, companies and foundations, and other civil society actors).

## Building new theoretical frameworks

One important aspect that is common to the classic innovation studies and the social innovation literatures is the idea that innovation is good: “That innovation is good, always good, is the mantra in the study of innovation” (Godin & Vinck, 2017a, p. 319). The study of innovation has produced a vast body of theory, research and policy that consistently treats innovation as an economic phenomenon, equating the concept to technologic change, largely seen as something good, and failing to provide alternative narratives (Godin & Vinck, 2017b). However, some scholars have recently challenged those dominant views on innovation, actively pursuing alternative paths of research for what diffusion theorist Rogers called the “pro-innovation bias” (Rogers, 1983). This “pro-innovation bias” leads to a research agenda focused on successful innovation, thus excluding from the literature the study of phenomena like “imitation, resistance, discontinuance, disinnovation, failures, withdrawal and de-adoption” (Godin & Vinck, 2017b, p. 6) and preventing a holistic study of all aspects of innovation.

Similarly, the vast social innovation literature does not provide obvious frameworks for the study of innovation from a development NGO perspective (Fowler, 2013). Exploring alternative frameworks can open new research opportunities that go beyond the study of successful innovation and explore the role of imitation, resistance to innovation and innovation failure. Examples of available frameworks exist in the links between social innovation, development studies and sustainability transitions literature (Howaldt et al., 2014), and also in the civic innovation framework (Biekart et al., 2016). Civic innovation puts citizens and civic agency in the centre of the analysis and aims to explain the power politics and socio-cultural intersections of civic-driven change. From a civic innovation perspective, global development policy frameworks such as Agenda 2030 can be considered, but so should values-based views of development, longer-term social change goals, development as good change (as in Chambers, 2017).

These alternative narratives of innovation could prove to be useful to the study of innovation in development cooperation, particularly when it comes to development NGOs and other civil society actors. What is the role of NGOs and civil society actors, not only in originating but also in diffusing innovation in its different forms (e.g. products, services, social practices)? What is the role of imitation in innovation diffusion among civil society actors? Do NGOs resist innovation and why? And, finally (and this is of course a difficult topic when working with NGOs, who tend to avoid exposing narratives that might shine a negative light on them for potential funders and supporters), what happens if and when NGO innovations fail? An important avenue for research that brings together these open questions and that should be considered when choosing a theoretical framework is the role of development NGOs in innovation towards (positive) systemic change.

## The digital revolution

Beyond the immediate (and more obvious) interest in using technology to find solutions for development and social problems, there is the opportunity to conduct research on how development NGOs and other civil society actors are changing due to the widespread diffusion of digital technology. The digitalisation revolution has been a key enabler of innovation in the development cooperation sector (Boas et al., 2005). The survey of 20 national NGO platforms mentioned above suggests that ICTs and digitalisation are considered the most important enablers for innovation by these organisations and one of the key reasons they innovate (Silva, 2021b).

On the other hand, digital transformation, defined as “organizational change triggered and shaped by the widespread diffusion of digital technology” (Hanelt et al., 2021, p. 1187), has been argued to bring profound changes to organisations (Verhoef et al., 2021; Vial, 2019). Boundaries between types of organisational innovation become blurred: implementing digital tools within an organisation initially with *inwards* intention can lead not only to the intended internal change but, at a later stage or concurrently, change the very practices of that same organisation, therefore producing *outwards* facing innovation. In addition, it has been argued that social media are changing the way civic innovation happens, with social movements starting online, spreading, and changing through the online social sphere (Biekart et al., 2016). We need further research on how development NGOs are using ICTs and other digital tools to change their internal processes. Also, how is the digital transformation impacting the way NGOs act and interact with other actors? And how can

innovation enabled by and led by digital transformation contribute to social change?

## Conclusion

Due to the rise of a new ‘innovation agenda’ in development cooperation over the last 20 years, innovation in development cooperation is today an emerging field of research. Nevertheless, development NGOs are still on the side-lines of researching this topic, which has so far focused on the sub-topic of humanitarian innovation and the role of private actors and social entrepreneurs. This chapter started by providing an overview of the existing academic and grey literature on innovation in development cooperation, as well as the current development sector transformation, in order to situate the debate. Second, it highlighted potential areas of research to help us understand the content and direction of innovation amongst development NGOs and the role of NGOs in innovation for development. Existing research on development NGO innovation focuses, like most classic innovation research in other fields, on studying specific, usually successful, innovations. It therefore leaves many questions unanswered on topics like innovation definitions and perspectives on innovation, processes, culture, funding, motivations, failure, as well as the very role of NGOs in innovation for development and (positive) social change.

A future research agenda on innovation and development NGOs should, first of all, go beyond single case studies and focus on a more systematic understanding of current perspectives (*why*) and practices (*what* and *how*). This must consider the diversity of NGOs working in development and thus include different types of organisations, from different geographies, working in different thematic areas. A second open avenue for research concerns the relationships between development NGOs and other development actors, newcomers and traditional, when it comes to innovation. A particular focus should be given to private sector actors, such as companies and foundations, who had a key role in shaping the current innovation agenda in development cooperation. Similarly, the relationship between development NGOs and other civil society actors, in a time when citizens and social movements reclaim their centrality in the fight for social change worldwide, remains an under-researched topic.

A third avenue for research is the use of alternative frameworks to the study of development NGOs and innovation, going beyond the study of successful innovation and exploring the role of imitation, resistance to innovation and innovation failure. The civic innovation framework, which puts citizens and

civic agency at the centre of the analysis and aims to explain the power politics and socio-cultural intersections of civic-driven change, can be a particularly useful resource when analysing the role of development NGOs.

Finally, a fourth important research area is the role of digital transformation in innovation by development NGOs. Technology as a solution catalyst in development cooperation has sparked a lot of interest, but the transformation of development NGOs and other civil society actors due to widespread diffusion of digital technology has received much less attention. Current research shows that ICTs and digital tools are considered important enablers for innovation in these organisations. Social media has changed the way civil society actors advocate for change. There is space for further research on how development NGOs are using ICTs and other digital tools to change their internal processes, and how the digital transformation is impacting the way NGOs act and interact with other actors. But also how innovation, enabled by and led by digital transformation, can contribute to social change.

An innovation research agenda with a focus on development NGOs is currently relevant not only to facilitate organisations (as well as their donors and supporters) when defining their innovation strategies and pathways. It is also key to help them reflect upon their identities and their overall place in development cooperation and social change, in a context of sectoral transformation and uncertainty.

## NOTE

1. Umbrella organisations that work as coordination bodies, creating space for advancing collective action, defending their members' freedom for civic action, helping their members coordinate and share experiences, but also by helping regulate the sector to increase accountability (Fowler, 1997, p. 116).

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# 11

## Emergent agency in a time of Covid

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### Introduction

So-called ‘critical junctures’ – wars, economic shocks and other emergencies – often play a pivotal and catalytic role in bringing about change. Previous pandemics such as the Black Death or the Spanish Flu have been major political and social tipping points. Could Covid follow suit? This question was the subject of a global research initiative.<sup>1</sup> Although crisis-inspired, the resulting research agenda has long-term value for civil society and organisations keen to understand and strengthen the influencing power of civil society.

The outbreak of a global pandemic was unprecedented in the contemporary era, with government, organisations and businesses needing to adapt repeatedly to challenging and mutating events. Across the world, people have been responding to the pandemic at a local level by acting, organising and learning. Press reports and experiences such as those that found their way to the blog ‘From Poverty to Power’<sup>2</sup> showed that huge changes were taking place in the nature of civil society due to their responses to the pandemic.

Most early analysis concentrated on the health impact and state response (or lack of it). What was missing was a more bottom-up look at how individuals, communities and grassroots organisations were responding. What kinds of patterns could be identified in this ‘emergent agency’<sup>3</sup> – the responses it triggers among low-income, excluded communities around the world? How can others support and amplify this work? What is its long-term impact – new organisations, new politics, or new options that others can support?

The answers to these questions can help identify important opportunities and rare silver linings from an otherwise catastrophic historic event. They can help us understand how better to support civil society not only through emergencies but also in day-to-day operations. They can give insight into structural

issues, informing development initiatives and donor practices, and amplifying impact through scaling efforts and influencing, thus setting the future direction for international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), policymakers, and civil society actors aiming to ‘build back radically better’ from the pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

To answer these questions, the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity of the London School of Economics<sup>5</sup> funded the Oxfam research project ‘Emergent Agency in a Time of Covid’. The research involved extensive literature review (Nampoothiri and Artuso, 2021), in-country research (the Philippines, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Nigeria), and nine thematic clusters on social movements, women’s organisations, faith organisations, education, HIV/aids, children and youth, livelihoods, informality and the state, and peace building. This chapter describes the patterns of emergent agency identified by these efforts. Core themes are discussed, concluding with four research priorities.

## **Context, forms, pathways**

### Path dependency and political framing

At the outbreak of the pandemic, most governments in the global North responded by imposing strict lockdowns on movement and travel. But for many parts of the global South such strategies were inadequate or not feasible. Self-isolation, stay at home, sanitise/wash hands were difficult or impossible in high-density communities, including refugee camps and low-income settlements. People with lower incomes, including minorities, women and youth, were hardest hit, mostly due to their reliance on face-to-face and precarious jobs. The restrictions on INGOs meant that support based on external actors or linkages stopped. This immediately shifted reliance to local expertise, with an accompanying shift to local networks, knowledge, leadership and resources.

Civic responses were influenced by national histories of social organisation and self-help, state effectiveness, the nature of the social contract, and what was happening politically, socially and economically as the pandemic struck. An upsurge in Mexico’s feminist movement in 2019 morphed rapidly into a Covid-19 online organisation (Alfaro, 2020). In India, Delhi’s response was shaped by pre-Covid-19 protests against the Citizen Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens legislation, which were widely perceived as undermining Muslim citizenship. In Nigeria, the End SARS protest over police

**Table 11.1** Roles, relationships and forms of agency identified in case studies

Nature of state responses	Forms of civil society interactions	Forms of emergent agency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effective</li> <li>- Absent</li> <li>- Kleptocratic</li> <li>- Repressive</li> <li>- Populist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spotting gaps but largely secondary to state mechanisms</li> <li>- Self-help delivery</li> <li>- Resisting and replacing state mechanisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Direct service delivery (independent, co-opted, or in conjunction with state)</li> <li>- Advocacy to improve state response</li> <li>- Resistance to state attack or theft</li> </ul>

brutality that had started in 2017 resurfaced in September 2020 with protest mobilisation via social media.<sup>6</sup>

Path dependence also shaped the evolution of individual forms of collective action. In some places, new initiatives emerged, usually as forms of self- or mutual help; in others, existing CSOs repurposed their work in response to the pandemic, seeking to juggle the competing demands for practical help ('service delivery') and political action/advocacy.

There are, of course, risks in Western researchers seeing the pandemic through Western eyes (as a once-in-a-lifetime health disaster) rather than understanding its relative importance elsewhere, especially in places with higher levels of endemic insecurity. For example, in Somalia, it was widely perceived as only the third most important disaster after drought and locusts (personal communication with Amy Croome, 18 August 2020), and in India, basic poverty-related survival was more urgent. However, by mid-2021, this lower priority was shifting, with more contagious variants of the disease alarmingly accelerating the pandemic in lower-income countries and communities, as rich countries vaccinated their way out of the pandemic and the centre of gravity of the disease moved South, like HIV/AIDS, 20 years earlier.

Much of the civic response was shaped by state actions (Table 11.1). This may have offered additional power and authority, particularly to faith organisations, customary authorities, or women's rights organisations that held relationships of trust with communities to which authorities needed access for Covid-19 responses.

In conflict-affected places, the state is often absent or predatory, with community groups used to being first responders. Covid-19 has reinforced that role. In

many countries, the government's belated response led CSOs to produce and distribute personal protection equipment (PPE) and food.

### Forms of civil society response

The diversity of individual and group efforts to respond to Covid-triggered needs has been massive. They varied in scale, origin, and purpose, tactics and repertoires. As needs and opportunities shifted, efforts pivoted and snowballed. The levels and scales at which civil society responded ranged from one-on-one practical support to global advocacy. Individually, mutual aid groups sprang up across the globe in urban neighbourhoods, villages and refugee camps. Elsewhere pre-existing groups ramped up their work, including providing additional support to widows, migrant workers and those at risk of domestic violence. National and global alliances were a common form of scaling, given the range and reach of efforts needed.

### Emergent and adaptive

While some responses were novel, others were rooted in existing organisations or groups. The more 'emergent' responses have occurred where previous efforts were non-existent or inadequate, with a void left by the state/government. Many responses, however, came from existing groups that pivoted away from advocacy or scaled up their work to cover growing needs.

Social movements are a major form of emergent popular agency.<sup>7</sup> In principle, social movements are distinguished from other kinds of emergent agency in that they are conflictual, normally representing a conflict with the state, corporations or dominant groups. This can create particular difficulties in the relationship with some donors, states and INGOs. Emergent social movements are a fluid form, however, and in some cases may be met with engagement, concessions, or co-option by the state, or may institutionalise themselves into NGOs, charities or other forms. These complexities were heightened during the pandemic, which was consistently marked by restrictions on people coming together in informal ways and disruption to 'normal' social movement activities. Pleyers (2020) noted that social movements focused around five roles that we also saw in the Emergent Agency cases, namely: public protests (where feasible); defending workers' rights; mutual aid and solidarity; monitoring policymakers and popular education.

## Purposes

Most responses were initially focused on *meeting practical survival needs*. With the loss of normal sources of income, food, healthcare, and education, finding alternative channels of service delivery became urgent. Food drives were organised in Kibera (Kenya) by a new network of activists.<sup>8</sup> Low-income, urban women became central to food delivery in the Philippines, providing them with both income and nourishment (Dionisio and Palanca, 2020). Local healthcare delivery needed alternatives when normal access to medication, PPE or qualified healthcare became impossible. In Somaliland, Siraad, a feminist collective, stepped in to reduce elite capture of supplies by hand delivering PPE to local women (Abidiaziz, 2021).

*Providing safety and emotional support* emerged as a second purpose. Increases in domestic violence were widely reported, with women trapped in confined physical spaces for extended periods with men venting pent-up frustrations on family members (Harvey, 2021). Feminist activist collectives used social media to create support networks for victims of domestic violence. In Mexico, Las del Aquelarre Feminista, an existing feminist collective, opened an emotional support phone line for victims of domestic violence, with pro bono professional therapists and secret codes for those unable to contact 911 directly (Alfaro, 2020). In China, a new feminist activist WeChat support group (Bao, 2020) created an anti-domestic violence campaign with the Rural Women Development Foundation that garnered the support of several thousand people in just a few hours (Bao, 2020).

*Countering misinformation* about the virus spawned media-related responses. For example, the Siraad Initiative in Somaliland realised the effects of misinformation and saw how quickly fake news spread (Abidiaziz, 2021). Many Somalilanders, including women working in the market places that the Siraad Initiative was targeting, thought the pandemic was a simple flu. People ignored Covid-19 regulations, so the initiative worked to eradicate misconceptions. The control of digital spaces became an arena for young digital activists. To curb misinformation and quell panic in South Africa, two recent graduates of the University of Cape Town established the Coronapp, a tool to centralise pandemic-related information (Bernardo, 2020).

As government responses to Covid-19 started to target civic space, responses started to include *protest* and *advocacy*. In the DRC, opportunistic police sometimes found themselves violently expelled by largely spontaneous citizen action. The violent imposition of lockdown rules by Uganda's 'Local Defence Units' triggered widespread criticism and resistance (Green and Kirk, 2020).

In Jos, Nigeria, crowds stormed government warehouses where food and other Covid supplies were held without distribution.<sup>9</sup>

Four types of advocacy efforts can be identified. Two types were in response to the centralisation and militarisation of pandemic responses, which led to violence and human rights violations. Some responses focused on *defending rights*, with some cases producing relatively quick ‘wins’ including the dropping of coercive legislative proposals in Bolivia (CIVICUS, 2020b). Advocacy responses elsewhere aimed to *hold the state to account*, for example through investigations of police violence (Kenya) (CIVICUS, 2020b). A third kind of advocacy focused on a more *structural response* to meet practical needs, such as policy change to improve digital access in low-income settlements or to deal with the explosion of domestic violence. Finally, there was *normative advocacy* to change social views, notably on gender-based violence.

*Digital access*, of course, became crucial for many aspects of life during the pandemic, the need for which has itself spawned new responses. Fundraising became digital for efforts such as the Kibera food drive (see above), as for organising of protests. Not only was digital a means for advocacy, but it also became its focus. For example, social movements in Argentina began to advocate for better connectivity, with a bill presented to Congress to guarantee free internet access in low-income settlements.

*The need to strategise differently around civil society responses* generated further initiatives, including creating opportunities to regroup and build new capacities. Specific training emerged in technical areas, including the use of online tech, IT security and social media, as well as the practicalities of scaling up organising, creative actions, internal democracy and diversity, or seeking funding or legal advice. South Asia Women’s Foundation in India pivoted from its default of face-to-face reflections, strategising and mobilising to working entirely online.<sup>10</sup> This was not without its pitfalls. For example, in Mumbai, huge pockets of the population had no access to cell phones. It took the Foundation time to replace service delivery and engagement with virtual means.

### Repertoires and tactics

Responses took many forms. Typical repertoires included coalition-building, online activism, symbolic events and ‘happenings’, street protest, and documentation, for example, of social need as an advocacy tool with state providers. More practical approaches included disseminating hand washing instructions and countering misinformation about how the virus is (not) spread.

Some forms of agency, including protest, were cultural. The lyrics of popular songs were changed to protest-related content or practical instruction. In Mozambique, the popular band GranMah released 'Esta nas tuas Mãos' ('it's in your hands'), a video with advice on handwashing techniques and alternatives to handshakes.<sup>11</sup> Documentaries were created, books and special issues written, interviews given, and YouTube videos posted.

### Expansion and innovation

Hallmarks of the response were more (entrepreneurial) creativity, creative collective non-violent responses, and a step change in digital organising.

*Entrepreneurial creativity* was much needed and started early on. Across the 24 states of India a little over 65,000 rural women, part of around 15,000 self-help groups, produced over 20 million masks by 12 April (*Economic Times*, 2020). These groups were spread across the length and breadth of the country, so this decentralised production model created easier logistics for delivery to local hospitals and customers (Green, 2020).

Some businesses emerged more slowly. In the Philippines, Veggies for Good started as a family humanitarian response and then grew into a social enterprise (Dionisio and Palanca, 2020). It brought agricultural produce to quarantined residential households by mobilising low-income women and displaced male labourers and using social media platforms to match supply and demand. One year on, its day-to-day operations were handled by urban low-income mothers, connecting vegetable farmers directly to consumers in Metro Manila.

Despite the restrictions, activists found a multitude of peaceful ways to speak out, make visible and denounce or demand. In Palestine, in April 2020, feminists organised balcony protests with pots and pans against the surge of gender-based violence during the pandemic. In Singapore, young climate activists from the Fridays for Future global school strike movement held solo protests in April 2020 due to the country's restrictive laws on peaceful assembly (CIVICUS, 2020a). In Brazil, in June 2020, human rights groups put up 1,000 crosses paying tribute to Covid-19 victims on the lawn in front of key government buildings, calling out the denialism of President Jair Bolsonaro (CIVICUS, 2020c).

Most striking in civil society response was *the acceleration of digital uptake and innovation*, which led to new and in some cases, more relevant forms of action. Lockdowns and social distancing left many people homebound, with the economy, service provision and (many) relationships requiring digital

means. Innovative civil responses included the distribution of free solar radios in Kenya that allowed children without internet access or electricity at home to continue studying while schools were closed (Rioba, 2020). Digital spaces enabled many movements, organisations and communities to mobilise people, advocate for change, raise resources, brainstorm and strategise, enabling faster and more efficient organising with new opportunities for coalition-building (Nampoothiri and Artuso, 2021). Social media influencers, musicians, poets, painters, social and political activists, and television and sports stars used their talents and social platforms to reach out to millions of people.

## Cross-cutting reflections

Across this enormous diversity of responses, five themes stood out: the agility of local responses, trust as the basis for social action, the rise of coalitions, the reality of exhaustion, and the downsides of digital innovation and expansion.

### Going local

In the pandemic, local presence came up trumps. Communities were able to overcome the challenges faced by larger organisations that could no longer bridge physical distances. With their knowledge of local communities, these networks and organisations were able to develop new strategies for service delivery, setting up multiple forms of mutual aid. This was exemplified by Indian communities and self-help groups – particularly involving women producers – connecting local farmers and consumers to achieve self-sufficiency, mapping vulnerability in their villages to use government budgets to provide medicines and food to those in need (Kothari, 2020). In the Brazilian *favelas*, where many inhabitants lack digital access and online media, grassroots media organisations used banners in busy spaces and other personal messaging to stress hygiene and social distancing guidelines (Cavalcante, 2020).

Much of the funding for grassroots/non-state actors in the pandemic came from local/non-aid sources, including *zakat*, or contributions from the middle classes or Diasporas. Local organisations created simple, low-budget solutions (e.g. the Philippines pantry movement; see Dionisio et al., 2020) and introduced online and other forms of fundraising. Post-pandemic, could this accelerate the shift away from reliance on international aid to domestic funding sources for activism, perhaps backed by smaller pots of more agile, localised aid, such as Religions for Peace?<sup>12</sup>



New leaders stepped up with little or no prior experience, partly due to the increased prominence of youth activism and surging activity among informal groups and networks. This new leadership may be another lasting legacy of the pandemic – a new generation of leaders forged in and shaped by the Covid-19 crisis.

### Shaped by trust

When the normal flow of relationships is interrupted, whether by physical isolation, state repression, or sudden poverty, people fall back on the reciprocity and security of their trusted networks – family, friends and allies – to get things done amid adversity. Covid acted as a wedge, heightening the importance of existing trust networks in some settings, and of the political uses of distrust in others (Kenny, 2021).

Trust between individuals and institutions became an invisible shaper of events. In El Salvador, the evangelical churches negotiated with the *maras* (gangs) to get access to the poorest barrios to distribute food and help – many gang members had parents in those churches. By contrast, the Roman Catholic Church negotiated directly with national authorities, where their bonds of trust lie.

Broader social trust shapes the public legitimacy of institutions and their ability to persuade people to do the right thing (e.g. on vaccination or self-isolation). According to the Rona Foundation, a Kenyan widows' organisation, 'they [widows] have become the pillar, the place where people go for help. We are the ones holding society together.' As trust became the currency of response, Covid exposed the varying degree of legitimacy and connectedness of civil society organisations.

But trust is not simply inherited or static. The responses to Covid and other political events constantly create, destroy and redistribute trust across society. New links of trust were created as new coalitions were built, generating new political and social capital for change, for example when trust built through service delivery transformed into opportunities for advocacy. 'In Mexico, feminist collectives, such as the hacktivist group Luchadoras, coordinated discussions and debates on how the measures implemented to control the pandemic simultaneously reflected and aggravated socio-economic, political, geographic and gender inequalities' (Alfaro, 2020). Despite social distancing, emotional bonds and trust were built by sharing life stories, 'building community in the shape of new collective digital memory'.

In Somalia, for the Hormoud Women's Forum, in Barwaaqo internally displaced persons (IDP) camp, trust had to be earned. Despite being elected by their community, the 20 women in the forum were unable to convince the IDP community about Covid-19 prevention protocols:

Distrust in the leadership groups and rumours that the groups were receiving monetary compensation from external agencies for their work initially led the Barwaaqo community to not take C-19 prevention seriously. ... The women's group tenaciously knocked on people's doors to advise on social distancing and to distribute the [donated] masks and soap ... As time passed and the effects of the pandemic started to affect Barwaaqo, the community started to become more open to the [Forum's] work. (Abidiaziz, 2021, pp. 1–2)

### Building coalitions

The pandemic acted as a social glue, pushing networks of activists and organisations to connect and work collaboratively, building coalitions within civil society and with businesses to organise larger-scale and more coordinated responses. In India, a coalition of 30 NGOs called Rapid Rural Community Response to Covid-19 helped address this issue at scale. Over six million families across 12 states and a network of over 10,000 women's self-help groups collected data about the most vulnerable and worked alongside local governments and others to provide immediate shelter, food and medical help (Bamzai, 2020). The Delhi Relief Collective – a loose association of NGOs and individual volunteers – used social media platforms to generate data and a rights-based discourse around the impact of the lockdown on informal and migrant workers, get media and political attention, and advocate for emergency welfare measures (Mohanty, 2020).

Coalitions also allowed different groups to come together to offer multiple and complementary responses. Initiatives such as 'Cape Town Together'<sup>13</sup> or 'Frena la curva'<sup>14</sup> ('brake the curve') blurred the lines between formal and informal civil society, with activists, organisations, communities, entrepreneurs and urban 'laboratories' organising community-led responses that raise awareness, build solidarity, and provide essential services.

In some contexts, coalitions broke with the norm. In South Africa, civil society groups were not in the habit of working together on common agendas according to Kelly Gillespie (Sitrin and Sembrar, 2020):

There have been post-apartheid attempts at coalition building. ... Often they fall apart because there was not something specific to work on. What is most interesting about this pandemic is the organic emergence of working groups around particular issues. ... There is something about the time of crisis and the possibility that the

coalition has afforded to have people sit down and actually work together regardless of their differences. (Sitrin and Sembrar, 2020, pp. 110–13)

### Going digital unevenly

The shift to digital can create opportunities for inclusivity and connectivity, speed, and scope of organising. With online spaces opening up in both work and everyday life, global distances are suddenly reduced, and circulation of information is faster than ever. Going digital meant opportunities for youth leadership. Civil society and the aid sector experimented with new practices made possible by the new digital spaces. For example, the default of peace builders had been face-to-face conflict resolution. But in the pandemic, many organisations embraced online approaches, with spaces evolving to become more inclusive.<sup>15</sup>

But the shift to digital has its downsides. With digital adoption comes growing need for digital literacy, and internet and technology access. This exacerbates pre-existing divides and increases isolation of certain groups. The digital divide is intersectional, with gender, income, age and geography jointly determining who has access and literacy to reap the benefits. This has exposed the need for greater civic action around this issue (Bülow, 2020; United Nations, 2020).

### Deepening exhaustion and stress

Romanticising the everyday heroes who gave time and energy to feed, comfort, earn, and care belies the deep exhaustion and stress that many experienced. While grassroots efforts and organisations can and do step into the breach for a few weeks or even months, after 18 months many people were exhausted. Financial worries grew as income opportunities reduced or stopped. Emotional stress was often related to care and leadership responsibilities – additional and heavier responsibilities with less support to meet them. Many took over responsibilities held by others, such as grandparents taking care of children, or parents taking over education. Stress was further exacerbated in contexts with multiple crises, for example conflict and floods in the DRC and the February 2021 coup in Myanmar.

The pandemic led to sharp rises in gender-based and domestic violence, with only marginal policy response (Harvey, 2021). In India, partner organisations of the South Asia Women's Foundation India reported that prolonged periods of being homebound led to more aggressive demands by men, causing huge stress and deep shame.<sup>16</sup>

Leaders had the stress of needing to find new strategies that could not be face-to-face, yet could not always rely on digital substitutes, and at times faced new forms of backlash. In all cases, they had new duties of care to other responders, including creating spaces for stressed volunteers to share their emotions.

## Questions from the Covid spotlight

The pandemic has shone the spotlight on how structural inequalities combine to create and amplify layers of suffering (Berkhout et al., 2020). But it has also revealed the enormous diversity and creativity of local action. It seems likely that the civic system will emerge from the pandemic expanded and revitalised, albeit with the dangers of burnout and exhaustion. We suggest four research priorities that could offer civil society and its allies realistic inspiration.

### Making visible and staying loud

Civic action has become locally even more critical, diversified to meet needs. It has been very vocal in exposing the dire structural shortcomings of lack of social security and growing inequalities, worsened by the economic consequences of the pandemic. This sparked healthcare protests (Sharkawi and Ali, 2020), labour protests (Brecher, n.d.), women's solidarity networks (Alfaro, 2020), and food riots (*New Straits Times*, 2020). As Pleyers (2020) observed, 'The COVID-19 outbreak is a battlefield for alternative futures'. He notes an optimism among progressive intellectuals and movements about the opening of opportunities to build a fairer world which, he cautions, must be tempered by assessing their impacts. Our findings strongly endorse this view.

Question 1. Under what conditions will pandemic-triggered activism have sustained impact on the long-term crises of inequality and injustice? For example, will gender inequality be redressed with bold policy responses given the heightened attention to the under- and unpaid care economy and gender-based violence?

### New social contract

The pandemic has acted like a political pressure cooker, pushing the relationship between citizens and states in different directions. It has created new actors, changed power dynamics and rewritten relationships between the state

and civil society. These relationships remain in a state of flux. If civil society is playing a larger and more prominent role in meeting citizens' immediate needs, people's views and expectations of their governments may change, with expectations shifting to new, non-state actors. Governments could, therefore, become overseers and coordinators, rather than service deliverers.

Question 2. With civil society stepping in to supplement, coordinate or implement the delivery of services, in which ways and contexts and on what issues will this become a longer term change?

Creative disruption or back to before?

Covid-19 has accelerated some trends and innovations. The restriction on movement and economic repercussions have forced civil society to rethink its strategies and modes of action, with opportunities being seized to push through new practices. For example, removal of the intermediary role of health centres has made direct delivery of anti-retroviral drugs possible, a longstanding request by users in South Africa (SOS Project, 2020). Internet reach and data affordability are becoming recognised as basic needs, with initiatives to reduce the cost of access in urban peripheries and install Wi-Fi equipment in rural areas and in indigenous territories.

Question 3. Which civil society innovations – tactics, alliances, priorities – will be sustained and why? What will determine which emergent groups will stay or fade away? With the fault-lines of society so sharply illuminated, how will advocacy priorities be (re)combined with service delivery and with what benefits or limitations?

Digital natives

The pandemic has led to a revaluation of forgotten or undervalued parts of society: local networks, youth, digital connectivity, and alliances/coalitions. There are signs of a potential 'youthquake', building on their generational advantage as 'digital natives'. A likely irreversible shift online has occurred, with implications for repertoires, the politics of organising, and the social contract. This phenomenon not only serves progressive movements, of course, and is also evident in and enabling more reactionary responses.

Question 4. Will the explosion of digital activism prompt a long-term shift in power and leadership? How will the nature of grassroots digital activism resemble or differ from that of educated elites?

As Covid-19 persists, and morphs into a many-faceted post-Covid world, civic groups will continue to evolve. Those who started by meeting basic needs may become more politically active; advocacy organisations that have moved into service delivery may stay there or revert. There are multiple implications for allies and funders. In particular, where power shifts accidentally in the right direction, through Covid-enforced localisation, do not be tempted by a return to business as usual but find ways to nurture the inspiring work that exists.

## NOTES

1. See <https://afsee.atlanticfellows.org/covid19-rapid-response-fund>.
2. See <https://oxfamapps.org/fp2p/category/emergent-agency/>.
3. Agency was defined as 'the capacity of an individual or group to actively and independently choose and to affect change'. Agency can be progressive or negative. It can be in the direct interest of the agent, or proxy agency seeking to help others. It can propose or resist change. That definition was intentionally broad to help look beyond formal politics, aid and civil society organisations to a wider spectrum of grassroots action by individuals and informal groups.
4. 'Build back better' was first coined in the United Nations' Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (United Nations, 2014). Adding 'radical' reflects the widespread understanding that pre-Covid conditions excluded billions of people who deserve more than a return to the former unjust and elite-favouring status quo.
5. See <https://afsee.atlanticfellows.org>.
6. SARS refers here to the infamous Special Anti-Robbery Squad, which constantly abuses Nigerian citizens.
7. This umbrella term includes overlapping, but not identical, terms like protest, resistance and community-based organising.
8. See <https://kibrafooddrive.co.ke/awards.php>.
9. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zE95eYz7OfU>.
10. Discussions in the Women's Rights Organisation cluster.
11. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yhp9GrYD7Ak>.
12. See <https://www.rfp.org/multi-religious-humanitarian-fund/>.
13. See <https://capetowntogether.net>.
14. See <https://frenalacurva.net/>.
15. From discussions in the Peacebuilding cluster.
16. From discussions in the Women's Rights Organisation cluster.

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# 12

## Civil society and (re-) embedding volunteering

*Lucas Meijs and Stephanie Koolen-Maas*

### Introduction

As volunteering is an (indispensable) backbone of non-profit organizations, communities and civil society (e.g. Handy et al., 2000), we globally depend on the generosity of citizens as volunteers. Volunteering is socially constructed and what is (or what is not) volunteering is informed by its context (Handy et al., 2000; Meijs et al., 2003); definitions and valuation of volunteering differ globally (Guidi et al., 2017). Generally speaking, formal volunteers give their unpaid services in an organizational context, whereas informal volunteers give their unpaid service to neighbours, friends and communities, more organically outside an organizational context.<sup>1</sup> Both formal and informal volunteers provide a significant contribution to civil society and the development of healthy and resilient communities (Lough et al., 2018).

Given the importance of volunteer contributions, it is not surprising that scholars, policymakers and practitioners embrace the *embedding of volunteering*. Embedding of volunteering refers to the act of establishing volunteering as a convention or norm in society (Hustinx & Meijs, 2011). Nowadays, volunteering is no longer embedded by volunteer-involving organizations in the third sector alone. Other organizations or institutions also embed volunteering. For instance, governments, commercial corporations, educational institutes and the like stimulate, encourage and facilitate volunteering (e.g. Hustinx & Meijs, 2011; Brudney et al., 2019). This has led to the development of the term “third-party volunteering” (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010).

In these instances, the third party links citizens, employees or students to an organization in which the volunteering is performed (i.e. volunteer-involving organization) (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010). In addition, third parties present new relational expectations in which individuals feel obliged or compelled to volunteer (Compion et al., 2021). Where Haski-Leventhal and colleagues (2010) only connect the concept of third parties to organizations that “control”

the volunteers, Brudney and colleagues (2019) go a step further. They do so by expanding the concept of third-party volunteering to also include concepts such as family volunteering, single volunteering and volunteer tourism. In these types, other organizations instrumentally link volunteer service to other (leisure) activities (hyphenated volunteering).

We see (re-)embedding volunteering as a way to (re-)match volunteer energy to volunteer opportunities. This means that volunteering only happens when the (manipulated) willingness to volunteer as part of the convention or norms of society (or a company, school, religion, etc.) are combined with opportunities, the existence of volunteer opportunities that invite people. Although the size and current importance of third parties might differ between countries, there is a global trend on corporate volunteering, service-learning and National Days of Service (NDS) events.

The use of volunteering by a third party to achieve its own organizational goals is what we refer to as the instrumental use of volunteers and volunteering. Third parties instrumentalize volunteering to achieve their own goals such as learning (service-learning), reputational effects (corporate volunteering), quality time (family volunteering) or dating (single volunteering).

Within the context of these developments, we address the following question: *which tensions emerge when third parties (re-)embed formal volunteering with an instrumental approach?* For instance, tensions could arise by violating the “voluntary”, “free choice” or “unpaid” characteristics of volunteering (Cnaan et al., 1996). Tensions also arise on the value distribution of the instrumentalized volunteering. This applies to students, university and professors in service-learning or in corporate volunteering to employees, companies and non-profit organizations, for example. These questions merit our attention as the implications of the instrumental use and embedding of third-party volunteering remains poorly understood (e.g. Brudney et al., 2019; de Waele & Hustinx, 2019).

In the first section, we shortly describe the changing landscape of third-party volunteering. Subsequently, we deal with the tensions and violations inherent to a third-party instrumental approach. The potential positive and negative outcomes, and how volunteer outcomes are distributed, are the topic of our third section. We conclude with a research agenda on how the (re-)embedding of volunteering by third parties can be reconciled with the goals of volunteers and communities, understanding this might entail exporting these Northern instrumentalization and embedding strategies to the global South.

## Embedding through instrumentalization

### Third-party instrumentalization

New developments in volunteering include the involvement of third parties such as commercial corporations, educational institutes and governmental institutions, but also organizations involved in family and single volunteering, NDS events or volunteer tourism (Brudney et al., 2019; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010; Hustinx & Meijs, 2011). All over the world, macro-level actors try to stimulate and facilitate volunteering by mobilizing volunteers and organizing their activities (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010; Hustinx & Meijs, 2011); not only in the West, but also in Africa (Compion et al., 2021), Asia (McCarthy, 2009), Latin America (Allen & Galiano, 2017) and Russia (Krasnopolskaya et al., 2016). Although most of them can be found globally, most have roots in the global North. It is up for debate if this is a consequence of “colonialism”, isomorphism, or rather more organic due to evolving civil societies and third parties such as multinationals and educational institutes. In the next section, we discuss the consequences of volunteer embedding by governments, corporations, educational institutes and NDS events.

### Governments as a third party

Obviously, most governments appeal to our sense of good citizenship as part of a programme or a political agenda (e.g. Brudney & Williamson, 2000; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010). In that sense, volunteer work has become a vehicle to activate various excluded groups (Hustinx & Meijs, 2011). Kameråde and Paine (2014) show that governmental volunteering programmes in the UK are aimed at forming a direct pathway into employment and combat social exclusion of certain target groups.

In addition, governments can embrace workfare volunteering, entailing activation practices in which welfare recipients engage in volunteering to increase their employability (de Waele & Hustinx, 2019). Some governments aim at actively changing the behaviour of citizens. In a Canadian example, Ilcan and Basok (2004) illustrate how governmental interventions steer civil society organizations towards a double responsibility: providing social services and simultaneously training community members to assume their moral duties. Another example is government using volunteering as a means to promote citizenship, particularly among young people (Holmes, 2009). Consequently, citizenship increasingly is seen as coming with responsibilities and duties, such as service to one’s local community (Morrison, 2018).

### Corporations as third parties

Also, companies support employee civic engagement as part of their corporate social responsibility and encourage or facilitate their employees to devote time and effort as volunteers (Lee, 2011) in the employee's personal time or as part of the corporation's initiative. Corporations can embrace corporate volunteering for various reasons related to moral obligations or instrumental gains (van Cranenburgh & Arenas, 2014).

First, corporations can have their own instrumental objectives for corporate volunteering programmes (van Cranenburgh & Arenas, 2014). For instance, to enhance hard and soft workplace skills and as teambuilding activities (Shantz & Dempsey-Brench, 2021); to increase employee attitudes and outcomes (e.g. Paco & Nave, 2013); or improve the reputation of the corporation (Allen, 2003). Meanwhile, corporate volunteering programmes develop human and social capital, and promote social networks and trust (Pajo & Lee, 2011).

Second, corporations can feel morally obliged to give back to society, feeling that corporate volunteering is the right thing to do (Roza, 2016; van Cranenburgh & Arenas, 2014). This is evident, as even in times of crisis, corporations take up their moral duty to support civil society. During the global Covid-19 crisis, corporations organized and adapted corporate volunteering programmes for their employees. For instance, Santander – active in South America among other countries – organized several new social initiatives covering new needs as a result of the pandemic. Examples include making face masks for healthcare workers and customers, and a telephone “befriending” service for the elderly living alone or in care homes or hospitals (Santander, 2021).

Although corporate volunteering is perhaps already seen as “business as usual” in multinational companies (Schlenkhoff-Hus, 2017), Allen and Galiano (2017) conclude that corporate volunteering in Africa, the Arab nations, and developing Asia is still in its infancy, despite solid efforts by both global companies and companies headquartered in those regions. Although “Latin-America has a vibrant, growing, well-documented and impactful practice of corporate volunteering” (Allen & Galiano, 2017, p. 107), corporate volunteering was in 2014 not a common practice in Colombia (Pastrana & Sriramesh, 2014). As the corporate benefits are often not recognized, corporate volunteering is not practised for its instrumental value in local companies.

### Educational institutes as third parties

Educational institutions often send their students on volunteer projects in their curriculum – known as community- or service-learning (credit bearing) (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). These volunteer projects are usually directed at student improvement rather than the beneficiaries (Eby, 1998). The volunteer service contributes to the students' academic, civic and personal learning objectives, as it allows students to apply theoretical course material in practice for local communities (Redman & Clark, 2002). Furthermore, students receive practical experience and the opportunity to boost their resumes (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000).

### Other third parties: National Days of Service

NDS events are nationwide volunteering events in which individuals and groups support non-profit organizations by contributing their time to one-day service projects (Maas et al., 2021). NDS events are a global phenomenon and are organized by a central organization to create an ethic of volunteering (Maas et al., 2021). These events aim to achieve the more intangible goals of social cohesion and promote active or good citizenship, serving an instrumental goal to embed volunteering in society.

## **Emerging tensions within third-party volunteer institutionalization**

Third parties embed volunteering by means of volunteer instrumentalization. As they pursue their own organizational goals this might create tensions. First, the instrumental approach influences fundamental volunteer choices. For instance, instrumentalization can increase mandatory pressure to coerce individuals to volunteer; it reduces autonomy in volunteer choices; and decreases the amount of unpaid voluntary work.

### Increasing mandatory pressures: diminishing the free choice of volunteering

Third-party volunteering can apply mandatory pressures to have their constituency serve as volunteers. For instance, de Waele and Hustinx (2019) find that the “voluntary” property of volunteering is strongly violated in workfare volunteering as non-participation means losing welfare benefits (Kampen & Tonkens, 2019a). When service-learning is part of the curriculum, students

are forced into volunteering to earn their study credits (Dienhart et al., 2016); when corporations engage in corporate volunteering, corporations must make a conscious choice between voluntary participation or mandatory pressures.

In addition to mandatory pressures, third-party volunteering can also increase normative pressures (Hustinx & Meijs, 2011). Corporations and educational institutes can opt to activate their employees or students by setting certain expectations, norms, values and standards compelling individuals to conform to group pressure out of a need for approval and acceptance (Rodell & Lynch, 2016). Normative pressure is then set in a societal context where individuals who volunteer are perceived as “good” and “decent”; those who don’t can feel criticized by others who do volunteer (Hustinx & Meijs, 2011). This seems a fundamental issue for volunteering. Nonetheless, the distinction between voluntary or involuntary participation is in practice not as clear (see Cnaan et al., 1996). For instance, a membership organization can have a schedule for members to perform certain volunteer tasks. The argument is that joining the organization is voluntary (see Hustinx & Meijs, 2011). Another example is a mandatory teambuilding activity in a corporation where the choice to participate may not be an actual choice.

#### Limiting autonomy

Instrumentalization of volunteering by third parties also decreases volunteer autonomy as the type of volunteer work cannot always be chosen by the volunteer. For instance, workfare volunteering should enhance aspects such as skills, work attitudes, knowledge and networks (de Waele & Hustinx, 2019). The same applies to educate students and employees through corporate volunteering and service-learning. Yet not every volunteer activity will yield these results. For instance, when the aim is to enhance teamwork through volunteering, an individual volunteering activity is not suitable to obtain this instrumental goal. The third party will oftentimes determine the type of volunteer work, the job and the volunteer-involving organization. This is especially true in workfare volunteering, employer-led corporate volunteering programmes and in service-learning tied to the curriculum.

#### Stretching volunteering to “paid” labour

The Anglo-Saxon sensemaking of the word “volunteering” is that it is, in fact, unpaid labour (Dekker, 2019). Yet, the instrumentalization of volunteering in the third-party context, challenges the “unpaid” nature of volunteering. Corporate volunteering, for instance, is often done during paid hours (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010). In addition, the volunteers in workfare volun-



teering are – indirectly – paid as the volunteer work enables the welfare recipients to keep their welfare benefits (Kampen & Tonkens, 2019a). Likewise, in service-learning, students receive study credits for their volunteer work. This might change the motivation of the volunteer into a more extrinsic direction. It could imply that the volunteer will cease volunteering at the moment the job has been found, the credits have been given, the company terminates the programme or at the end of the NDS event.

## Who benefits?

Instrumentalization of volunteering by third parties would ideally result in a win–win–win for civil society, the third party and the volunteer. We argue that equal distribution of the wins is seldom achieved due to the mandatory character, limited autonomy and the change of motivation (being “paid”).

“Voluntary dedication is an important factor in motivating people to participate in public life, and when you make something mandatory, you lose or undermine the feeling” (Sobus, 1995, p. 153). Thus, coercing volunteer participation can be counterproductive and ineffective (Kampen & Tonkens, 2019a). Furthermore, mandatory programmes will make volunteers feel unhappy, controlled and dependent, decreasing intrinsic motivation to volunteer (Kampen & Tonkens, 2019b). The expectation to actively participate in volunteering activities often puts a mental strain on volunteers. Certainly, mandated volunteers might not always have the time and capacity to fulfil the expectation (Zhang et al., 2020; Sundeen et al., 2007). Thus, those volunteers who participate out of free will – and altruistic motivations – are more committed and effective than those who are obliged to (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2008). Furthermore, the volunteer is not allowed to opt out. Thus, when they do not see the possibility of participating actively, they feel pressured (Sheel & Vohra, 2015), which makes one unhappy (Kampen & Tonkens, 2019a), and negatively affects mental health. Perhaps, even more importantly when volunteers are forced, they not only will not learn anything from the experience, but they could bring harm to the beneficiaries (Chan et al., 2020).

In the case of service-learning, educational institutions often send their students to volunteer in order to improve the students rather than the community or beneficiaries (Eby, 1998). Negative consequences can then arise for both students and beneficiaries, especially in at-risk communities (Eby, 1998). Similar situations may arise for welfare benefit citizens who often are a vulnerable target group themselves (de Waele & Hustinx, 2019). Often stu-

dents or employees are not made aware beforehand of the cross-cultural and cross-social differences in volunteer contexts, and confrontations with such social gaps might be experienced as shocking – causing emotional distress (Eby, 1998; Tyron & Stoecker, 2008; Wilson, 2000).

In corporate volunteering, many employees feel volunteering adds an extra task to their regular job, causing perceived job overload, which, in turn, negatively affects their overall well-being (Zhang et al., 2020). In addition, volunteer instrumentalization could result in low quality of volunteer work for the volunteer-involving organization or beneficiary. When other goals are at play – such as the development of certain skills or knowledge – the volunteer might not yet be sufficiently qualified to do the assigned work. This will produce a low-quality result (Rodell & Lynch, 2016; Samuel et al., 2016).

The lack of autonomy in choosing the volunteer activity or organization can also demotivate volunteers. For many volunteers, volunteering should be an enjoyable task where one can connect with the beneficiaries and assert his or her values. So, when the forced upon cause is not attractive to the volunteer, the volunteer will not be inclined to successfully fulfil the task (Lorenz et al., 2011; Tyron & Stoecker, 2008).

Lastly, diminishing the altruistic individual motivations to volunteer also has consequences. Mostly, it can decrease the chance to participate in volunteering in the future (Chan et al., 2019; Kim & Morgül, 2017; Sobus, 1995). Especially being forced to volunteer works counterproductive to the intrinsic motivation to volunteer in the future. Thus, while instrumentalization might increase volunteer energy in the short run, it might limit volunteer energy in the long run.

## Conclusion

The effect of third-party instrumentalization on volunteering is complex. We also argue that it contests the inherent pure nature of volunteering (being voluntary, unpaid and non-remunerated). At the same time, third-party involvement is becoming a global way of (re-)embedding volunteering. That is to say, re-embedding in countries with a volunteer tradition (Hustinx & Meijs, 2011) and embedding in countries with a developing volunteer tradition (Compion et al., 2011; Krasnopolskaya et al., 2016).

The assumed positive aspect of third parties might be that they introduce individuals to volunteering or encourage individuals to volunteer more (in

the short term). The potential negative effect is that many of these instrumental embedding strategies might fundamentally change the perception of volunteering. An interesting dilemma is that these (re-)embedding strategies are invented in the West and seem to be exported to other environments with different volunteer and civil society traditions.

A first research question is what drives this exportation? Is this mainly due, for example, to multinational companies and operating universities that force their corporate volunteering and service-learning upon other environments? Or is this much more driven by local copying behaviour based upon ideas of modernity, professionalism or effectiveness?

A second research topic is to examine under which conditions this exportation of the instrumental approach taken by third parties is effective? Does it actually embed volunteering in countries in which formal volunteering is limited or does it destroy local practices? This opens up a more comparative agenda on topics like service-learning and corporate volunteering that not only focuses on the form (which is Western dominated) but also on the “why” of this involvement, which might differ.

A third research agenda, again also in a comparative aspect, could focus on the potential negative aspects of third-party involvement. Fundamentally the question should be addressed how voluntary, autonomous and intrinsic motivation (in third-party volunteering) are judged in different cultures and civil societies. The instrumental third-party approach is becoming globally active, but we have to examine if it destroys more than it brings in certain communities – and how we can circumvent any negative consequences.

A fourth research topic could focus on the division of the created value between third-party, volunteer and community. Third parties should highlight the impact, relevance and importance of the volunteering not only to themselves but also to volunteers, beneficiaries or communities.

A fifth research item looks at a more structural perspective. The third-party involvement adds a layer to the volunteer–community or volunteer–beneficiary relation. The main consequence of this extra layer might be that the distance between the volunteer and the recipient might become larger, more hierarchical and more transactional. Again, this might play out differently across the globe.

## NOTE

1. In this chapter, we limit ourselves to formal volunteering. Thus, whenever we use the term “volunteering”, we refer to formal volunteering taking place within an organizational context.

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# 13

## The value of diasporic cross-border philanthropy and voluntourism

*Philine S.M. van Overbeeke and Malika Ouacha*

### Introduction

The concept of the “global civil society” is now fairly commonplace – within academia, in the mass media, and amongst a broader public (Taylor, 2002). Waterman (1996) remarked that the provenance of the term is not well grounded and that “global civil society” has not yet passed “through the forge of theoretical clarification or the sieve of public debate” (p. 170). When employed, the term has generally served as a kind of catchall for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or social movements, of all shapes and sizes, operating in the international realm. In addition, what is required to interpret global civil society further, is what existing approaches have failed to offer: a global approach for, and to, studying a worldwide phenomenon. An approach that – more than has hitherto been the case – embraces interpretative and contextual research methods to probe people’s subjective experiences, perceptions, and feelings. First and foremost, this requires moving beyond state-centric perspectives to view the domain of global civil society as a complex and highly dynamic multiorganizational field in which the intrinsic meaning of what is experienced by actors within this field forms a central part of analysis. This multiorganizational field encompasses both those organizations that tend to work within the international NGO and nation state system and are involved in complex multilateralism, and those movements – anti-neoliberal and anticorporate alike – committed to street protest and other forms of direct action (Taylor, 2002).

One of the forms of direct action committed in the global civil field is volunteering. Volunteering means any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization. This definition does not preclude volunteers from benefiting from their work. Whether these benefits can include material rewards is open for debate (Wilson, 2000), and immaterial

rewards, for both the giving and receiving end of volunteering. In this chapter, we will specifically be focusing on the latter, combined with the concept of tourism that goes hand-in-hand through the concept of voluntourism (Bakker & Lamoureux, 2008).

In between her two master's degrees, Malika decided to spend a year abroad. While seeking to better understand her ethnic Moroccan roots, she decided to combine her search with her desire to mean something for this world. Malika moved to Morocco and spent her spare time teaching English and French in an orphanage. Besides her own luggage, Malika also brought 50 boxes filled with pens, pencils, papers sorts, schoolbooks, and everything else a child may possibly need when attending primary school. Along with these boxes, there were 50 more filled with empty schoolbags, socks and shoes of all sizes, small hats, and winter coats. As Malika shared her planned adventure to her country of origin with her social media contacts, she added that she didn't only want to go and take something from the country. She also wanted to give something in return. Returning to Morocco on an annual basis for several years in a row, not only resulted in a solid network within the country's human aid organizations, but it also led Malika to build a data set from which she gained and created many professional possibilities. One of those being her current PhD project.

Malika is not the typical "white savior" you might think of when reading about volunteer tourism. Indeed, "the voluntourist who typically features in popular and academic articles is a young, white, single woman from the Global North who is either in college or recently graduated from college" (Germann Molz, 2016, p. 806). This is not to say that only young, white women volunteer; in fact, people of all genders, ages, and ethnicities do; however, the stories described in most academic articles are more likely to be similar to that of Philine:

Philine is a white, university-educated, woman in her thirties who grew up in a well-off family. When she was 17 years old, freshly graduated with her VWO (university preparatory education) diploma, she was not quite sure about the next steps in her life, so she decided to do a gap year. She worked in hospitality and sales for a few months while saving up and planning a three-month trip to Southeast Asia. This being her first intercontinental travel, Philine consulted a booking agency to explore their options. A few minutes into the conversation, the option to volunteer in Thailand came up and got her very excited. After some consideration, she decided on a six-week program with Activity International for which she paid around 1200 Euros. After two "cultural" weeks, a trekking week and a beach week, it was time to volunteer for two weeks. Philine was quite confused and annoyed at the time: She initially signed up to help with the construction of clay houses but was not allowed to do this as it was "a man's job." Accordingly, she went with her second choice, volunteering with young children at an orphanage. She soon learned that the "orphans" were not there, because they were with their parents in the mountains. She was so confused – how do orphans have parents? The group ended up renovating the "orphanage"; they spent two weeks painting walls, gardening, and



sanding and painting school benches. Plenty of pictures were taken and shared on social media and the volunteer activity was proudly presented on Philine's CV for several years after.

In this chapter we explore our current knowledge about experiences like Philine's while we also wonder: Do we need to ask the same questions when diaspora like Malika participate in volunteer tourism? And if we do, do we expect different answers? Are there any questions that have not been explored for traditional voluntourists that might be necessary to ask from this diaspora perspective? And would those questions also need to be explored for traditional volunteer tourists? Lastly, does giving money create a different set of questions than giving time cross-border?

## **Volunteer tourism: the traditional questions**

The most commonly used definition for volunteer tourism is Wearing's (2001) original: "people who for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve the aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment" (p. 1). However, since volunteerism can take many shapes and forms, ranging from so-called "orphanage volunteering" to assisting in ecological projects, we stick to a more neutral and broad description similar to that of Guttentag (2009): Voluntourism describes the act of individuals participating in volunteering while traveling.

To capture the diversity and complexity in the field, Kinsbergen and colleagues created a taxonomy of international volunteering providers (Kinsbergen et al., 2021), which in our view distinguishes volunteer tourism from other types of international volunteering clearly. In the taxonomy, distinctions are made on two dimensions, orientation (tourism vs development) and volunteer strategy (primary or secondary), resulting in four types of international volunteering.

First, development-oriented providers with international volunteering as a primary strategy are nonprofit organizations that provide an international volunteer with goals connected to the host communities' interests. They see volunteering as both a goal itself and as a means to reach development goals and are more dependent (financially) on the demand for their services. Second, development-oriented providers with international volunteering as a secondary strategy are nonprofit organizations that provide international volunteering on the side. Their goals also align with the host community needs;

however, they only see volunteering as a means to achieve development goals and they are less dependent on the market. Third, tourism-oriented providers with international volunteering as a primary strategy are the commercial international volunteering organizations. They focus on the goals and interests on the travelers, see volunteering as a goal itself, and are quite dependent on the demand for their service. Fourth are the commercial tourist companies that also offer options to volunteer; they also go by the preferences of the travelers and see volunteering as a goal in itself; however, they are fairly independent from the trends in volunteering (Kinsbergen et al., 2021). Despite the differences, most of these organizations work with models of shared volunteer management (Brudney et al., 2019), which offer the advantage of higher volunteer inclusion (van Overbeeke et al., 2022).

Following this taxonomy, international volunteering providers and participants with an orientation that is tourism-based are considered volunteer tourists or voluntourists. Development-oriented organizations and volunteers, such as UN Volunteers, are not considered as volunteer tourists, as their main objective is volunteering and development, not leisure (United Nations Volunteers, 2015).

Although the first notions of voluntourism already stem from the early 1900s, there has been an explosive rise in the market in recent decades due to growth in opportunities for both volunteering and international tourism (Wearing, 2004; Callanan & Thomas, 2005). As definitions differ, it is difficult to calculate the size of the market. However, McGehee (2014) estimates that close to 1.5 billion dollars is being spent by about 10 million volunteer tourists every year.<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that this billion-dollar market has been highly commercialized over the years, and much of this money stays in the hands of large for-profit third-party sending organizations (Guttentag, 2009).

With the market for voluntourism growing, so has academic interest. The topic has been researched widely over past years (e.g., Dolezal & Miezelyte, 2020). Research on voluntourism was overwhelmingly positive in the early 2000s, mostly focusing on the voluntourists – their motivations, benefits and positive impact. Scholars over the years have pointed at, for example, the work achieved by the volunteer tourists, the revenue created by sending organizations, the intercultural experiences between volunteers and host communities, and the personal growth of the volunteer (see Wearing & McGehee, 2013 for an elaborate review). Overall, this positive value created through voluntourism seems to mostly benefit the volunteer tourists themselves.

More recently, scholars have started publishing more critical research on the phenomenon as the focus is shifting from the value for the voluntourists themselves toward the other players in the field, the host communities. While some researchers find positive values for host communities as well, Guttentag's (2009) review of the literature on volunteer tourism highlights several ways in which negative value may be created. This review informed many others on the possible negative effects of volunteer tourism (e.g., Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Dolezal & Miezelyte, 2020; Jakubiak, 2020). In this section, we propose how these negative values might be different when the volunteer tourism is performed by diaspora rather than traditional voluntourists.<sup>2</sup>

### Local community involvement

Guttentag (2009) first points at the disregard of the local community's involvement and wishes. His review shows the focus of voluntourism organizations on the motivations, desires, and needs of the voluntourist over that of the local community. Arguments for this focus stem from wanting to keep voluntourists involved, possibly because otherwise no "development" will happen or because of a profit mindset. The views of the Global North are seen as superior to those of the Global South; this show of paternalism and white saviorism is why there is usually a lack of consultation with the local community when it comes to "solutions" to "problems": what the sending organization thinks is good for the local community, but the latter does not experience in the same way.

However, diasporic volunteer tourists who have roots in the country they visit might be able to create a closer connection to the local community. Perhaps they organize their voluntourism in a different way, for example by using their personal connections instead of a big organization to find a project to voluntour at. Similarly, it would be interesting to explore in which ways diasporic volunteer tourists research the local community and the project before traveling. Is different value created when the organization and pre-research is performed differently?

### Knowledge and skills

Guttentag (2009) also critiques volunteer tourism because voluntourists often seem to have a sense of superiority when it comes to knowledge and skills. Almost no skills are required to participate in a voluntourism activity. While some would say that small things can make a difference, it is questioned by several authors what actual value is created by voluntourists without the necessary skills, language, and cultural knowledge (Simpson, 2004; Callanan &

Thomas, 2005). Some claim negative value is created because of this, with the voluntourist even hindering work progress and leaving unsatisfactory work.

While we do not want to make the claim that diasporic volunteer tourists might have a different skillset from the average volunteer tourist, having their roots in the travel destination might have an influence on the language and cultural knowledge this specific group of voluntourists possess. It would be interesting to find out if a different kind of value is created when volunteer tourists understand the culture and language better.

#### Labor demand and dependency

Guttentag's (2009) third point of critique is that volunteer tourism can result in "a decreased labour demand and promotion of dependency" (p. 544). Several researchers find that financial value for local communities can be low and limited. More strikingly, many jobs performed by (unskilled) voluntourists could be performed by (paid) locals instead. Guttentag claims that volunteer tourism may even have a negative impact on local communities by establishing dependency on the organizations providing it (2009).

Translating such critique to the different value of diaspora leads to questioning the long-term vision diasporic voluntourists may have or lack. As the aim to help their country of origin often comes from the shared ambition and therefore value with their parents, or the first migrant voluntourists. However, de Haas (2005) explains that the latter did so with a possible scenario of going back and leaving the country to where one is migrated. Ouacha argues that the act is done from a present desire; namely, providing their country of origin with support through local contexts (Ouacha, 2021). Immigrant communities in many different parts of the world have formed home-town associations of various kinds over the last two centuries. But today we are seeing a very specific type of home-town association, one directly concerned with socioeconomic development in its communities of origin and increasingly engaging both governmental and civic entities in sending and receiving countries in these projects. These home-town associations are becoming micro-level building blocks of global civil society (Saassen, 2002, p. 226).

#### Reinforced stereotyping and poverty rationalization

Guttentag (2009) also recognizes that volunteer tourism can result in reinforced stereotyping and the rationalization of poverty, mostly due to a lack of intercultural experiences. While many researchers express the positive value of the cultural exchange between the voluntourist and the local community, these

research results stem from the personal statements of the volunteer tourists themselves – not the local community members. Multiple researchers, such as Lockstone-Binney and Ong (2021), have even found that these statements might have been made to rationalize the cost of the trip, or because they thought them to be socially desirable (Ver Beek, 2006; Brown, 2005). More importantly, some scholars (e.g., Simpson, 2004; McGloin & Georgeou, 2016; Swan, 2012; Jakubiak & Smagorinsky, 2016) show that volunteer tourism can even increase othering (Simpson, 2004; Raymond & Hall, 2008), often started by messages of the sending organization itself. Voluntourists often make remarks along the lines of “they have so little, but they are so happy” which in cases results in poverty being romanticized by the volunteer tourists (Simpson, 2004).

Since a lack of intercultural experience is the root for stereotyping and poverty rationalization (Guttentag, 2009), diasporic volunteer tourist could again create a different type of value here. It would be valuable to research whether their connection to the local culture and similarities to the people living in it could possibly limit othering.

#### Instigation of cultural changes

Another way in which volunteer tourism can cause negative value creation according to Guttentag (2009) is the instigation of cultural changes in local community. This is deeply rooted in, for example, mission trips, where change is a primary goal. However, it can also happen unconsciously, when the local communities take note of how the affluent, white volunteer tourists act, what they eat, and how they dress. Or even how the diasporic voluntour eats and dresses. According to Piper, “remittances” done by diaspora should be viewed from a political viewpoint, as it shifts the lens from the victimization of the receiving party by structural factors to give weight to the aspect of their (actual and potential) agency via political activism within the transnational sphere. In other words, remittances in the political context can be defined as

the activities, actions, and ideas aimed at the democratization of the migration process (ranging from pre- to post-migration) via political mobilization in the form of collective organizations operating in the transnational sphere. These ideas and political practices are embedded in the social contexts of origin and destination countries’ structural and agential histories, shaped by the migration experience and characterized by multiple directions of flow. (Piper, 2009, p. 238)

To summarize, we believe that future research should focus more on the behavior of diasporic volunteer tourists when they are abroad specifically compared to non-diasporic volunteer tourists. Cheung Judge (2016) shows a case where

it is at times easier for the former to adjust to local customs compared to the latter; for example, to eat local meals (because they are used to eating this way at home) and even dress similarly. However, in that case, from the viewpoint of the local community, these voluntourists were still seen as “Westerners” in some cases. It is in this specific comparison where our research agenda found its main existence.

## **Volunteer tourism value: new questions for diasporic voluntourism**

In the previous section we discussed literature on volunteer tourism and proposed to specifically research the questions asked about traditional volunteer tourist for diasporic volunteer tourists. In this section we focus on specific questions that should be explored for diasporic voluntourism.

### Motivations

As briefly explained, diasporic voluntourists come forth from the act of financial support done by pioneer migrants in the West. Such an act is also known as providing remittances. Resources, such as money and clothes, sent back to families from migrant-sending communities increase the feeling of relative deprivation among non-migrants. This subsequently increases aspirations to migrate to achieve upward socioeconomic mobility (de Haas, 2005; Quinn, 2006). Besides this, remittances were also provided to finance the migration of other family and community members (van Dalen et al., 2005) or to help improve their livelihoods in the country of origin.

Since the early 2000s, the focus of diasporic aid has expanded, which has resulted in the act of remittances to help improve the livelihoods of others, besides family and community members in the countries of origin. These immigrants and first generations widely distributed “zakat,” Islamic faith-based giving, to extended family members, “neighbors,” and people in need in the towns and villages of the “homeland.” This is similar to the earlier mentioned act of remittances. Much of zakat finances are therefore subsumed under general “remittances” (May, 2019, p. 8). However, the philanthropical acts we are pointing to are no longer committed by pioneer migrants, but by the diaspora that found its existence in the meantime, meaning second- and third-generation migrants who are born and raised in (an often) Western context, before their philanthropy commences in their country of origin. Though the migrants have been settled in Europe for more than four decades, the same act of voluntourism

seems to have been taken over by their descendants. As such, the act of giving and volunteering differs in the way diaspora does it compared to original migrants. Therefore, we are automatically challenged to raise questions such as: Why do diaspora really voluntour? Why do they decide to recreate another type of support than the way their forebears did? What could their motivations be (connecting to heritage, faith-based)? And what does that mean for the value they create?

#### Acceptance by local community

Coming from a completely different geographical context, according to Sadiqi (2013), acceptance by local communities could be a challenge that diasporic voluntourists may not have to deal with. She refers to local, indigenous, communities where language is the leading tool to build the essential bridge. El Aissati (2001) refers to language in Morocco's indigenous Amazigh societies as the base of their identity. El Aissati states that "speaking the Amazigh language is interpretable as holding the Amazigh identity" (2001, p. 59). He addresses Fishman who describes language as "a recorder of paternity and an expresser of patrimony" (p. 27).

Referring to the ethnic indigenous identity of diasporic voluntourists, and the lack of including this specific identity by countries' own civil society (see Sadiqi, 2013), leads to the following questions we aim to further investigate: Could it be that diaspora are differently accepted by local communities? Do they stay longer? Are they more involved? What does that mean for created value?

#### Diaspora in "third" countries

Similarities to beneficiaries of volunteering are usually seen as positive in terms of value creation (Metz et al., 2017). Another point of interest for future research is that of diaspora participating in volunteer tourism in a country similar to that of their heritage (e.g., same continent), yet not exactly it; for example, Chinese citizens voluntouring in Thailand or black British students traveling to Zimbabwe to volunteer. Will this enhance voluntourism value, or could it create similar negative values as in traditional volunteer tourism?

Li (2016) points out multiple issues in South–South voluntouring (China–Thailand), such as the commodification of vulnerable children, the focus on volunteer wishes over community needs, and being unqualified/unskilled to perform volunteer jobs. Cheung Judge (2016) shows complex dynamics with young black UK students traveling to Zimbabwe to voluntour. On the

one hand, they felt the benefits of “blending in” and feeling connected to the country, while, on the other hand, they believed that this had negative effects on their experience (e.g., when the town kids only ran up and hugged the white kids in the group).

Future research should focus on what aspect creates the positive value when it comes to diasporic voluntourists. Is it simply the similarities (skin color), value systems (cultural, religious) or perhaps based on certain skills (language)? This could, in turn, also open up the discourse to extra questions to be asked about traditional volunteer tourists.

### **Value: what changes when giving money instead of time**

The previous sections described cross-border philanthropy in terms of giving time. When we consider the possible differences in giving time in the context of regular voluntourism, it also opens up the discussion on giving money. Cross-border giving can occur when an individual or corporation donates to an entity in another jurisdiction (“direct philanthropy”) and when a domestic entity operates in another jurisdiction or a foreign entity operates domestically (“indirect philanthropy”) (OECD, 2020, p. 108). Though such forms of giving can provide receiving ends with support (e.g., materialistic, in the form of financial support), similar to volunteer tourism it can create negative value. For example, the overrepresentation of the donors’ interests and the lack of professional teams with appropriate knowledge and skills to address certain social and cultural issues (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2019). In line with earlier topics, we open up the discussion toward cross-border giving by second- and third-generation migrants. Are there differences in value creation when one gives time instead of money or financial recourses (like they are taught to do)?

Throughout the twentieth century, literature has shown that forms of cross-border giving were either established by colonial forces themselves, or by the diaspora that found its existence within the migration from the colonies to the country of the colonizer (May, 2019). It is important to mention that, in this chapter, we make no difference between diaspora groups with or without a colonial past. Money sent back to families from migrant-sending communities increased the feeling of relative deprivation among non-migrants. This subsequently increases aspirations to migrate as a way to achieve upward socioeconomic mobility (de Haas, 2005; Quinn, 2006). However, further debate has led us to assume that diasporic volunteered inspired aspirations to



live where rights are respected can lead to agitation for such similarity back home. In addition, we believe that taking this along in a future research agenda would definitely be fair. Besides the motivational effect mentioned earlier, remittances may also be directly used to finance the migration of other family and community members (van Dalen et al., 2005) or to help improve their livelihoods in the country of origin. Over the last two decades, this motivational effect has expanded, which has resulted in the act of remittances to help improve the livelihoods of others, besides family and community members, in the countries of origin.

We have noticed that such philanthropic acts are not only driven by personal cultural heritage, but also by personal motives. Ouacha (2021) argues that personal motives based on faith, spirituality, and religion differ from societal and political contexts. In reflecting back, the link to the voluntourists who don't share such personal motives, we are automatically drawn to raising questions such as: What difference in value creation does it make if money is given instead of time by regular voluntourists? How would this be the case (for both the giving and receiving end) if diasporic voluntourists give time instead of financial resources? And what if both voluntourists (the diasporic and the non-diasporic) would do that; would this as a whole make a difference? As demonstrated before, we are convinced that significant difference can be made when diasporic backgrounds are found in the giving party. However, we do not demonstrate that this could mean the end of the negative value impact of non-diasporic voluntourism, as we assume that there is a down-side to everything. How that specially relates to our comparison requires further research.

## Going forward

In this chapter, we have described the value of volunteer tourism from the traditional volunteer tourist (Philine) perspective and aim to open the discourse toward a new research agenda on value creation through volunteer tourism from a different perspective – that of diaspora (Malika). Volunteer tourism has been a widely researched topic for decades and only recently have the dark sides of the phenomenon been discussed more in-depth in academic and popular literature. The recent and ongoing Covid-19 crisis seems like a natural juncture to change the discourse and practices around volunteer tourism and its positive and negative value creation. We argue that volunteers, organizations, and researchers alike should grab this opportunity to move away from

volunteer tourism practices that are creating negative value and toward those that generate positive value for all parties involved.

We propose three pathways of research on the further examination of value creation amongst traditional voluntourists and diasporic voluntourists. As stated earlier, we believe that both similarities and differences should be recognized. First, we think it is important to examine whether the value creation by traditional volunteer tourists is similar or different than for diasporic volunteer tourists. This should be researched throughout the process of volunteer tourism: the preparations phase, the trip itself, the reflection afterwards. Following two groups of volunteer tourists in their process of voluntouring could create far more interesting and practical results than the constant comparison from several different geographical contexts, which is often done in general academic work.

Second, we argue for the importance of exploring possible new values created by diasporic volunteer tourists and considering whether these values might apply to traditional volunteer tourists as well. Such explorations are important to shift the debate from focusing on traditional volunteer tourists toward those in the diaspora. Asking new questions, connected to the roots of the volunteer tourist, can open a new debate on possible positive and negative values of volunteer tourism. The positive values can then be extrapolated to best practices for both traditional and diasporic voluntourists.

And finally, as a third pathway for further research, we argue for the importance of studying the possible differences in values when replacing giving time with giving money (cross-border). Such an examination of differences in value would lead to increasing knowledge on cross-border giving of time and money and how to enhance value in the future. This pathway for further research is best studied in communities, both in the diasporic context in the West and those in the country of origin in which the diaspora performs their voluntouring. It is in these communities that we could also further research how diasporic voluntourists may increase value. The literature cited in our chapter, focusing on voluntourism, often demonstrates the value of the voluntourists alone, and leaves out that of the community, both the one it is from (in a Western context) and the one it is serving. In most cases of diasporic voluntourists, the voluntourists belong to both. Overall, the main important question that covers all the questions above, is: What does it mean if voluntourism is done by a voluntourist who is from the community it is serving, both the one in the country of origin and the country of residence, in terms of value created for all stakeholders?

## NOTES

1. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on these numbers in 2020; a big player (Projects Abroad) mentioned that numbers went down by 98 percent in April 2020 (Tomazos & Murdy, 2020).
2. We realize that not all diaspora have a close relation with the country in question; this will be discussed in the third section of this chapter.

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# 14

## New and fluid forms of organizing volunteering

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Newly capable groups are assembling, and they are working without the managerial imperative and outside the previous strictures that bounded their effectiveness. These changes will transform the world everywhere groups of people come together to accomplish something, which is to say everywhere.  
(Shirky, 2008, p. 26)

### Introduction

To organization theorists, it is far from new that more 'fluid' modes of organizing (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010) are emerging in the shape of open networks with blurry boundaries of membership and a lack of formally delegated authority. This trend has also been observed in civil society research, within which the social movement literature has, to some degree, engaged with such ways of organizing (i.e. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). However, fluid organizational forms are not limited to the political aims of social movements, but also manifest themselves in more mundane and less contentious activities, such as volunteering, understood as time 'given freely to benefit another person, group or cause' (Wilson, 2000, p. 215). I focus on the latter, aiming to relate these profound changes in our way of engaging in the world to the normative ideals of, and for, civil society. I do this against the backdrop of concerns raised about the impacts of fluid forms of organizing for the transformative potential of, and democratic governance in, civil society (e.g. Christensen & Strømnes, 2010; Stolle & Hooghe, 2005).

The volunteering literature does not properly equip us to answer these questions, because it rarely studies these fluid formats for engagement *as* collectives. Rather, the volunteering literature has tended to focus on the individual and the formal organization as the level of analysis. In short, the literature has not capitalized sufficiently on the advancements which organization theory has made in conceptualizing and understanding fluidly organized collectives. Therefore, this study asks: *how can organization theory complement our*

*understanding of fluidly organized volunteering from the stance of processual ontology?* A processual ontology is applied to grasp the processes with which organizational stabilization and change emerge in the flux of interrelating (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Studying this interrelating enables us to see the organizing arrangements, which at first glance can appear particularly intangible in fluidly organized volunteering because of the fuzzy boundaries and the unclear delegation of authority.

I begin the chapter by presenting the orientations with which new ways of volunteering have been addressed in the volunteering literature. Second, I suggest how we might address the subject with different sensitivities if we apply a relational ontology. Next, I introduce the lens of ‘organizationality’ (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015), which can help us understand how the fluid is also ordered, and I exemplify how the civil society debate can benefit from this. Following this, I suggest paths for future research and link these to the concerns raised about the implications of fluidly organized volunteering for the transformative potential of, and the democratic governance in, civil society. And lastly, I conclude that a processual ontology and the lens of organizationality not only enables us to debate the raised concerns, but also invites us to raise questions about the implications different from those addressed in the current civil society literature.

## **Changes in voluntary engagement**

Prior research has brought attention to voluntary engagements performed in informal, decentralized and non-membership-based forms, for instance in the context of mutual aid groups (Kilicalp, 2021), time banks (Laamanen et al., 2020), street sport (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011), and crisis responses (Carlsen et al., 2020). Recurring in descriptions of these ways of organizing are fluid boundaries of membership and a lack of formally delegated authority, which is why I refer to them as ‘fluid’ (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010).

Several voices have contemplated the potential perils of these new forms of organizing in relation to certain ideals of, and for, civil society. First, civil society is commonly ascribed a transformative potential by means of collectives’ interaction with the political system or other authorities. When civil society groups act as ‘transmission belts’ (Cohen & Rogers, 1995), more nuanced public decision-making is assumedly enabled (Eliasoph, 2013, p. 12f.). To this effect, research has questioned whether, due to their presumed ephemeral nature (e.g. Bode, 2006, p. 354), fluidly organized groups are suited



to channel preferences of the group to formal authorities, which operate through long-term decision-making processes (Stolle & Hooghe, 2005, p. 167). Second, the fluid format is said to be ill fitted to the procedures usually applied when involving civil society in policy development and implementation (e.g. Kornberger et al., 2017, p. 188). And third, ideally, the represented preferences are developed democratically, in the sense that a diversity of the constituency of a given collective has exercised influence on the formulation of preferences (Halpin, 2006; Heylen et al., 2020). In that regard, it has been questioned whether fluidly organized collectives function democratically, for instance because of the risk of oligarchy (Michels, 2000), where a minority of participants come to dominate (Christensen & Strømnes, 2010; Khneisser, 2019).

However, the volunteering literature does not properly equip us to answer such questions because it does not study the actual organizing of voluntary engagements in fluid formats. The level of analysis in a great deal of the literature is on individual acts, motivations and demographics. It explores motivations (Dunn et al., 2016; Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020) in 'reflexive' ways of volunteering (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003), which are characterized by more self-centred motivations and a conditional commitment to an activity rather than an organization. It also studies social and demographic traits of reflexive and informal volunteers (Perpék, 2012; Pettigrew et al., 2019) as well as the extent of episodic and online volunteering (Carlsen et al., 2020; Cnaan et al., 2021; Ihm, 2017). Moreover, the literature on 'informal volunteering' studies individual acts like signing petitions, donating money and shopping for the neighbour (Henriksen et al., 2008, p. 197; Jegermalm et al., 2019, p. 100). These publications, however, tend to disregard the fluid organizational context in which such actions are oftentimes nested.

Another part of the literature conducts meso-level analysis of organizational questions, but, as noted by Egholm and Kaspersen (2021, p. 8), it tends to focus on formal organizations. With regard to new ways of engaging, this literature has treated questions of how formal organizations adapt to the behaviours and preferences of reflexive volunteers (Meijs & Brudney, 2007), episodic one-time volunteers (Dunn et al., 2020) and 'spontaneous volunteers' who work for formal organizations in an unplanned and ad hoc mode (Simsa et al., 2019). Taking the formal organization as a point of departure likely influences how new ways of engaging are perceived. Based on the needs of most formal organizations, new ways of engaging are problematic and often described in negative terms like 'non-commitment', 'self-oriented', 'unstable', 'episodic' or 'sporadic'. Perhaps this narrative of the ephemeral character of new ways of engaging is also the reason there has been very little research at the meso-level of organizing in the fluid format. Collective action in the fluid organization is

either assumed to be unthinkable (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) or very hardly grasped, due to the lack of formal and legal structures (Hjære et al., 2018, p. 13). Meanwhile, if we shift the point of observation to the rationale of fluid organization, similar traits of modern engagement are not described in such negatively loaded terms. Some ways of organizing are designed to benefit from sustained as well as occasional participation (Shirky, 2008, p. 121), and in that setting, the length and stability of engagement is less important.

In short, the questions raised about the potential perils in the changed patterns of engagement rest on certain assumptions that limit our understanding of the phenomenon. By studying new ways of engaging as collective actions rather than individual actions, and by trying to understand these actions from the rationale of fluid organization, we can, for instance, begin to see how fluidly organized groups can be stable and perform coordinated acts, even if the engagement of its individual contributors is episodic.

## **A change of ontological perspective**

I suggest that the limitations described above can be mitigated with a processual ontology (Emirbayer, 1997). Here, 'organization' is not addressed as an entity, but as a verb, which can open up for seeing the collective capabilities of fluid organization. Organization is always in the state of becoming, since it is made up of temporary patterns of categories, which are continually challenged by endogenous and exogenous factors made relevant or irrelevant by actors (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). This challenges assumptions that formal and informal organizations are fundamentally different. Some patterns acquire meaning as 'formal organizations' in certain socially situated contexts, but they exist only through the actions that sustain them as seemingly stabilized. Hence, from an ontological point of view, fluid and formal forms of organizing are not different, and we should study them in the same way; that is, by inquiring into the social interaction in which a pattern is produced and reproduced, thereby creating a sense of stabilization. This ontology lets us see that arrangements in fluid organization might be more stable than is implied in the critiques hereof.

Since all organization is fluid from the stance of a processual ontology, I want to stress that when applying the concept of 'fluidly organized' or 'fluid organization', I refer not to an ontological status, but to a group's lack of explicit formulation of membership boundaries or authority.

## Fluid organization in organization studies

To address questions about the implications for the transformative potential of and democratic governance in civil society, I turn to organization studies, where fluidly organized collectives have been scrutinized in the literature on ‘organizationality’ (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). ‘Organizationality’ is an umbrella term for perspectives which work from a low-threshold understanding of organization (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). It can encompass ‘various streams of recent organizational scholarship that are all united by an adjectivic understanding of organization as a matter of degree’ (Schoeneborn et al. 2022, p. 134). Here organization is not approached as a verb or a noun, but as an adverb (Schoeneborn et al., 2019), inquiring into the specific ways of interrelating in which a social collective is produced as organizational, even if they do not fit the classical criteria of a formal organization.

One stream in this literature applies the framework of Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) on ‘partial organization’. A partial organization consists of decided orders on one or more of five basic elements of organization: membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring and sanctions. Ahrne and Brunsson juxtapose the number of elements with the degree of organizationality. Another stream stems from theorizing on communication as constitutive of organization (CCO). It promotes the idea of the organizational as a continuum: a pattern of action can be more or less organizational at varying times, and organizationality is thus always temporarily enacted. Schoeneborn and Dobusch (2019) illustrate how CCO can contribute to the development of a processual theory on partial organization, by drawing attention to the glue that creates a stickiness between elements of partial organization and the processes within which movement happens on this continuum. Contrary to the lens of partial organization, the CCO literature does not predefine elements that are organizational, but studies the activities through which organizationality emerges. Dobusch and Schoeneborn (2015) suggest three layers of activity: interrelated decision-making on behalf of the collective, attributed collective actorhood, and identity claims.

In sum, CCO operates from the stronger end of the spectrum of processual ontology, and, contrary to the specificity of the five elements of partial organization, the CCO part of the literature opens up for a multiplicity of forms that organizationality can take.

## How civil society debates may benefit from the organizational literature

Applying the lens of organizationality opens up new perspectives on the concerns raised in the civil society literature. First, the assumption that fluidly organized groups are ephemeral in nature and therefore unsuited as transmission belts to channel preferences of the group to formal authorities is challenged by the literature, illustrating that such groups can also exist over longer periods of time (e.g. Laamanen et al., 2020; Massa & O'Mahony, 2021). By seeking to explain their endurance, the lens of organizationality brings nuance to the debate rather than accepting assumptions about the fluid and the formal.

Second, having established that fluid organization is not always short-lived, we can move on to consider whether it is fit to interact with formal authorities through the procedures usually applied when involving civil society in policy development and implementation. Again, empirically, we have already seen that collaboration between fluidly and formally organized groups can occur. For instance, the Facebook-based *Makers Against Corona* (MAC) acquired dispensation from state authorities to produce non-CE-approved personalized protective equipment, which they distributed through formal agreements with regional hospitals (Højgaard, 2023). The perspective of organizationality offers us a way to see degrees of (temporary) formalization in relationships between a group and its context, rather than accepting the binaries of formal and fluid. Studies of how a group becomes a legitimate organizational actor in the eyes of its external stakeholders and audiences (Dawson & Bencherki, 2021; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) invite us to ask not if the fluid forms 'fit' the existing system, but how the group and its surroundings co-construct organizationality. Schoeneborn and Dobusch (2019) suggest this happens when characteristics are ascribed to the organization through a self-reinforcing cycle of attributive movement. When state authorities attribute organizationality by entering into formal collaboration with MAC, this ascription can be appropriated in internal processes; for instance, by the group's perception of itself as bound by these collaborations in spite of their informal and legally non-binding character.

Thus, with the theoretical perspective of organizationality, the 'transmission belt' potential for channelling group preferences cannot be assessed simply based on the form of organization – fluid versus formal – but by looking at: (i) how stabilization arises out of the internal dynamics; and (ii) how a group is produced as a legitimate collective actor through interactions with its surroundings.

Third, regarding the concerns about democratic procedures, the organizationality perspective can help us understand how groups find middle ground between the bureaucratic rigidity that they are typically aiming to avoid and direct democracy's risk of oligarchy, where a minority of participants come to dominate. This is exemplified in Laamanen et al. (2020), who study how a time bank balances the emergent orders of direct democracy and decided orders, which are more bureaucratic. Over time, the group moves back and forth on this continuum of organizationality to find a balance that fits their egalitarian ideals. Laamanen et al. (2020, p. 539) suggest developing our understanding of decisions to include indecisions, which they find are used as a prominent tool for postponing decision-making until the need for decision appears to have expired or, at least, be less pertinent. In Højgaard (2022), the subject of inter-related decision-making is also addressed by extending the understanding of decisions to include action. Assuming that something can be decided through the lack of sanctioning of actions, I show that in the case of MAC, interrelated decision-making, and consequently membership influence, happens in bodily actions and not just discursively. I suggest that in the group's own socially situated understanding of influence and accountability, MAC's governance form – a 'do-ocracy' – can be understood as democratically anchored. From this perspective, civil society literature's concerns about democratic governance should not be addressed by answering whether or not fluidly organized groups are democratic, but by exploring how the notion of democracy itself is produced in their social interaction.

## Calls for research

Having established the potential of the organizationality perspective, I want to suggest ways of pushing this research further, and indicate how this would stimulate debates on the implications of fluid organizing for civil society. Overall, the organizationality literature shares a tendency to neglect the material and bodily aspects of organizing, accentuating instead discursive aspects. However, Dobusch and Schoeneborn's (2015) three dimensions of organizationality are all potentially partly embodied and material.

For instance, *identity claims* are bodily negotiated and exhibited when snowboarders distinguish themselves by the feelings experienced in risk taking, and signal group belonging through work in the service industry of ski sport areas (Wheaton & Beal, 2003). I suggest that a practice lens (Nicolini, 2013) can help forefront such embodied patterns, with which we make sense and relate to each other in the production of organizationality. Blagoev et al. (2019) touch

on the matter of practices, when they describe rituals and routines as a source of organizationality, but unfortunately, they do not touch on the bodily aspects of this interrelating. Taking into account embodied practices of organizing could highlight how fluidly organized collectives can stabilize despite the episodic nature of individual involvement herein. This would challenge the presumption of an ephemeral nature, thus nuancing the debate on fluidly organized groups' potential as transmission belts.

A sensitivity to embodied production of the social can also help us to unpack *interrelated decision-making*. When the partial organization perspective talks about decided orders, it tends to take decisions for granted as an a priori phenomenon rather than in themselves produced in interrelation. Ahrne and Brunsson (2011, p. 85) describe decisions as reflected, conscious and explicit, whereas a strong process perspective sees decisions as modelled in the midst of actions in which we are absorbed rather than detached observers. Hence they can be non-explicit, even unreflected, as a bodily reaction in a crisis (Law & Mol, 2002). The action becomes a decision retrospectively when it is socially ascribed meaning as representing or regarding the group (Chia, 1994). Devoting more attention to such processes could both help theoretically to explain the occurrence of organizationality in groups without formal authority as well as open up new avenues for debate on the democratic implications of fluidly organized voluntarism, since criteria for democratic process often evolve around decisions.

And lastly, given the centrality of communication platforms as material anchors (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015, p. 1031) that increase visibility of a collective externally thus aiding *attribution of actorhood*, I encourage more research on how the digital architecture of such platforms in itself invites certain ways of organizing the collective (see e.g. Uldam & Kaun, 2019). For instance, in theorizing interrelated decision-making in fluid organization, one could hypothesize that the messiness of the Facebook medium changes how and when something is decided and expands the space for ambiguity and non-decision. Discussions on the democratic implications for civil society would benefit from more knowledge on how communication platforms influence power and decision-making in organizationality.

More than a decade ago, Hustinx (2010) encouraged us to move away from the narrative that changes in volunteering are sparked by personal choice, and invited us to consider instead how volunteering is being re-embedded in new institutional contexts. With this chapter, I suggest we might think of fluid organization as a re-embedding of volunteering, and explore the implications hereof in relation to certain ideals for civil society. A cross-fertilization of

organizationality and volunteering research would certainly be fruitful for that. However, I fear this change in volunteering research is improbable. Rather than research on new forms of organizing as organizations in themselves, what is likely to be addressed is the scope of, and contributions from, volunteers outside formal organizations.

## Conclusions

The perspective of organizationality lets us see the organization in the fluid, which helps us to engage with questions about its implications for the transformative potential of, and democratic governance in, civil society. It also alters which questions should or could be asked about such implications. It deflects our attention from whether such collectives are ephemeral or stable enough to interact with authorities, and whether they fit the procedures of such organizations. Instead, it invites us to ask how they stabilize and are produced as collective actors in interaction with such authorities. Likewise, rather than asking if fluid collectives are democratic, a processual perspective asks what is produced as democracy there, changing the question from is/is not, to what could be or become democracy. This enables us to raise questions about the democratic implications of fluidly organized volunteering, which are different from the questions addressed in the current civil society literature. Notwithstanding the merits of the organizationality perspective, it could benefit from a stronger sensitivity to materiality and embodied social processes. This might enhance insights into stabilizing dynamics, the becoming of decisions and the organizing produced in the use of communication platforms.

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# 15

## Public administration as a site of struggle for social justice

*Chris McInerney*

### Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the pursuit of social justice and with how a different type of relationship between civil society organisations (CSOs) and public administration can be created to deliver more just societies. The chapter does not assume homogeneity in either civil society or public administration organisations and recognises that to talk about public administration involves a range of organisational forms, levels and differing degrees of mission specificity and engagement with social justice concerns. Equally, there is no assumption that all CSOs are interested in or committed to a social justice agenda; some may well oppose it.

For the purposes of this chapter, civil society is understood as the space between the state and the family/firm, populated by groups and associations – civil society organisations – that are formed voluntarily by their members to pursue, promote and/or protect their interests. These CSOs are distinct from the state and enjoy some level of autonomy and independence from the state (Manor et al., 1999), albeit that for some CSOs, the exercise of full autonomy and independence has been compromised by funding relationships with the state. The broader term, CSOs, includes a range of organisation types including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), social movements, community-based organisations, religious organisations, and so on, as well as a range of organisational forms, some highly structured and regulated, others more informal in their structures and mode of operation.

The chapter discussion therefore takes place in a somewhat fluid and imprecisely defined realm. Indeed, the very notion of social justice itself is contested and cannot be easily disentangled from competing ideological foundations. While these complex distinctions cannot be fully unpacked, the chapter

will explore how CSOs can engage differently with public administration in the pursuit of progressive social justice ambitions and why a more focused research agenda is needed in this area.

## Considering social justice

Different views on the nature of social justice vie for attention and influence. Rawls and his much cited *Justice as Fairness* (1973) often provides a starting point for discussions on social justice. Alongside his principles for fairness, Rawls also refers to ‘a family of highly significant (moral) values that characteristically apply to the political and social institutions of the basic structure’ (Rawls, 2001, pp. 40–41). Within the approach taken by Rawls there is an implied role for democratic institutions, including political parties and public administration. This is clarified somewhat with Rawls’ description of the basic structure as

the way in which the main political and social institutions of society fit together into one system of social co-operation and the way they assign basic rights and duties and regulate the division of advantages that arise from social co-operation over time. (Rawls, 2001, p. 10)

Within the social policy and public administration sphere, responses to social exclusion/injustice have followed different trajectories, at different times focusing on income distribution, access to employment, personal responsibility, and system failure to explain both social exclusion and related routes to social inclusion. These provide useful insights into underlying social justice/injustice mindsets. It has been suggested that in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s a redistribution focus/discourse (RED) and a discourse on social integration via engagement with the labour market (SID) dominated public policy. However, accompanying both is a discourse described as the ‘moral underclass discourse’ or MUD. In the MUD, the ‘socially excluded are presented as distinct from the rest of society’ and the main concern is with the behaviour of the poor rather than with processes within wider society (Levitas, 2004, p. 44).

Thus, within these ongoing policy discourses, there remains an underlying focus on those who experience exclusion, both as the target for action and as the source of the problem. While the RED acknowledges some level of structural causation to injustice, related policy responses still emphasise individually oriented solutions. Likewise, the SID focuses on labour market weaknesses and labour market reengagement, the latter with varying levels of welfare

associated coercion. The MUD, however, is less of a direct policy prescription and more of an ideational underpinning that locates the responsibility for exclusion directly with the individual experiencing exclusion. Essentially, if you are poor, it is most often your own fault. Social injustice does not exist, it is the individual that produces their own exclusion, and it is the individual that must change their behaviour if they want to progress. Addressing exclusion therefore leads to a 'performative notion of inclusion' (Levitas, 2004, p. 48) where the focus is on the actions or performance of the excluded person.

The reason for introducing these discourses is to highlight the types of analysis and associated policies that are present in, and to varying degrees influence, public administration institutions. While the MUD may not always be openly articulated, the degree to which it contributes to an ingrained disposition within public administration institutions must be considered. Without doing so, there is a danger what will result will be little more than 'a pathologizing of the excluded' (Sullivan, 2002, p. 507).

Of course, it cannot be assumed that all CSOs are equally concerned about social justice or see associated change agendas in the same way (Craig, 2009). Moreover, for many CSOs, pursuit of a social justice agenda poses new challenges. The shift towards commissioning and contracting, where organisational funding is more closely tied to the delivery of services, has narrowed the space for CSOs to pursue more structurally oriented change agendas (Grey and Sedgwick, 2013; Tenbensen et al., 2013). More fundamentally, in the majority of countries worldwide, civic spaces have been narrowed (CIVICUS Monitor, 2021). For those CSOs in a position to pursue a social justice orientation a number of approaches are generally taken: advocacy; awareness raising/ conscientisation; defending rights; research, policy and strategy development; directly meeting needs; provision of contracted services; monitoring state actions; taking on the role of critical friends/partners (UNESCO, 2021). Inevitably, tension can arise when CSOs attempt to marry multiple functions, most especially the delivery of contracted services alongside advocacy and lobbying. What is less common in the research literature is consideration of how CSOs can and should focus their attention towards a different type of engagement with public administration systems, an ideational and a mindset engagement.

## Considering public administration and social justice

Public administration operates at a variety of different levels and is shaped by competing ideological and political influences. Alongside core national civil service institutions, in most countries there will exist sub-national administrative structures, at regional or municipal levels and sometimes even lower levels of concentration. In addition, specialised state agencies may be created to address particular issues where additional, dedicated capacity is needed. Amongst these may be agencies with a direct focus on social justice, human rights and equality. The courts, police, and defence forces are also part of public administration systems. It is necessary therefore to recognise that different approaches may be taken to social justice at different levels and in different organisational types. For example, some research suggests that more decentralised governance offers greater potential to address social justice concerns (Smoke, 2015) though others have questioned where decentralised systems may simply reproduce patterns of 'elite capture of local power structures' (Crook, 2003).

Traditionally, public administration is associated with impartiality, neutrality, hierarchy, adherence to the rule of law and responding to the directions of democratically elected representatives (Hughes, 2017), leading to an expectation of equal treatment for all citizens, though in practice, this often does not happen. Since the advent of the neoliberally inspired, New Public Management (NPM), public administration has become increasingly dominated by concerns with effectiveness and efficiency and the freeing up of public managers to implement policy, although still directed by elected representatives (Christensen and Laegreid, 2011). However, NPM itself has become increasingly challenged in recent years, not least for its short-term focus on meeting the needs of the market; its inability to accommodate deliberation or challenge; its limited focus on outcomes and impacts and its pushing forward of 'technical efficiency as the goal of public bodies at the expense of democratic processes and social values' (Blaug et al., 2006, p. 6). Its inability/willingness to consider structural responses to social justice can be added to this list.

The dominance of NPM has also been challenged by those seeking a more democratically oriented vision of public administration. In the USA, the New Public Administration (NPA) ideal emerged as a perspective that challenged the value neutral myth of public officials (Wooldridge and Gooden, 2009) and instead called on public administration 'to change those policies and structures that systematically inhibit social equity' (Frederickson, 2010, p. 9). Others have emphasised the need to recover some of the historical legacy of social justice in

public administration (Burnier, 2021). There is also acknowledgement of the role played by public officials in reinforcing inequality by 'enforcing discriminatory laws and using their broad discretion to advance exclusionary social mores' (Johnson and Svara, 2011, p. 9), a theme so visibly highlighted in the USA and across the world through the actions of the Black Lives Matter social movement. Competing paradigms like Public Value Management (PVM) have also been developed (Moore, 1995) that articulate a different way of thinking about public administration and how it can relate to the reality of delivering public services (Ernst and Young, 2014). While not designed specifically from a social justice perspective, Stoker (2006, p. 56) argues that PVM 'rests on a fuller and rounder vision of humanity than does either [traditional] public administration or new public management'. More recently, a post-NPM paradigm, it is claimed, shows greater acceptance of the need for collaboration and of the importance of networks and partnership (Lodge and Gill, 2011; Hustinx et al., 2015) alongside a recognition of the need to foster 'pro-active leaders' who are open to 'pragmatic co-operation' (Christensen and Laegreid, 2011, p. 18). For some, a post-NPM 'focus on co-ordination, collaboration and joined up outcomes' is simultaneously associated with a '(re)centralisation of control' (MacCarthaigh, 2017, p. 6). While recentralisation indicates a 'reassertion of old public administration' (Lodge and Gill, 2011, p. 143), it is argued that whole of government or joined up government approaches point towards a willingness to engage in 'multi-agency collaborative partnerships' (Christensen and Laegreid, 2011, p. 15). Whether 'recentralisation' and collaboration can easily co-exist remains open to question.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly in terms of influence, in most democratic countries large parts of public administration systems operate under the direction of elected political leadership, who themselves are accountable to citizens, including CSO members. While this is more clearly demarcated in some political systems, such as the USA, in others, the parallel obligations of public officials to simultaneously respond to political will as well as constitutional and other legal imperatives can be a source of tension, especially if those imperatives relate to social justice. In this grey zone of administrative accountability, public sector responsiveness may manifest in different ways along a spectrum, at one end constrained by political dictates and bureaucratic rules, while at the other a more deliberative ethic enables greater collaboration and co-production (Bryer, 2007).

## Shifting public administration towards social justice: the challenge for CSOs and areas for future research

Public administration is hugely influential in all our lives. It makes sense therefore that CSOs pay greater attention to how it can be encouraged, enabled and/or required to address issues of social justice. Three challenge zones are proposed.

Challenge zone 1: knowledge – become more aware of the nature of public administration structures

It is worth considering and researching how many CSOs fully or even partially understand the structures and nature of public administration. If CSOs accept that public administration has a central role in the pursuit of social justice, then surely it is imperative that a more complex level of understanding exists. Grasping the potential to shift from an NPM-dominated reality, to one more informed by alternatives such as PVM, offers CSOs an opportunity to engage differently about social justice issues. It allows CSOs to frame their social justice ambitions in a public administration context, using a public administration lexicon. This of course does not guarantee that CSOs will be able to deliver social justice outcomes. However, it does offer the potential to increase CSO legitimacy within the public policy-authorising environment (Moore, 1995). It also offers the potential for CSOs to more fully appreciate the DNA of public administration institutions and, where necessary, to identify ways of genetically engineering them towards a more progressive social justice outlook. Operating in these boundary spanning spaces is far from straightforward. In this case, boundary spanning requires CSOs to understand and recognise the inherent instrumental nature of public administration and how this instrumentalism can clash with the ‘communicative rationalities’ of CSOs (Kelly, 2004).

To illustrate this, the example of a US CSO, The Full Frame Initiative, is offered. The Full Frame Initiative (FFI) was founded in 2007 as a ‘social change organisation growing a robust alliance of ground-breaking government, community and non-profit changemakers’ that aims to challenge ‘the assumptions and remaking the structures and systems that are currently harming people so that everyone has a fair shot at wellbeing’.<sup>1</sup> To bring about the change it wishes to see, the FFI works with a variety of partners to focus on systems, on structural change and to ‘shift mental models’ towards a ‘well-being’ orientation that focuses on social connectedness to people and communities; stability; safety; mastery and feel that people can have influence over what happens in



their lives; and finally, meaningful access to relevant resources (Ambrozy, 2021). As such, the FFI is not focused directly on service delivery but instead aims to change the way that services are conceived and delivered by public administration institutions, including the court system, state-level government departments and medical institutions.

While the FFI was established as an organisation dedicated to this purpose, it does not mean that existing, more broadly based CSOs could not use its example as a way of targeting a deeper systems approach. Research into how CSOs currently do this would clearly be of value.

### Challenge zone 2: shifting ingrained dispositions

All institutions, and individuals within them, have their own norms, values and dispositions (Peters, 2018). The intention here is not to suggest that the norms and values of all public administration institutions, and of those who work within them, are always inherently opposed to social justice objectives. However, in some cases at least, prevailing norms and values may be based on certain 'mental models' that are, at best, blind to injustice or, at worst, consciously justify it. There are two main related elements to consider here, individual and institutional disposition and values, neither of which are always visible, recorded or directly tangible. For every statement about values or published codes of conduct, there are many other less transparent, informal norms and mores that impact on how public institutions operate. Bearing in mind the earlier discussion on the MUD, CSOs need to recognise and understand both publicly and privately held norms, dispositions and values, and then seek to influence them.

It goes without saying that the nature of individual and/or institutional dispositions within a social justice and/or public administration context is not straightforward. Mann (1999) has argued that it is necessary to understand and integrate three distinct but interconnected levels of human action: intention, meaning and structural ideals. All three must be understood but, he suggests, intention and meaning are subsumed into a 'multivalent' idea of structural idealism which is concerned with 'penetrating the social meaning of an act or series of acts ...' (Mann, 1999, p. 168). To understand the true meaning of an action there is a need to look beyond any given 'stated ideological position' (if such even exists), instead looking to develop insights into the broader 'ideological environment' within which the action takes. CSOs therefore need to focus more on recognising and understanding not just actions but the 'ideological environment' that influences and determines actions within public administration institutions.

Mann also considers the idea of 'ingrained dispositions within a given group or class' (Mann, 1999, p. 181). Within public administration institutions there are likely to be ingrained dispositions, including the MUD, that legitimise the way public officials operate and, in some cases at least, provide implicit justification for actions that embed injustice rather than promoting social justice. This suggests that officials within public administration systems will act, at least in part, according to understandings, ideas and beliefs (i.e. dispositions), which may derive from influences and experiences in broader society; in the media; within their families and communities; from within a particular socio-economic grouping; from their religious beliefs and/or from education opportunities or lack thereof.

Addressing negatively engrained dispositions inevitably encounters the myth of the neutral and impartial public official (Wooldridge and Gooden, 2009). In challenging this, CSOs should seek to persuade officials to eschew neutrality and seek to act in favour of the most disadvantaged, as 'proactive administrators with a burning desire for social equity to replace the traditional, impersonal and neutral gun for hire' (Shafritz and Russell, 2002, p. 466). In doing so, they should recall and borrow from the challenge to reflect on the role of individual values, experiences and realities as presented by Chambers, who forcibly argued that

The neglect of the personal dimension in development at first sight seems bizarre. It is self-evident to the point of embarrassment that most of what happens is the result of what sort of people we are, how we perceive realities, and what we do and do not do. (Chambers, 2004, p. 12)

Applied to engagement within the world of public administration, this seems like an equally self-evident truth, but one that does not often inform the ways that public administration operates nor the ways that CSOs engage with it.

### Challenge zone 3: skills and capacity – become capacity builders

Public institutions often simply do not have the capacity to know how to address the full complexity of social injustice. CSOs can play a role in supplementing or building social justice capacity in public institutions, though whether such a role will be always welcomed or encouraged is another story!

The way that public administration across the world operates has clearly changed since the 1990s. It has become more than obvious that the problems facing increasingly complex societies cannot be solved by governments alone, nor by public administration alone. Inevitably, this focuses attention on the

capacity of the state machinery (i.e. public administration). Speaking about the challenge of developing an ‘innovation-oriented civil service’, the OECD called for core skill areas to be emphasised across all public sector institutions and names the somewhat unusual combination of ‘Curiosity, Storytelling and Insurgency’. It explains these as relating to ‘mind-sets and working methods, where all public employees are supported to ask questions, search for unexpected solutions, communicate with a range of audiences, and be drivers of change in their organisation’ (OECD, 2017, p. 19).

The specialist skills and capacities suggested by the OECD are unlikely to be found within public sector institutions alone. In any case, it can be argued that developing an innovative, social justice oriented public administration system cannot and should not happen only with the input of public officials. It also needs the involvement of social justice-oriented CSOs. To a significant extent, capacity building in public administration continues to mainly emphasise improvements in core bureaucratic skills (Robinson, 2008, p. 567), with a focus on particular components, such as improving administrative systems, organisational reform, devolving and regulating service delivery, technical skills and an emphasis on performance measurement and monitoring at the expense of capacity to understand and evaluate impact (Peters, 2015). It is unlikely that this narrow approach to state capacity building is capable of embracing the type of change required to deliver a social justice agenda. Instead, alternative conceptions of state capacity building need to be developed. There are different types of administrative capacity: delivery; regulation; coordination; and analytical, all of which are clearly interconnected (Lodge and Wegrich, 2014). However, for the purposes of this chapter, it is analytical capacity that is seen as most important, not least the capacity to analyse the causes of injustice. Moreover, successful delivery, regulation and coordination of policy is only possible if underpinned by good quality evidence and well-informed interpretation and analysis of that evidence. There is a danger that if social justice-oriented CSOs and public administration engage in silo-specific analysis, all that results are competing, not communicating perspectives.

To illustrate the capacity building role of CSOs, the case of an Irish CSO, the Galway Traveller Movement (GTM) is presented. The GTM is a regionally based CSO, established to advocate for the rights of a minority ethnic population, Irish Travellers.<sup>2</sup> Travellers have a nomadic tradition and are undoubtedly the most marginalised group in Irish society, experiencing high levels of discrimination in the labour market, the education system and accommodation provision. Travellers also have substantially poorer health status by comparison with the broader population (Pavee Point, 2021). As part of its focus on health, GTM has built up strong relationships with the responsible

state agency in its region, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and now operates a community-based, peer-led primary health care programme, employing several Traveller women as community health workers. Alongside this service delivery role, GTM also participates in the capacity building of a range of health professionals. Using the services of Traveller ‘ambassadors’ it delivers a multi-disciplinary, equality mainstreaming programme with the HSE mental health providers in the region. It also provides credit-bearing training for student nurses designed to improve health outcomes for Travellers. In doing this, the organisation manages to integrate roles in service delivery with public administration capacity building designed to shift perspectives and mindsets.

## Conclusion and ongoing research agenda

This chapter has argued that to achieve social justice objectives, CSOs need to reconsider how they engage with public administration institutions. It has also proposed that CSOs should refocus, along with their other activities, on (a) engagement that builds their knowledge and understanding of public administration systems, influences and drivers; (b) targeting a pro social justice adjustment in ingrained disposition and values; and finally (c) on becoming more directly active in public administration capacity building.

In response to these issues, three research questions are presented to guide a future research agenda:

- Are CSO efforts to move public administration towards a more social justice-informed paradigm and ways of working, sufficiently well-grounded in knowledge and understanding of the DNA of public administration institutions?
- What role do CSOs play in examining and shaping the impact of institutional and personal dispositions on the pursuit of social justice within public administration systems?
- Can CSOs play a role in building public administration capacity to more effectively address social injustice?

To ensure that the type of engagement envisaged here does not compromise other CSO objectives and activities, it may be the case that CSO coalitions are better suited to the task. Here, the role of higher education institutions as members of such coalitions should be considered, not least supporting the knowledge and understanding elements referred to above.

## NOTES

1. See <https://fullframeinitiative.org/history>.
2. See <http://gtmtrav.ie/>.

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## **PART III**

### **Historiographies of civil society**





# 16

## Pro-social giving and reciprocity in the Global South

*John C. H. Godfrey*

### Introduction

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Western colonising powers imposed their norms and rules on *pro-social* giving in much of the Global South, disrupting indigenous traditions and practices. This chapter is motivated by the belief that research should pay closer attention to non-Western traditions of pro-social giving. These continue to play a significant role in providing resources within civil society. A greater understanding of traditional giving will enhance this role. Civil society is a nuanced and malleable term, where Fowler (2021) offers a valuable discussion of the concept in the Global South. As used in this chapter, *civil society* means that space, independent of state or market forces in which resources are mobilised for public benefit.

This chapter seeks to encourage others to research, theorise and normalise indigenous patterns and structures that will strengthen and increase the effectiveness of giving within civil society in the South. There is no better rationale for this chapter than that offered by Indian development scholar Sundar Pushpa that, "... research on giving, historical, theoretical, or empirical, provide(s) a basis for informed giving and guides policy formulation as well as action by fundraisers, policymakers, and welfare and development organisations" (Sundar, 2017, p. 71).

Much of the literature discussing pro-social giving in the West prefers the term *philanthropy*. Philanthropy is a Western word that took on its present widely contested meaning in the 18th century. An alternative Western term with a longer provenance is *charity*. A problem with the usage of both these terms is that they are too often defined as contrary and distinct (Sundar, 2017; Wilkinson-Maposa et al., 2005). In any case, they do not have an accepted vernacular meaning within (nor do they translate readily to the languages

of) the regions discussed in this chapter. Fowler and Mati (2019) suggest that understanding the ontology of concepts implying pro-social giving is necessary for fully grasping them. For this chapter, the terms *pro-social giving* or simply *giving* will be used unless the context requires a broader umbrella term.

To look at pro-social giving within civil society of the entire Global South is a large challenge. This chapter attempts to reduce this by providing an overview of what we know of pro-social giving in two large geographic regions, Africa and South Asia, uncovering their similarities and differences. The author was born, and spent part of his childhood in Africa, and has worked in the Middle East and South Asia as a fundraising consultant. A recent academic focus has been on traditions of giving in India (Godfrey, 2016; Godfrey et al., 2017). This focus was born out of a frustration with the Western, Judaeo-Christian focus of the scholarship of giving. The chapter will necessarily be broad-brush. There is a multiplicity of political, cultural, religious and other differences within and between these regions. There are also some broad commonalities.

These commonalities discussed include cultural, temporal and geographic proximity to, first the origins of pro-social behaviour in Africa (Boehm, 1999); and, second, to the Middle East (Bolkestein, 1939) and South Asia (Reddy & Natarajan, 2011) where the earliest empirical evidence of pro-social norms were discovered. Another commonality is the widespread colonisation of both Africa and South Asia, which brought exogenous traditions, norms and rules that impacted on indigenous giving.

Indigenous giving traditions, however, differ between the regions. Literature has recently begun to focus on traditional indigenous giving norms and customs in Africa; while there has been a longer history of anthropological interest in South Asian giving traditions. One area of particular interest in respect of giving that has emerged in both regions relates to norms of *reciprocity*.

## **Pro-sociality and reciprocity: a historical appreciation**

Interest in investigating the field of pro-social giving outside the West has increased since the millennium. Early edited publications are Habito and Inaba (2006) and Ilchman et al. (1998), joined more recently by Moody and Breeze (2016) and Wiepking and Handy (2015). Their discussion of giving in Africa and South Asia, however, is slender. Before these works it had mostly fallen to historians (Haynes, 1987; Iliffe, 1987; Kozlowski, 1985) and anthropologists

(Feierman, 1998; Parry, 1986) to describe and explain customs and norms related to exchanges of gifts, endowments and other pro-social activities.

Interest in giving outside the Western tradition, however, is growing. This chapter draws on an expanding body of literature from both Africa and India. The importance of this research field is becoming greater as the globe experiences profound changes to climate, public health, world trade and the balance of power between nations. It is quite possible, if not certain, that the capacity, if not the inclination, of the developed world to give aid to the developing world will diminish. Some Western countries are already curtailing bilateral aid programmes (Development Initiatives, 2021). The global distribution of SARS-Cov-2 vaccinations has provided indications of the West privileging its interests over others.

One of the ironies surrounding the lacunae in the scholarship of non-Western pro-social giving is that its origins, and the earliest evidence of its norms and customs, lie in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and the Pacific. It is widely accepted that mankind originated in Africa, probably in several locations, then dispersed. Pro-social behaviour and altruistic traits very likely emerged contemporaneously (Boehm, 1999, 2000). The earliest empirical evidence for norms of pro-social giving dates to the 6th century BCE (Bolkestein, 1939) in the form of curses against those who would not extend help to those in need. Bedouin principles of hospitality to fellow humans in the harsh environment of the Arabian Peninsula (Ibrahim, 2008) and Vedic scriptures requiring giving to the poor in South Asia long predate Christianity. Vedic scriptural precepts, including *dān* and *dharma*, still provide norms for giving in India today (Agarwal, 2010; Bornstein, 2009, 2012; Copeman, 2011). Also, in South Asia and parts of Africa, Islam introduced rules for giving including *waqf* (endowment), which predate comparable Western charitable endowments (Singer, 2013).

Historical and anthropological sources for Africa provide little empirical data concerning ancient institutions of pro-social giving (Iliffe, 1987). Instead, scholars have extrapolated from their research of language and ritual to the existence of systems for gifting, and for caring for the poor and sick (Feierman, 1998). These works suggest patterns of communal pro-social giving remain customary in contemporary Africa. The concept underlying this communality is summarised by Copeland-Carson using the Bantu term *ubuntu* – I am because you are. She explains, “In this worldview, one can only fully experience one’s own humanity by supporting others; and another person’s suffering diminishes one’s own humanity” (Copeland-Carson, 2007, p. 9).

### Reciprocity in comparative perspective

Prominent in the anthropological discourse surrounding giving is the concept of reciprocity. The seminal work on giving and reciprocity is *The Gift* by 19th-century scholar Marcel Mauss. The key finding of Mauss (2016) relating to giving was what he described as three obligations – to give, to receive, to make a return. The translator of the most recent edition is careful to explain the meaning of the term *rendre* – to make a return – as used by Mauss. She explains that what is given back may take many forms, either material or immaterial, and its motion and the agent of its return may be direct or indirect: “We give back because in some sense the thing or quality given already belongs there or wants to go there, especially with respect to encompassing values” (Mauss, 2016, p. 20).

Arguably, the most significant difference found in discussions of giving in Africa compared to South Asia concerns this concept of reciprocity. This, in the case of South Asia, is because of a lineage of anthropological and ethnographic literature drawing on a footnote by Mauss, where he remarks: “We must acknowledge that, of the main subject of our demonstration, that is, the obligation to reciprocate, we have found little evidence in Hindu law” (Mauss, 2016, p. 161, fn. 161).

Following this line of argument, scholars of contemporary Indian giving such as Bornstein (2009, 2012) and Copeman (2011) argue that *dān*, a form of giving commonly practised in South Asia, is performed **without** (my emphasis) expectation of reciprocity. Others (Hénaff, 2003; Michaels & Pierce, 1997; Parry, 1986) argue that an expectation of reciprocity may be inherent in *dān* when interpreted as charitable or philanthropic giving.

Discussion of pro-social giving in Africa, however, largely acknowledges an implicit understanding of reciprocity. Much of this discussion refers to *horizontal giving* as being the most common pattern found on the continent (Fowler, 2016; Fowler & Mati, 2019; Wilkinson-Maposa et al., 2005). The characteristics of horizontal giving are related to what Hydén (1980, 2014) calls the *economy of affection*, and others identify as *philanthropy of community* (Mombeshora, 2004; Wilkinson-Maposa et al., 2005) or *communalism* (Mati, 2017). “Investment in social relations is the dominant logic guiding social and economic life in Africa”, says Hydén (2014, p. 59). This means, in essence, giving at the local, neighbourhood or family level is welcomed and is more effective than the more impersonal *vertical giving* whereby help is given by strangers representing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), or by elite donors. An

empirical study by Mombeshora (2004) provides evidence of horizontal giving. She draws on Sahlins (1972) to identify three forms of reciprocity inherent in what her respondents tell her about giving – *generalised reciprocity*, *balanced reciprocity* and *negative reciprocity*.

Generalised reciprocity is the normative action of giving food, clothing and firewood to relatives and neighbours without asking for anything in return. Balanced reciprocity anticipates a return of equal value and is typified by the normative exchange of labour, for example, at planting or harvest times. The third form, negative reciprocity, occurs where there is an asymmetry or as Mombeshora (2004, p. 123) explains, “where the actors in the transaction have unequal power bases in the form of human, natural, social and economic capital”. In this third case, Mombeshora’s empirical findings part from Sahlins who had found that these unequal power relationships were uncommon among kin. Mombeshora gives examples where negative reciprocity arose from jealousy and antagonism among kin.

In South Asia, historical evidence of horizontal giving is found in ancient inscriptions recording gifts from occupational guilds and village assemblies (Reddy & Natarajan, 2011). The custom of family and village communities looking after their needy deteriorated with industrialisation as rural dwellers migrated to the cities in vast numbers driven by famine and increasing rural impoverishment (Sundar, 2013). The independence leader, Mahatma Gandhi and the *Swadeshi* movement were successful in reviving volunteerism and encouraging the formation of self-help groups during the struggle for independence (Mohanty & Singh, 2001). There is evidence of a revival of *horizontal philanthropy* emerging in India, in forms such as self-help groups and microfinance (Kassam et al., 2016), although these are largely reliant on vertical giving and support from NGOs and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Goswami & Tandon, 2012; Mohanty & Singh, 2001).

In pre-colonial times, in both regions, vertical giving was a function of statecraft typified by gifts from rulers, kings and chiefs to subalterns. Iliffe (1987) describes the liberality of Gold Coast noblemen, Nigerian emirs and the charity of Savanna kings. He does, however, note that such generosity was not spread across all regions of Africa. “Giving by Indian Rajahs and Sultans is the stuff on which legends are built” (Agarwal, 2010, p. 19). Giving by South Asian rulers was reciprocated by subaltern loyalty and service (Godfrey et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, in pre-colonial civil society, wealthy South Asian merchants built mosques, temples, and other public facilities, such as wells, educational institutions and hospitals. Their giving established social capital, credit and licence

to trade (Haynes, 1987). Feierman (1998, pp. 6–7) describes a similar “ancient pattern in which people built leadership through the gift” in Africa.

Large populations in both regions experienced Muslim rule, converted to the Islamic faith and adopted Islamic giving norms. Charity, institutionalised as *waqf*, *zakat* and *sadaqa* are integral to the practice of Islam. Under Muslim rule religion and polity are inseparable. Muslim rulers used giving, especially *waqf*, as a method of gaining their subjects’ acceptance. *Waqf* were used to create mosques and madrasas but not necessarily limited to religious institutions: orphanages, hospitals, bridges were endowed through *waqf* in South Asia (Bayly, 1983; Kozlowski, 1985). The Islamic Mughal rulers of South Asia also made substantial gifts to Hindu temples (Joshi et al., 2001; Kozlowski, 1985; Osella, 2018). Generally, Islamic rulers in South Asia did not to any great extent interfere with existing religious giving practices (Haynes, 1987; Kozlowski, 1985). In any case, *waqf*, *zakat* and *sadaqa* were similar to existing Vedic norms of endowment and *dān* (Kozlowski, 1985).

#### Enter colonialism

An inflexion common to both regions occurred as the West arrived: the initial missionary incursion was later accentuated by colonialism (Feierman, 1998; Mati, 2017). Christian missionaries came to both Africa and India from Catholic Europe around the 15th century. Vertical giving, in the guise of charity, was a tool of proselytisation. Protestant missionaries from Britain became predominant in South Asia (and parts of Africa) from the 19th century. They brought with them Victorian attitudes to charity and the poor which strongly opposed superstitious and wasteful indigenous (Sharma, 2001; Watt, 2011), “as well as Catholic” (Osella, 2018, p. 15) giving practices.

The colonising powers, when they arrived, considered their role as a *civilising mission*. In Africa, this involved displacing existing patterns of reciprocity and horizontal giving in pre-colonial civil society. It is outside the space available here to trace the myriad effects of colonialism (and not just British colonialism) on Africa and South Asian giving. One significant impact, however, was the increased institutionalisation and codification of vertical giving. It is during this period that a significant distinction in colonial attitudes to giving within indigenous civil societies of Africa and South Asia emerged. On the one hand, in Africa, as Ekeh describes:

But the relationship between the emergent colonial state and African society was distant. First, the colonial state did not crave nor need the values from indigenous African societies for its existence ... Second ... Africans regarded the colonial state

along with its alien functionaries with ambivalence. There were indeed no moral linkages between the colonial state and African societies. (Ekeh, 1994, p. 240)

On the other hand, the Indian colonial rulers attempted to regulate and manage, yet still preserve existing indigenous giving traditions, especially those of the wealthy merchant communities, as Birla outlines:

Colonial sovereignty, manifest in philanthropy, also performed itself as political economy: as the distribution and management of the public. Here, the Government of India assumed trusteeship for its public of subjects, producing colonial sovereignty itself as a benevolent trust relation, with “the public” as its object and effect. At the same time, the measure claimed non-intervention in indigenous gifting practices. (Birla, 2009, p. 101)

In Africa, as a result of the ambivalent relationship between the colonists and their subjects, traditional indigenous horizontal giving remained the predominant pattern of pro-social giving within civil society (Iliffe, 1987; Mati, 2017; Mombeshora, 2004; Wilkinson-Maposa et al., 2005). Ekeh (1975, 1994) explains that *two publics* in Africa emerged in response to the exogenous pressures not only of colonialism but slave traders and missionaries. Horizontal giving and the *economy of affection* (Hydén, 1980, 2014) operate within what Ekeh (1994, p. 240) describes as the *primordial public*, “an alternative public domain, located in kinship structures and different from the *colonial public domain*”. Thus, throughout Africa, the most widespread, effective forms of pro-social giving are not those provided by the state or by NGOs but those that are known, in their various languages, as *ubuntu* (Bantu), *harambee* (Swahili – Kenya), *ujamaa* (Swahili – Uganda), *umuganda* (Kinyarwanda), or *twiza* (Berber) (Mati, 2017). All these terms describe norms of cooperative, self-help and reciprocal pro-social activity.

In India, on the other hand, the tradition of merchant philanthropy emblemised by the giving of large philanthropic family trusts such as Tata, Godrej, Bajaj and Birla was encouraged by the British colonial government (Birla, 2009, 2018; Godfrey et al., 2017). A tradition of wealthy merchants giving generously was already long established in South Asia. Vedic scriptures encourage the acquisition of wealth along with giving it away: giving is a requirement for salvation (Godfrey et al., 2017; Sundar, 2013). The British encouraged wealthy Indians to donate, rewarding significant philanthropists with titles and privileged access to elite colonial circles. Merchants responded – “since business communities generally needed to be on the right side of the ruling elite” (Sundar, 2013, p. 58) – by giving for education, public buildings and public works.

Yet while merchants prospered during the era of industrialisation, traditional structures and pro-social patterns in rural Indian villages deteriorated as workers were drawn towards the factories, warehouses and ports of the cities. Horizontal giving diminished significantly as rural impoverishment increased.

The nationalist struggles in each region saw different patterns of giving to independence movements. African nationalists drew on trade unions and community cooperatives – components of the primordial public, the *affective economy* – to fund activities and provide volunteers (Aina, 2013). During the Indian Nationalist period, which began in the mid-19th century, the indigenous elites and educated middle classes activated for and funded social and political change through religious movements such as the *Brahmo Samaj*, *Arya Samaj* and the *Ramakrishna Mission*, as well as civic movements, such as Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League (Joshi et al., 2001; Kasturi, 2010; Watt, 2011).

Gandhi drew the support of the wealthy by espousing a theory of *trusteeship* which was derived from *dharmic* values with which the elites were well accustomed (Godfrey et al., 2017; Sundar, 2013). Gandhi co-opted the rural masses and spread the message of nationalism with his campaigns of *Swadeshi* and *Satyagraha*. These, though, were largely funded, and volunteers were drawn from the elites and middle classes. To a large extent, therefore, the Indian independence movement drew on vertical giving that was largely absent in colonial Africa; with the exception, as it happens, of support for East African independence given by a strong South Asian merchant community there (Gregory, 2017).

Giving by the elite in Africa has been slow to emerge (Iliffe, 1987). Traditional forms of vertical giving collapsed as the authority and resources of chiefs and rulers waned. Few Africans felt comfortable with either formal philanthropy or establishing personal foundations. As the continent became more prosperous this has changed (Mati, 2017; Murisa, 2018), though there is a dearth of scholarly research into African elite giving.

### The role of corporate philanthropy

The pattern of vertical giving by the merchant elite in South Asia in place today started in the 19th century. The oldest, still functioning private grant-making foundation was established by the Tata dynasty in 1892, even before that of Andrew Carnegie in 1911. The elite funded education, including some of South Asia's earliest universities, as well as schools and colleges (Joshi et al., 2001; Sundar, 2013). This tradition of vertical giving continues as, in India



particularly, high net worth and ultra-high net worth individuals (HNWI, UHNWI) and middle-class wealth has grown substantially (Godfrey et al., 2017; Kassam et al., 2016; Sundar, 2017). As in much of Asia the majority of corporations are controlled by families; corporate and family giving are entwined – those making the decisions are usually family members.

Although such encouragement for corporate giving in India can be traced much earlier, since 2013, the Indian government has required 2 per cent of corporate profits to be spent on CSR. In 1965, the Indian prime minister chaired a forum in which it was agreed that every business had a responsibility to itself, to its customers, workers, shareholders and the community. This was followed by a 2004 national seminar on CSR, and in 2009 and again in 2011. Guidelines were produced following the 2011 seminar to be followed, first by state-owned entities, then subsequently being mandated for all companies (Afsharipour, 2013). The range of causes that the Indian government allows CSR to support include eradicating poverty, promoting education and vocational skills, gender equality, reducing child poverty, combating HIV and other diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability.

Though lacking the historic lineage, or the preponderance of family-owned business found in South Asia, CSR and personal foundations are becoming normalised in much of Africa (Mati, 2017). The initial growth was greatest in South Africa (Kuljian, 2005). And, as for India, African CSR addresses concerns like health, including HIV/AIDS, education, and environmental issues.

## Conclusions: researching reciprocity

This chapter has provided a brief overview of scholarship on giving in Africa and South Asia. Its purpose is to encourage greater investigation of reciprocity as an understudied aspect of civil society. Although the chapter highlights the long history of pro-social giving in two large regions of the Global South, a great deal more exploration including and beyond these regions will be invaluable. The chapter notes that Western terms such as charity and philanthropy are unfamiliar and inappropriate when applied to the South. It endorses the suggestion that giving in the South can be more readily understood when it is considered as having both horizontal and vertical forms. In the discussion above is a proposition that the two regions differ in the balance of one to the other. There is also a suggestion that the concept of reciprocity has different aspects in the giving traditions of South Asia compared with Africa.

**Table 16.1** A matrix tool for theorising types of reciprocity, horizontal and vertical forms of giving

		Vertical Giving	Horizontal Giving
RECIPROCAL	Balanced reciprocity (equal return)	CSR (social capital and licence to trade); micro-credit (and other forms of social investment)	Mutual aid (reciprocal farming activity); self-help groups; harambee
	Generalised (intangible) reciprocity	Elite personal and corporate foundations; diaspora giving; <i>waqf</i> ; endowments (community recognition). <i>Zakat</i> ; <i>seva</i> ; tithing (discharge of religious obligation)	Giving to kin and neighbours
	Weak reciprocity	INGOs, NGOs, bilateral aid programmes	Gifts to shrines and temples; giving to charities, alms (warm glow); <i>sadaqa</i> (reward in the afterlife)
NON-RECIPROCAL		<i>Dān</i> ; anonymous gifts	

Silber (2013), discussing analogous complexities in Western giving traditions cautions against over-categorisation but instead advises taking a flexible approach. As a practical step, she suggests constructing a matrix encompassing variable types. As a tool for theorising different types of reciprocity and horizontal or vertical forms of giving, this would certainly provide deeper insights. Table 16.1 offers a prototype of how such a matrix might look for the present subject matter.

As a prototype model, it invites refinement through further research and testing. If, as a result, greater understanding of the formal and informal mechanisms, motives and drivers of horizontal and vertical giving and reciprocity emerges to provide productive insights to civil society actors involved in resource mobilisation and civil society regulators involved in policymaking, the work of this chapter is done.

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# 17

## Connecting African civil society to its roots

*Alan Fowler and Shauna Mottiar*

### Introduction

Research on civil society in and of Africa must inevitably consider the continent's colonial experience spanning some 300 years. Some observers argue that this extended period of external penetration on pre-colonial socio-political formations and conditions, the imposition of nation states and the post-independence neo-colonial era have produced a singular typology and configuration of what is understood as Africa's civil society (Opuku Mensah, 2008) with its particular expressions and variants (Obadare, 2013). This chapter does not review writings that question the transferability and application of civil society as a concept or category derived from Euro-American origins and applied to other continents (Hearn, 2001; Lewis, 2002; Obadare, 2004; Fowler, 2014; List et al., 2020). The authors' long-term involvement as practitioners and academics in this field, and our familiarity with these debates, lead to a conclusion that, perforce, analysts craft definitions to suit their needs. Here, we rely on an inclusive definition provided by Michael Waltzer: "Civil society is the sphere of uncoerced human association between individuals and the state, in which people undertake collective action for normative and substantive purposes relatively independent of government and market" (cited in Edwards, 2011, p. 4).

With recognized limitations, for convenience we regard civil society as an overarching socio-political category, populated by a variety of associational forms and functions. These include, and are not limited to, non-profit and voluntary bodies, be they secular or religious; traditional, cultural entities; unions; professional bodies; social movements; community-based entities; and civic networks and platforms, both actual and virtual. Put another way, we consider African civil society from an inconclusive political perspective of the associational life of a polity that, however organized and resourced, are meaningful for their collective agency. In doing so, section two relies on a common distinction between formal associational forms that are legally registered and

those that are not, while recognizing that the latter are 'formal' for those who take part. In other words, informalism does not infer instability or preclude functioning according to mutually agreed conventions, norms, rules, resources and sanctions to realize shared aims. For convenience and clarity, within civil society we will use the term non-governmental organization (NGO) for formally organized and professionalized entities. Social movements will refer to mass associations and mobilizations engaging a polity's agency in the public domain.

A central premise of this chapter is that Africa's history has produced complex layers of associational life that are poorly connected, but which will be operating in emerging contexts requiring better rooting in the continent's resources and energies, hence becoming more capable of engaging in political realities and processes. Two observations about research context are of necessary interest. One is that, for some entities, civic space is 'shrinking' while, for others, it is opening up (Hossain et al., 2018). One pivot for this selectivity (Roggeband & Krizsan, 2021) is the normative character and purpose of the interests involved, with intolerance and uncivility on the rise. A further observation is of tensions within African civil society that can co-determine its role in a country's socio-political trajectory, tensions which can be exploited by a regime to weaken opposition. One contribution to a future research agenda would be describing, analysing and understanding the forces and processes in play and how the civil society ecosystem is being reshaped.

Section three explores a future research agenda from two principal vantage points and strains between them. One is a search for material bases for collective action which are derived from the continent's population – domestic or Diasporic – rather than from external resourcing. The other are drivers of civic agency that, through social movements, tie political dispensations and processes to citizens' energy in collective action and influence against democratic backsliding, further accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Both processes can be regarded as ways of (re)building civil society from the roots of civic associational life. Strains between the two arise from the extent to which civic agency serves different political projects, an issue not limited to Africa (Dagnino, 2008).

The concluding section summarizes the analysis and reflects on the issue of why and how a future research agenda can be pursued and financed.



## Within African civil society: a disconnected landscape

Emergence of what can be considered civil society in and of Africa can be analysed through historical eras: pre-colonial, colonial, early and late post-colonial. This section does so to understand why layers of civil society have arisen, are poorly connected and exhibit relational frictions.

### Roots of African civil society

Africa's pre-colonial associational life pivoted around ethno-linguistic relations and their 'traditional' governing structures (Diop, 1987; Herbst, 2001). This legacy continues to resonate in both post-colonial economics (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2013) and in the politics of ethnic neopatrimonialism prevalent on the continent (Francisco, 2010). Put another way, post-colonial eras have not replaced but remain informed by primal identities and relationships. It can be argued that the roots of African civil society lie here, albeit in updated expressions discussed below.

The colonial era saw these societal arrangements operate as sites of refuge, resilience and resistance to colonial oppression and exploitation. Their material functioning relied on what, today, can be understood as an embedded system of horizontal philanthropy (Wilkinson-Maposa et al., 2005). Hyden (1983) refers to such pre-existing social relations and endogenous systems as an 'economy of affection' which deepened in response to coping with and avoiding colonial demands. However, these indigenous formations also provided patronage pathways to engage with the foreign colonial project through appointments, for example, as local chiefs and administrators: often precursors of a new African elites and origin of endemic corruption (Alim et al., 2020).

Bratton's (1988) seminal article describes the emergence of African civil society as a product of interactions between the governed and governors in the formation of colonially imposed nation states (Chazan et al., 1993). This process created African civil society and African countries as two sides of the same coin. One cannot be understood without the other, connected by ethno-linguistic political arrangements, typically seen in membership of political parties. Mamdani (1996) argues that this process created a complex identity of people as both citizens and subjects in newly independent political dispensations. Further complicating the relationship between governors and governed is Ekeh's (1975) observation of the presence of two moral publics, one rooted in ethnic loyalty, the other an immoral sphere of an imposed civic state to be exploited whenever possible (Osaghae, 2006). As a consequence, the

nature of relations and interfacing between civil society in and of Africa and state institutions and politics was and remains morally and normatively under tension.

Our concern is with the outcomes of processes involved in the evolution of the civil society side of the coin in transitions from their colonial inheritance to post-colonial dispensations and current conditions. Here, particular determinant variables are: (i) the latency and legacies of ‘nationalist’ mobilizations against colonial power; and (ii) the subsequent post-colonial impact of foreign aid. These processes created new layers and occupants of civic associational life with potentially contrary political agendas. The following section begins with the movements spurred by the struggle for independence.

#### (Post-)colonialism and civil society layering

To greater and lesser degrees, the pathways to independence for African countries involved ‘nationalist’ and pan-Africanist mass mobilizations of the population. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to spell out in detail what this looked like across the 54 countries now forming the continent’s political design. While recognizing each case is unique, the processes involved can be summarized in the following way, shaping outcomes in terms of the nature of Africa’s contemporary social movements as constituents of civil society.

In a historical review, Brandes and Engels (2011, p. 6) identify four phases relevant to the understanding of social movements in contemporary Africa. These are: the phase of anti-colonial liberation movements; the phase where liberation movements held state power; the phase of democratic transition where ‘civil society’ was tasked a critical role; and the phase where ‘civil societies’ were co-opted by international agencies and donors effectively transitioning into ‘professional development agencies’. To these we add a fifth layer where struggles for political rights, social rights and social justice through opposition to the effects of globalization are finding voice in social movements and protest mobilizations.

Debates around these struggles are, for the most part, conceptualized as ‘civil society’ and ‘social movements’ – terms that are used interchangeably. For Donatella Della Porta (2020, p. 939), “the various definitions of social movements and civil society present different accentuations but also space for interaction”. ‘Civil society’ can be understood as “the features of associations in the public sphere and their role in politics and society” and ‘social movements’ as “processes of mobilisation and action” (Daniel & Neubert, 2019, p. 178). Understanding African political struggles requires acknowledging the diverse

nature of social movement organizing and activity and the various organizational and institutional forms it may take:

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations, self-defined social movements, strikes and riots, the mob and the crowd – all have elements of social movement praxis and all may be considered together with their engagement with political parties, international agencies and other societal agents, in critical analyses of the role of popular social forces in African societies. Social movements manifest themselves in overt institutional and organisational forms for example as civil society organisations, church or other religious groups and trade unions but can also take amorphous and temporary forms, for example protest movements which coalesce briefly around a particular issue or initiative before dissolving into wider society. (Larmer, 2010, p. 252)

This layer of mobilization and action may provide insights into the relationship between movements and national politics (Larmer, 2010). It is also, however, a layer where tensions and conflicts between and within movements may shape processes and outcomes. These tensions are related to unequal power dynamics among leaders and officials, paid and unpaid members, beneficiaries and those who claim to represent them, and varying genders and ethnicities.

#### Foreign aid and the advent of NGO-isms

Colonial power in Africa relied on organized religion as its handmaiden: the civilizing mission of gun and bible. In some locations, the religious imperative met pre-existing Muslim adherents and animisms with their embedded cosmologies. An instrument of Christian faith and evangelism was the introduction of *caritas* in the form of schools, hospitals and institutions of social welfare, such as homes for orphans and for people with disabilities. Often following a northern modelling, a new genus of civil society – faith-based organizations (FBOs) – was created on the continent, originally heavily reliant on external finance, but in the post-colonial era much less so. Beginning around the 1960s, independence opened up the internationalization of African civil society through the entry of Euro-American secular non-profit NGOs mainly dedicated to the socio-economic development of communities (Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001). These difficult to categorize (Najam, 1999), highly diverse foreign entities provided an array of purposes and role models, stimulating the establishment of African equivalents as ‘partners’ (Fowler, 2000). Both existing and new legislation served to facilitate their presence and privileges – such as tax exemptions – with public policy recognizing their contributions to Africa’s development.

Thus, over a span of some 40 years, a secular layer of civil associational forms and welfare functions was added to the African civil society landscape, highly dependent on and vulnerable to external financing (Semboja & Therkildsen, 1995). In other words, a formally constituted type of civil society arose, which was semi-detached from domestic economies and poorly accountable to the local polity in general and communities in particular (Jordan & van Tuijl, 2006). Originally welcomed by newly independent states, the role of some NGOs in promoting a second liberation (Bboya and Hyden, 1987) from the single-party model of government common at the time caused a less favourable or benign treatment by some regimes in power. That is, taking up a democratization role within this layer created a more complicated and less trusting relationship between (parts of) civil society and the state. Consequently, and still, NGOs have to determine which stance and policy space they will take when doing their work: monitors, advocates, innovators or service providers (Najam, 1999), which can translate into cooperation, confrontation, complementarity and co-optation with the government (Najam, 2003). These choices hold true for other layers of constituents which make up African civil society, pointing to a research issue discussed below.

To summarize, civil society of and in Africa can be understood as a long-term geo-historical outcome of exogenous forces impacting on and subordinating, as well as responding to, endogenous societal structures and economies. One outcome is associational layers with different cultural and socio-economic groundings and political pre-dispositions. A critical characteristic, seen elsewhere, is that the more recent formalized layers are disassociated from the body of citizens and their informal associations, such as social movements of earlier eras (CIVICUS, 2011).

The key finding of this global phase of CSI is that there exists a noticeable disconnect between established civil society organisations and the increasing number of citizens involved in both new and traditional forms of activism. ... an investment in rebuilding these connections between organised and less formal civil society is now essential. (CIVICUS, 2011, p. 5)

As importantly, a ten-year study of the nature and role of citizenship in bringing about more democratic dispensations pointed to the greater significance of local associations operating in 'uninvited' rather than formal spaces for their participation that are typically relied on by formal CSOs (Pantazidou, 2012).

In a research programme that was largely centred on how citizens interact with states, we might have expected participation through formal participatory governance spaces to be particularly important. In fact, *citizen engagement through local associations and social movements emerged as even more important sources of*

*change*, with associations showing the highest percentage of positive outcomes in each outcome type. (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010, p. 56, emphasis added)

From these two conditions, what is being done to (re)build connections and where might research make a meaningful contribution? The next sections address this two-part question.

## Rooting Africa's civil society

The previous section provided an historical description and review of civil society in and of Africa in a geo-historical moment of Western political and normative dominance in which civil society research was motivated and funded. The emerging era signals the advent of a global contestation between normative foundations of governance and, consequently, relations between citizens and states. In short: democracy is vying with autocracy, where Africa is one site of competition which underlies the dynamics of closing space for parts of civil society that are championing the former.

The following discussion on rooting and (re)connecting civil society as sources of a research agenda therefore needs to be sensitive to a shift in geo-political context and the instruments being used to influence collective agency such as state-sponsored and artificial associations and uncivic mobilizations: a virtual civil society on social media.

Decolonization: shifting power, domesticating resources and blending organizations

In the 2020s, there are three prominent, potentially complementary, pathways being relied on to root the more formalized layers and internationally associated constituents of African civil society to the continent. One is through 'decolonizing' the mindsets and relationships within with the system which holds them together. Another, under the rubric of domestic resource mobilization (DRM) is to reduce reliance on foreign finance for civil society organizations (CSOs) being and doing. A third is to create new forms of CSOs – such as community foundations – that are much more locally sensitive and accountable. Each one is already a subject of systematic study.

Across many walks of African life and professions, decolonization is a widespread discourse and agenda. For education, it is typically phrased in terms of curricula reform. For professions, it is applied to revisiting criteria for

recognition, ownership of practices, nominations for positions and standards to be followed. For civil society #shiftthe power<sup>2</sup> challenges the way that decision rights are allocated in favour of a funder and the lexicon and vocabulary deployed to justify why assistance is needed in the first place.<sup>3</sup> The initiative Reimagining NGOs (RINGO<sup>4</sup>) is a social lab initiative to identify and test systemic changes in relationships between international and African civil society. Powerholders are seldom inclined to voluntarily give up their privileged position. Consequently, the asymmetry of resource-based power in NGO relations as a systemic neo-colonial pathology is out in the open as seldom seem in the past and being tackled in new, innovative ways.

A corollary with decolonization initiatives are dedicated efforts to empower local NGOs by diversifying their resources, on the one hand, and doing so domestically, on the other. In the case of the latter, the advent of Africa's billionaires as philanthropists is gaining attention (Murisa, 2018). What diversification means in terms of options, risks and prospects (Fowler, 2021) is the subject of recent study, with the realism of this strategy far from clear or proven (Kumi & Hayman, 2019; Schwier et al., 2020; Layode et al., 2021).

A third feature of shifts in the civil society ecosystem are organizational evolutions and reforms which bring intermediary CSOs closer to communities. That is the growth of community foundations in Africa and elsewhere in the world: a type of social movement for organizational innovations combining decolonization with domestic resource mobilization (Hodgson & Knight, 2012; Knight, 2021). However, growth in numbers may not mean growth in impact. Rather, as other chapters show (see Silva, Chapter 10 in this volume) impactful innovations that adapt to context are a potentially fruitful area of study.

In sum, the future direction of NGO-ism on the continent offers and needs research which moves beyond snapshots as well as exploring connections between these processes as well as if and how they interface with directions of travel seen and anticipated in social movements.

#### New social movements: channelling civic energies

The channelling of civic energies through contemporary African social movements has various layers. Two of the most discernible reflect first, a "fourth wave" of pro-democracy forces (Lodge, 2013, p. 147) and second, responses to the "assault of neoliberalism" (Burawoy, 2017, p. 21).

In the first instance, mobilizations in the 'fourth wave' also known as the 'Arab Spring' embodied oppositions to states where "since the third wave openings,

authoritarian rule has re-consolidated and regimes have undergone closure” (Lodge, 2013, p. 148). Features of this wave include youth activism and the deployment of social media which served to connect rather than distance mobilizations from political developments in other parts of the African continent. In this sense, social media platforms strengthened activism with their capacity to affect popular political perceptions. New technologies further presented opportunities for fresh forms of collective action (Lodge, 2013).

In the second instance, what has been termed “the proletariat to precariat” wave (Standing, 2011, quoted in Burawoy, 2017, p. 21), new modes of mobilization have taken hold as the global South has been most vulnerable to the effects of neoliberalization and globalization. This is reflected in “the lived experience of commodification but also a response to the process of ex-commodification, the expulsion from the market” (Polyani, 2001, quoted in Burawoy, 2017, p. 22). These mobilizations are framed by national political terrains but are globally connected; they have at their basis the idea that capitalism and finance capital have ‘hijacked’ democratic processes and for this reason they argue for more direct forms of democracy (Burawoy, 2017, p. 24).

### Tensions

The preceding sections have already alluded to tensions that arise from rooting formal, externally funded CSOs into African societies. In the case of NGOs, the primary struggle is over reforming neo-colonial systems that, despite a sincere ‘rhetoric’ of partnership, have yet to deliver local control over decisions, messages and measures of change. This is not, however, taking place in isolation from wider systemic forces as Africa’s nation states position themselves in different geo-political order with consequences for their citizen’s rights. Isolating civil society research to entities and stresses in their relational systems from the context of state–society relations is best avoided. The latter point also holds true for social movements, the more so because of their significant potential for political clout.

An obvious tension that exists is between social movements and NGOs. This is centred on questions of legitimacy and the ability to constitute an emancipatory political force. While social movements are able to effect sustained popular mobilization from a grass-roots base, NGOs effectively operate as professional organizations driven by funders, boards and directors (Pithouse, 2013, p. 253). These tensions have played out in various ways. Evidence from

southern Africa suggests that grass-roots activists experience NGO spaces as both constrained and unequal:

These spaces may call themselves socialist and be organised or dominated by NGOs that identify as socialist but they have often been experienced as directly oppressive by popular movements ... there is both a broader NGO elitism and a convergence between left NGOs and authoritarian left vanguards. (Pithouse, 2013, p. 255)

Evidence from the north of Africa echoes tensions between social movements and NGOs but suggests that while NGOs appear disconnected from popular mobilizations they play various roles of a “surreptitious symbiotic” nature (Glasius & Ishkanian, 2014, p. 2622). So, while NGOs may not have been pivotal in initiating actions or mobilizations, they provided support through non-monetary resources such as ‘the logic of fundraising’, ‘legal aid’ and ‘information about government plans to protect against and engage with the coercive logic of the state’.

Thus the boundaries between the formal NGOs and informal groups of activists are blurred and there is much more cross-over and collaboration than meets the eye. (Glasius & Ishkanian, 2014, p. 2622)

A personal, but telling, anecdote came from the response of a leader of a social movement to an INGO staff member who just explained how the movement would need to change organizationally in order to be funded. The leader’s comment was: “It’s like putting a fire in a box”. That is, what was being required would snuff out the burning energy which drove the movement’s momentum, which attracted the INGO in the first place. But the issue of tensions is far more than organizationally technical. “From a movement perspective and based on my experience in India, however, I’d say there’s a deeper issue at stake: NGOs seem incapable of practicing what movements really need, which isn’t partnership but solidarity” (Kumar, 2020, p. 1).

## **A future research agenda**

Reflecting the field of enquiry, a future research agenda for civil society would benefit from appreciating the presence, value and problems of layering. At the base, so to speak, is to explore what African ‘rootedness’ really means. That is to test the proposition – advanced in this chapter and recently by Obadare and Krawczyk (2022) – that there is validity to an ontological story of the affinity between ethnicity, kinship, primary associational life and civil society as a political player in citizens’ identity and their joint agency towards the state.



A research question could be: to what extent does the (type of) rootedness of collective civic agency (co-)determine citizens' gaining traction on (which) political processes, moments and why?

This enquiry should help to both illuminate and enumerate civil society 'below the radar' of much of existing research that overly relies on CSOs which are registered. A methodically grounded approach would pose the question: 'what associations do you belong to?' to a representative sample of a population. Elaborations could probe for what purposes; how much time do you give; and so on. One point of this research is to remove existing knowledge asymmetries and biases in how civil society is understood and portrayed on the continent. It is also a reminder that there is no uniform understanding of civil society, constituents, and their form and function on the continent (Obadare & Krawczyk, 2022).

From these foundations, research is merited on the extent to which an ethno-linguistic politics of neopatrimonialism employed by elites can be challenged – particularly by a combination of formal civic actors allied to mass movements. A prime example would relate to CSOs countering a morality which makes corruption on the continent 'legitimate' and endemic (Fowler, 2021). In doing so, guiding research questions would be: does the moral weight and compass of civil society point towards civility in defending the public good? Can countering corruption act as a bridge connecting the energy and agency of NGOs and social movements?

## NOTES

1. See <https://www.news10.com/news/international/report-democracy-backsliding-across-the-world-amid-pandemic/>.
2. See <https://www.youtube.com/hashtag/shiftpower>.
3. See <https://globaldevincubator.org/localizing-development-our-process-to-select-language/>.
4. See <https://rightscolab.org/ringo/>.

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# 18

## Understanding diversity of South Caucasus civil society

*Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan*

### Introduction

This chapter discusses development of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian civil society. It argues that although the three countries have shared colonial history and some similar recent historical experiences (wars, revolutions), the paths of the three neighbours diverged significantly since independence, creating different civil society environments. This diversity is often underappreciated; various contexts are lumped together under one 'region'. The chapter highlights the similarities and the differences between civil societies of the three countries. The country backgrounds, presented in this introduction, give a taste of the regional diversity; the section on the Soviet legacy highlights the impact of external homogenizing forces. The chapter then discusses the impact of the Western funding (NGO-ization), the counterbalancing influence of indigenous local movements, and the extent of Russian influence in the region. It concludes with tentative suggestions of directions for future research. The chapter argues that the three countries belonging to the South Caucasus region are more diverse than similar, and are on diverging political and cultural trajectories. Civil societies of the three countries are isolated from each other, each being shaped by different local circumstances.

Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are often grouped together as a 'region' not only in geographic, but also in geopolitical and cultural terms. The latter is a gross oversimplification. All three countries share a history of being part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Russian/Soviet colonial legacy left its imprint on the region; distrust of state authorities, corruption and arbitrarily drawn borders rife with conflicts are some of the typical markers of colonialism, common for the three countries. But the differences between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are substantial and growing deeper with every passing decade.

Armenian and Georgian populations are predominantly Christian,<sup>1</sup> Azerbaijani population is mostly Muslim. Armenian and Georgian languages are unique, each using its own alphabet; Azerbaijani language is similar to Turkish. If not for the colonial Russian lingua franca (now gradually being replaced by English), the three peoples would have difficulties communicating. Armenia is ethnically homogenous while Georgia and to a lesser extent Azerbaijan are home to various ethnic groups.

In Armenia and Georgia, the Church is well-institutionalized and enjoys the widespread trust and respect of most of the population. It is the carrier and advocate of traditional (conservative) values. In Georgia, the Church is in conflict with the Western liberal non-governmental organization (NGO) sector (Nodia, 2005; Wheatley, 2010). In Armenia, the Church has been siding with the state and enjoyed state patronage until recently (Mkrtchyan, 2019). In Azerbaijan, the state exercises tight control over Muslim communities (Abbasov, 2010).

In April 1918 when the Russian Empire collapsed, the three countries briefly formed a joint political entity.<sup>2</sup> The alliance survived for a little more than a month. In May 1918, Georgia declared its independence, followed by Azerbaijan and Armenia. In 1920–21, all three were forcibly incorporated into the newly created Soviet Union. The three independent states were re-established in 1991.

A long-simmering conflict over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh re-ignited between Armenia and Azerbaijan shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The neighbouring states fought two rounds of full-scale war: one in 1991–94 and one in 2020. Georgia had a civil war in 1991–93 and a war with Russia over breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008.

Armenia and Georgia experienced peaceful regime changes through mass uprisings, known as the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia and the 2018 Velvet Revolution in Armenia. Civil society played a major role in both events. Noticeable democratic developments ensued in both countries. In Azerbaijan, any attempts at mass dissent were suppressed. The Aliyev family consolidated its grip on the country.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of geopolitical orientations, Georgia has strained relations with Russia and made a decisive pivot towards the West after the Rose Revolution. Armenia attempts to maintain cordial relations with the West but is located within the Russian sphere of influence, deepened by stationing Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh in the aftermath of the 2020 war. Azerbaijan

is a close ally of Turkey.<sup>4</sup> Its relationship with the West is pragmatic. Being oil-rich, Azerbaijan can afford to ignore all Western sticks and carrots of democracy promotion.

The three countries have very different cultures, societies and historic trajectories. Apart from geography, the only powerful unifying factor was the colonial history of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. That homogenizing influence is gradually fading, although the communist legacy is important for understanding some of the peculiarities of state–society relations.

## The Soviet legacy

Although some authors claim that civil society in South Caucasus was ‘born’ shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union (Abrahamian & Shagoyan, 2011; Abrahamyan, 2001; Losaberidze, 2010), there is a growing tendency in the literature to discuss pre-Soviet and Soviet conditions that helped shape current civil society development (Aliyev, 2014; Babajanian, 2008; Hakobyan et al., 2010; Ishkanian, 2008; Nodia, 2005).

The impact of the Soviet Union on civil society was mostly stifling, but there are important nuances. The state aspired to control every aspect of people’s lives, including recreational clubs and professional associations. A plethora of state-run organizations existed; membership in some of them, such as labour unions and youth associations, was mandatory. Much of community service was also pseudo-voluntary: people were expected to regularly participate in Saturday clean-ups of public spaces, in pro-government festive demonstrations, in Red Cross donation drives, in amateur sport or cultural events and so on. This created a distaste of volunteering and associational membership, present across the post-communist region decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Howard, 2003).

State welfare provision crowded out or co-opted previously existing charity organizations. This created another long-lasting syndrome – expecting the state to fix all problems.<sup>5</sup> Soviet welfare provision was generous but often flawed; shortage of commodities was a common pattern. People relied on personal networks of relatives, friends or neighbours to obtain goods and services that were in short supply. The tendency to rely on informal networks rather than formal institutions is a persistent characteristic of the region (Aliyev, 2014; Babajanian, 2008; Fairbanks & Gugushvili, 2013) although the impor-

tance of kinship networks seems to be declining in post-revolutionary Georgia (Aliyev, 2014).

Thus, civil society of the Soviet Union consisted of state-run voluntary and pseudo-voluntary associations,<sup>6</sup> informal networks of mutual support and clandestine resistance movements, often with a nationalist flavour. The latter were particularly strong in Armenia and Georgia. Occasional episodes of contention occurred despite Soviet restrictions. About 100,000 people participated in a spontaneous mass rally in Armenia in 1965 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide (Goldenberg, 1994; Karlsson, 2007).

Societal mobilization peaked as the Soviet Union started to loosen its grip. In 1988, a mass movement in support of Karabakh Armenians' self-determination mobilized huge crowds in Armenia (Abrahamyan, 2001). In the same year in Georgia, over 100,000 people protested changes to the Soviet Constitution that would limit Georgia's right to secede. In 1989, another massive Georgian pro-independence rally was dispersed with force, leaving 19 civilians dead (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016).

#### Post-Soviet NGO-ization: pros and cons

When the Soviet Union collapsed, international donors rushed in to help the three countries manage a double transition to market economy and democracy. Civil society became the darling of democracy-promoting Western donors. This led to oversimplification of the complex concept: civil society was substituted with NGOs. Thanks to generous donor funding and training programmes, the number of NGOs in the three countries initially grew rapidly, plateauing at about 3,000 NGOs in Armenia (Paturyan & Gevorgyan, 2021) and Azerbaijan (Abbasov, 2010) and about 5,000 NGOs in Georgia (Companjen, 2010; Wheatley, 2010). Only a fraction of those are active today. Most organizations function only when they have grants, many close after implementing one funded project or after failing to attract funding (Aliyev, 2015; Nodia, 2005; Paturyan & Gevorgyan, 2021).

NGO-ization was most pronounced in Georgia. Western aid created a fairly robust and independent NGO sector (Broers, 2005; Nodia, 2005) which was strong enough to substantially contribute to Georgia's democratic progress. In the run-up to the Rose Revolution, Georgian NGOs helped expose electoral fraud by conducting reliable exit polls and parallel vote counting.<sup>7</sup> Thanks to their work, the opposition had proof of their electoral victory (Companjen, 2010; Mitchell, 2004; Nodia, 2005). Nodia (2005) calls civil society one of the 'co-authors of the revolution'.



The Rose Revolution in Georgia seems to support the idea that Western aid to independent and critical civil society can have democratic payoffs. In Armenia and particularly in Azerbaijan, however, international aid to civil society seems to have little effect or even adverse effects. NGOs are detached from the public. They are largely ignored by the Armenian government<sup>8</sup> and are actively suppressed in Azerbaijan. Ishkanian (2008) argues that NGO-ization tamed the emancipative potential of civil society, crowding out indigenous forms of civic participation. Some authors voice criticism of Georgian NGOs, calling them elitist and detached from the population (Jones, 2006; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani, 2009).

### Beyond NGOs: civil society and peaceful uprisings

NGOs played an important role during the Georgian Rose Revolution, but they were not the only civil society players involved. A *Kmara* (Enough) youth movement was also instrumental and highly influential. In the run-up to the revolution it mobilized public discontent in various forms – from street graffiti to rallies. Some opinion polls reported *Kmara* being more influential than opposition politicians supposedly leading the revolution (Companjen, 2010). Georgian informal movements and activist campaigns remain an important part of Georgian civil society and show signs of revival after Mikheil Saakashvili stepped down in 2013 (Stefes & Paturyan, 2021).

In Armenia, starting from approximately 2008, informal activist groups have re-entered the domain of civil society under the name of civic initiatives, focused on specific, narrowly defined issues, such as preservation of a public park, prevention of a hydropower-plant construction, and opposition to demolishing a historic building. Such initiatives are often led by young, tech-savvy people (Avedissian, 2020). Although many civic initiatives present themselves to the public as non-political, in their internal discussions they touch upon quintessentially political issues of citizenship and state accountability, often challenging neo-liberal donor narratives (Ishkanian, 2015). While in Georgia most of civil society discourse and research is focused on NGOs, in Armenia civic initiatives are by now understood as equally important civil society actors (Paturyan, 2015).

In the years preceding the Velvet Revolution, civil society accumulated valuable experience of peaceful resistance that was successfully utilized during the uprising (Paturyan, 2020; Zolyan, 2020). During the Armenian Velvet Revolution of 2018, civic activists were more visible than NGOs.

What happens to civil society in the aftermath of a successful regime change through peaceful mass uprising? After the Georgian Rose Revolution, many prominent NGO leaders joined the new government. This posed a range of unanticipated challenges to civil society and to the democratic project. The 'brain drain' from civil society to the state undermined Georgian civil society's watchdog functions (Broers, 2005; Cheterian, 2008; Companjen, 2010). Additionally, much of Western financial support was redirected from NGOs to the state, further weakening civil society (Losaberidze, 2010). As a result, post-revolutionary Georgian government faced very little criticism as it implemented radical reforms, often disregarding due process and human rights.

Armenia seems to provide an insightful contrast in that regard. Although many prominent NGOs supported the Velvet Revolution and some brain drain occurred in its aftermath, it was not as dramatic as in Georgia. By and large, NGOs maintained their distance from the new government and continue to play a watchdog function (Stefes & Paturyan, 2021).

Russia: the elephant in the room<sup>9</sup>

Russia is an important player in the region. It is Armenia's strategic ally; Georgia opted to distance itself from Russia; Azerbaijan maintains cordial but uneasy relations with Russia complicated by Armenian–Azerbaijani rivalry and presence of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh since November 2020.

Russian civil society is heavily impacted by increasing state interference. Beginning in 2006, the Russian government tightened constraints on externally funded NGOs, simultaneously providing funding and cooperation opportunities for organizations willing to engage in social projects. While many criticize this move as co-optation, some argue that many participants of Russian civil society are sincere, their activities are voluntary and their goal is to improve their communities (Hemment, 2012). Western-funded NGOs are severely impacted but they are also adapting. Some organizations shift their funding sources from foreign to purely domestic, strengthening their ties to local communities. Others relocate abroad but continue to engage in educational projects, court litigations and human rights monitoring (Moser & Skripchenko, 2018).

Azerbaijani government is emulating Russian government's co-optation tactics. In 2008, the president set up the State NGO Support Council to finance its own network of loyal NGOs (Abbasov, 2010). In Armenia, attempts to introduce Russian-style legislation to tighten state control of the NGO sector

were made several times, earlier drafts going back to 2007 (Grigoryan, 2015; Sahakyan, 2015). The government wanted tighter control of NGO funding, requiring detailed reports, yearly audits, the ability to attend NGO board meetings, and the ability to annul NGO registrations through the courts. Armenian civil society organizations saw these proposed regulations as too restrictive and engaged with the state to improve the legislation. The resulting law, adopted in 2016 was ‘a compromise achieved after more than seven years of discussions’ (Iskandaryan, 2016) that included a softer requirement of financial reporting and also allows NGOs to engage in economic activity and represent some stakeholders in court.

## Where do we go from here?

During 70 years of Soviet rule, civil society of the South Caucasus was mostly a clandestine space of public solidarity against an oppressive state. Arguably, this perception of civil society as being opposed to the (hostile) state rather than as working with the state to address problems is still predominant in the region. Civil society organizations mostly perceive themselves as watchdogs: advocacy is much stronger than service delivery. Soviet experiences of being forced into pseudo-voluntary associations, and the deep disappointment in political activism around the collapse of the Soviet Union left many people disengaged from civil society. Yet, despite overall public apathy, mass demonstrations occur from time to time, particularly in Armenia and Georgia. The triggers of discontent are similar and usually covertly or overtly political: protests occur around elections, environmental issues or social issues perceived as ‘unfair’ and linked to corruption: for example, an electricity price hike by a notoriously corrupt and inefficient electricity distribution network.

Since the early 1990s, both the subject (civil society in South Caucasus) and research on it have developed. The main contours are more or less clear. The NGO sector is well developed but somewhat disconnected from the broader public in Georgia and Armenia; civic activism is on the rise in Armenia; in Azerbaijan, civil society is repressed (Aliyev, 2015; Nodia, 2005; Paturyan, 2020).

Quantitative survey data (Caucasus Barometer and other surveys by Caucasus Research Resources Centres being most notable and freely accessible) and various expert-based assessment reports (Freedom House Nations in Transit, USAID Civil Society Organizations Sustainability Index, CIVICUS Civil Society Index reports and rapid assessments) are available to map the main

contours and probe deeper into relationships between variables. Qualitative research, focusing on what participants of civil society think and how they feel, is advanced through a number of publications (Aliyev, 2015; Ishkanian, 2008; Paturyan & Gevorgyan, 2021).

Accumulated research shows that the differences between the three countries are substantial. Comparisons (particularly between Armenia and Georgia) are insightful but Azerbaijan seems more similar to Central Asia than to its two South Caucasus neighbours. The peaceful democratic revolutions in Armenia and Georgia and the recent war between Armenia and Azerbaijan pose particularly important questions about trajectories of civil society development in the region. Given what we know so far, this chapter suggests the following questions to further advance the research agenda on South Caucasus civil society:

- What explains the similarities and differences between the three countries?
- What is the role of history? What did civil society look like in each of these countries before the Soviet Union? If Putnam et al. (1994) are right, some roots of civic community date back hundreds of years. Perhaps current divergent paths of development can be explained by differences that existed before the unifying force of communism.
- How do people self-organize to address common goals, particularly when states are weak or abusive and when NGOs are remote and donor-oriented? More research on local, informal grassroots forms of collective action and self-governance is needed. This type of research is feasible in Armenia and Georgia, but might be harder to conduct in Azerbaijan because of how closely the state monitors self-organization and activism.
- Is Western support to civil society entities in the region (particularly Armenia and Georgia) helpful, useless or harmful? How can donors engage without undermining civil society's legitimacy or indigenous energy?
- What was the impact of war on the civil societies of the three respective countries?

These questions suggest that in addition to widely used quantitative and qualitative research methods, we need to engage in more historical analysis of the communist and pre-communist societies of the region. As for better understanding the present, action research could provide valuable insights by engaging civil society members as active participants and co-creators of research.

## NOTES

1. The Churches are separate institutions. Armenia has its own Armenian Apostolic Church; the Georgian Church is Orthodox. There is also a sizable Muslim population in Georgia.
2. Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic.
3. Heydar Aliyev, a former KGB officer, was a communist leader of Soviet Azerbaijan from 1969 to 1987 and became the country's leader in 1993 in the aftermath of a military coup. His son Ilham Aliyev became president in 2003 in highly questionable elections.
4. As if the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh was not bad enough, this further complicates Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, because in common Armenian psyche Turkey is the arch-enemy, responsible for the 1915 Armenian Genocide and its current denial.
5. It does not mean that people trust the state. They can think of the current state as alien, oppressive or corrupt. But in stark contrast to Anglo-Saxon liberalism, people in this part of the world think that the state, bad as it might be, should take care of its citizens.
6. To what extent Soviet sport clubs or labour unions can be considered civil society is debatable. They lack a voluntary element and independence. However, modern professional NGOs consisting of paid staff are, strictly speaking, not voluntary either, and their dependence on donors can be significant. Soviet associations were not always completely controlled. They contributed to social capital creation, and fulfilled educational and recreational functions. A blank dismissal of this sphere of activity from civil society research might be one of the blind spots worth investigating.
7. NGOs' work during the elections is the most visible and well-documented tip of the iceberg. They were also active in education and awareness-raising in prior years, building coalitions and mobilizing support for what would become the Rose Revolution.
8. The relationship between Armenian NGOs and the government improved after the Velvet Revolution, but there are warning signs that the government formulates its own agenda and cooperates with NGOs less than they initially hoped.
9. Thank you to Dr Kees Biekart for suggesting the title of this section.

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# 19

## The Polish case: from darling to endangered species?

*Galia Chimiak*

### Why revisit civil society research in Poland?

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the evolution of the studies on civil society using the example of Poland. Following the succinct definition whereby civil society is the “domain of social organization within which voluntary associative relations are dominant” (Warren, 2001, p. 57), it should be pointed out that “an authentic civil society must involve the poor and the weak gaining meaningful rights as citizens” (Pearce, 1993, p. 16). The Council of Europe highlights the “essential contribution” made by civil society to democracy *and* human rights (Council of Europe, 2007). Civil society does not exclude the promotion of antithetical ideas. However, liberticidal quasi-civil initiatives do not pertain to civil society (Chimiak, 2006, p. 26) as civility and respect for human rights set the normative boundaries of the freedom to associate. The focus on Poland is justified as, back in the 1980s, “the subsumption of Polish dissent ... under the category of civil society [was] a truly remarkable intellectual development” (Pełczyński, 1988, p. 363).

The rekindling of civil society studies was triggered by the emergence and growth of the *Solidarność* movement. Furthermore, after the toppling of the previous system, Poland went on to become the principal beneficiary of funds and research from the West (Quigley, 1997). As after 1989 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) underwent an avalanche in growth and became the major pillar of civil society (Gliński & Palska 1997, p. 375; Chimiak 2016, p. 101) which started to receive significant research attention from Polish academics and NGOs alike (Gliński, 2006, p. 310), NGO studies will be prioritized in this chapter. And last but not least, as the country’s transition path has recently taken an unexpected turn, and Poland – along with Hungary, its fellow former darling of external donors – appears to be pacing on the road to illiberal democracy (Sata & Karolewski, 2020), it is imperative to analyse the impact of these events on the current studies of grassroots organizing.

## Structure of the chapter

This chapter can only do justice to a few of the most important studies on civil society. It is based on desk research as well as observations gathered during 20+ years of studying and cooperating with civil society entities and civic activists in Poland, as well as globally. Back in the 1990s, I chose to study civil society out of the conviction that it is the added value that democracies – old and new alike – need in order to develop and thrive. In what follows, first, the international context which gave rise to the unprecedented appreciation of and support for NGOs will be discussed. This contextualization is followed by a recognition of the impact of these circumstances on post-1989 civil society in Poland and, respectively, on Western and indigenous civil society studies. Next, the major strands in national research on NGOs will be discussed. The change of donor policies towards NGOs' role in development and post-9/11 aid securitization exacerbated the functioning of civic space.

This change of heart towards NGOs became especially pronounced in autocratic states and in countries experiencing democratic backsliding. Poland underwent its own populist reassessment of what was understood as an imitative post-1989 model of development, and consequently introduced measures against the (identified as external and therefore imposed upon) Western approach to supporting and studying civil society. The impact of “religious extremists” (Datta, 2021) fundraising to roll back human rights represents a further threat to civil societies in Poland and beyond. The final part of the chapter will discuss the repercussions of this wind of change on policies and studies of civil society in Poland, and the implications of these seismic developments on the emergence of a research lacuna that future studies should aim at addressing.

## Civil society and democratization in the context of post-socialist transformation

The rise of prominence of the concept of civil society as “critical to democratization, good governance, and development” (Howell et al., 2008, p. 9) can be traced back to the 1980s when Eastern European dissidents revived the idea of civil society as both an analytic concept and a mobilizing discourse. The unprecedented alliance among workers, leftist intellectuals, and the Catholic Church was cemented by their reticence to engage in politics. The resurrection of the concept of civil society also seemed like a solution to issues raised by

new social movements in the 1970s (Ekiert, 2019). It was the emergence of *Solidarność* in the early 1980s in Poland that promoted the use of “civil society” against the state in studies in both Central Europe and the Western world (Forbrig, 2006, pp. 50–51). The concept of the implied failings of the state was cemented at the end of the 1980s with the rise of the neoliberal paradigm initiating a turn-away from state-led policies. In lieu of state-led development, support for institutionalized civil society was introduced in the then Third World and afterwards to post-socialist countries alike (Chimiak, 2014, p. 31).

Indeed, the strategy to support and study NGOs in democratizing Poland was part and parcel of a larger process. As the overview of international development approaches’ impact on the role ascribed to NGOs pointed out, from the 1950s until the 1990s their focus shifted from equitable economic growth to sustainable development (Chabbott, 1999, p. 239). Accordingly, NGOs’ role in these processes evolved from minor to major, and from universalistic-oriented to single-issue organizations. Yet soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Edwards and Hulme (1996, p. 227) forecasted that, due to inevitable changes in donors’ policies, “at some stage NGOs, like flared jeans, will become less fashionable”. It was the security–development nexus following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States which eventually undermined the pivotal role ascribed to NGOs in many transition and developing countries (Howell et al., 2008). The impact of securitization on NGOs was exacerbated by the “viral-like spread of new laws” (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014, p. 1), which began to restrict foreign funding for domestic organizations engaged with democratization and employing a human rights-based approach to development. Before these happened though, the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of most of the Second World created a new category of states receiving technical and financial assistance from public and private funders from advanced industrial countries.

### **Civil society in Poland: strong under socialism, weak under democracy?**

It is a seldom recognized fact that the idea to support civil society to ensure good governance, under which much research on civil society in the post-socialist space has been conducted especially in the 1990s, was coined by the World Bank (1992, p. 2) in 1989 to cope with “the crisis of governance” in Africa. The conceptualization of civil society needing external support was developed not only by academics, but in a parallel fashion by international organizations, too. In fact, Poland, among other former socialist states, emerged mis-developed

(Perdue, 2005), rather than underdeveloped. At the end of the 1980s, international organizations like the World Bank started to promote the concept of social capital popularized by a political scientist specializing in comparative politics (Putnam, 1993). This concept was seen as the “missing link in economic growth and development” (Grootaert, 1998) that was meant to fix existing problems by de-politicizing development (Harriss, 2002). Thus, donors and academics alike opted for overlooking historical or global factors and conditions to focus instead on internal ones, like social capital, as the culprit explaining the challenges that countries/recipients of Official Aid (like Poland) and Official Development Assistance faced. Enhancing institutionalized civic engagement was meant to boost social capital.

And thus, Poland embraced – mostly uncritically – both the external support for its fledgling civil society, and the narrative and corresponding research focus which originated in the West. This observation is in line with the view in which the West had become the “surrogate hegemon” in Poland because the Polish elites, out of lack of respect for the Soviets, had to travel “westward to enjoy liberty and well-being, and to learn how to interpret history and the present” (Thompson, 2010, p. 6). The West obliged. Stereotypes of Eastern Europe as “prone to anti-civilizational tendencies, and, always in need of developmental attention from the West” (Boyer, 2010, p. 26) kept dominating Western discourse and policies towards the whole region. It may not be surprising that studies like the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project quantified the post-socialist civil society to conclude that it is ambiguous and a “pale reflection of its counterparts elsewhere in the world” (Salamon et al., 1999, pp. 33–4). Individual Western scholars likewise diagnosed post-socialist civil societies as “weak” (Howard, 2000). However, also Polish intellectuals like the philosopher Józef Tischner (1992) argued that the existence of the *Homo sovieticus* syndrome explains post-socialist civil societies’ limitations. Western scholars who have commended the region’s civil societies in the 1980s, after 1989 expressed their disappointment in Central Europe which, in their view, has experienced “decapitation through success” (Bernhard, 1996, p. 313) because former dissidents moved to politics after 1989.

#### Weak civil society, but strong NGOs?

Even if Polish civil society from the 1980s may not have lived up to its promise, indigenous studies conducted after the toppling of the previous regime discussed other important aspects of the post-1989 civil society, with a special focus on its institutionalized branch. The professionalization and maturation (Gliński & Palska, 1997, p. 381) of Polish NGOs was hailed as a success of civil society in the country. Polish NGOs started early on undertaking their

own surveys, too. Since 2000 the Klon/Jawor Association started conducting regular surveys of Polish NGOs every three years. Analyses of the human resources of Polish NGOs (Koralewicz & Malewska-Peyre, 1998; Chimiak, 2006) also came out.

More recently, critical studies on the “NGO-ization” of the Polish civil society and its alleged estrangement from the grassroots have appeared (Jacobsson, 2015). Likewise, the professionalization of NGOs was argued to have been a blessing in disguise as it reportedly resulted in making NGOs focus on their internal organizational demands and in the process desert their relationship with their constituencies (Alexander & Fernandez, 2021). One recent strand in the literature has focused on the rise of unregistered civic initiatives in Poland (Herbst & Żakowska, 2013). Studies on the new generation activists who opted for joining or establishing informal initiatives indicated that these were perceived as less bureaucratized, giving more financial freedom and being more trustworthy than NGOs (Pazderski & Walczak, 2015, p. 158).

Rather than concluding that there is a crisis in Polish civil society, one should recognize the incremental literature on other new models of civic engagement in the country and beyond. Thus, for instance the role of the Internet and communication technologies have recently been studied on the example of the proliferation of civic journalism in Poland monitoring local politics. These developments testify to the contention that the “internet emerged as a space for civic participation” where citizens “make the new world familiar to themselves” (Chmielewska-Szlajfer, 2019, pp. 125, 182). Furthermore, the medium of the Internet was found to change the action logic itself. Whereas the capacity to organize in collective action has been recognized as a constitutive element of civil societies in East and West (Schmitter, 1997, p. 240), more recent organizing by Polish civil society has been argued by Korolczuk (2016) to employ the logic of “connective action”. Studies of this emanation of individualization demonstrate perfectly well that the extinction of the pre-1989, communitarian type of self-organizing (Chimiak, 2006) is not to be lamented, but merits a closer look. The inspection, however, finds worrying tendencies, too.

### Civil society as a workplace

Further studies discussing the challenges faced by institutionalized civic activism point to the repercussions of the neo-liberalization of work, which process has been especially palpable in the creative industries like the media (Curtin & Sanson, 2016), academia (Ivancheva, 2015) and NGOs (*Nie tylko ks. Stryczek*, 2018). Precariat and projectariat are known to be commonplace in the institutionalized branch of civil society. Kiersztyn (2017) discovered that Poles

with higher education and in precarious jobs tend to become less engaged in public matters due to their job instability. This tendency suggests that, should current trends in the labour market persist, precarity may eventually turn out to be a greater threat to civic participation than the imputed post-socialist reticence towards civic engagement (Kiersztyn, 2017, p. 224). Other analyses of the impact of neoliberal practices on the mode of work of Polish NGOs have focused on the recurring practice of mobbing (i.e. emotional violence in the workplace).

Anthropologist and whistle-blower Maria Świetlik, who exposed the lack of respect for female security workers' rights at the (ironically) Women's Congress in Poland in 2018, argued that mobbing is a much more common practice in NGOs than openly acknowledged. She maintained that irrespective of the field of activity of the organization, the practice of psychological abuse is a structural problem of NGOs, exacerbated by the fact that its victims, mission-propelled individuals, voluntarily agree to mobbing and precarity for the sake of the mission and the image of their organization (*Nie tylko ks. Stryczek*, 2018). The coming-out of mobbed NGO activists, however, does not exhaust the issues plaguing civil societies.

## Global problems and local solutions

The ailments of the NGO sphere in Poland were exacerbated by other negative developments, the source of which lays in global trends. The post 9/11, 2001 "backlash against civil society" (Howell et al., 2008) – most evidenced towards advocacy and monitoring NGOs in authoritarian countries – was reinforced by the growth of right-wing politics worldwide. In Poland, those processes also marked a "key shift in the political dynamics between East and West, as well as global attitudes towards LGBTQI and women's rights" (Grabowska, 2015, p. 64). Research shows that those shifts caught civil society activists in Poland by surprise. Their hitherto focus on professionalization rested on the assumption that all people engaged in NGOs can cooperate constructively beyond ideological differences.

Research on conservative NGOs' attitude found these organizations were practising "self-victimization, demanding protective antidiscrimination laws, and stigmatizing opponents as intolerant" (Marczewski, 2018). The backlash against NGOs reportedly promoting liberal, leftist views does not rest only on the argument that these values were externally supported. "A-ideological" values became contested on the grounds of being "liberal" or even "leftist".

Thus, it was NGOs identified as promoting “exported” values that bore the brunt of the backlash, not only in Russia, but also in Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland and the Western Balkans. To understand why the re-evaluation of the recent history of external support for civil societies is taking place, it is necessary to briefly present the background of this assistance.

External donors: benevolent supporters, or indoctrinators?

In the first few years after 1989, private donors from the United States focused on supporting civil society organizations in Poland (Pospieszna, 2014, p. xx). Although their assistance was most sizeable and hence most influential, British, French, Swedish and German funders were likewise engaged in the development of institutionalized civil society in Poland (Iłowiecka-Tańska, 2011, p. 87). Germany was praised for providing decentralized aid (Wedel, 2001, p. 102). The Soros Foundation likewise assisted civil societies in Central and Eastern Europe after the toppling of socialism by committing almost one-third of foreign foundations’ assistance to the region (Quigley, 1997, p. 87). Even though its direct grants method was criticized for being susceptible to nepotism (Pospieszna, 2014, p. xxi), others commended Western NGOs, including the Soros Foundation, for the financial and in-kind assistance they provided to Polish local NGOs in the beginning of the transition (McMahon, 2002, p. 37). The European Commission’s “democracy line” earmarked for NGOs kicked off only in 1992 (Sedelmeier & Wallace, 1997, p. 361). Even though economic reforms were prioritized (by national policymakers and external donors alike) over support for civil society in the first years of the transition, the reportedly belated foreign aid for grassroots organizing was nonetheless credited for its “hitherto unmet” scale of support (Iłowiecka-Tańska, 2011, p. 85). Also, what a contemporary of the described events labelled as “democratization know-how” (in Chimiak, 2016, p. 93) which Polish NGOs learned from their foreign partners, helped establish the foundations of what was to become later on the developmental branch of Polish civil society.

Interestingly, Western and Polish expatriate academics argued that the post-1989 institutionalized civil society was indeed predominantly “liberal and pro-European” (Ekiert, 2020, p. 11) also because it was supported by donors who allegedly played partisan politics by favouring leftist groups in Poland (Wedel, 2001). A study on the unintended side-effects of external foundations’ alleged predilection to work with liberal or feminist NGOs in Poland during the first decade of the transition, argued that this approach eventually resulted in the marginalization of the newly established, Western-funded NGOs (McMahon, 2002). However, other studies found also positive impacts of this cooperation whereby civil society activists in Poland were exposed to new

ideas and approaches via their contacts with Western partners (Quigley, 1997, pp. 54–5), which notions they internalized (Hłowiecka-Tańska, 2011, p. 87).

Another empirical inquiry provided evidence that it was assistance or know-how from international actors (like the French Médecins du Monde) that allowed Polish NGOs to focus on issues previously considered taboo, such as violence against women or child abuse in Polish society. Some of these NGOs went on to share those ideas with civil society organizations from other Eastern European countries and later on with social partners in former USSR states, too (Chimiak, 2016). So, even if there are reasons to admit that former dissidents like Adam Michnik became the “darling of many Western foundations” (Wedel, 2001, p. 99), what a contemporary and participant in the events discussed in these studies called the “clericalisation of Poland” (Chimiak, 2016, p. 91) was inadvertently enhanced by foreign funders, too. Thus, the “liberal and progressive” aspect of external funders’ approach had to do with their egalitarianism as far as the world view promoted by national partner organizations was concerned, and not with the imputed imposition of leftist ideology on their local partners.

#### Poland: from paragon of self-organization to pillarized civil society

Apparently, then, what we are dealing with and what is reflected in strands of academic literature, too, is the emergence of parallel, incompatible perceptions of the past three decades. Ironically, Polish civil society’s strength turned out to have its underside, too, as evidenced in the polarization of the NGO sphere. This process, called “pillarization”, has been captured by recent research and understood as the “vertical segregation of civil society into distinct compartments with limited interaction across a dividing boundary (be it religious, ethnic, political)” (Ekiert, 2020, p. 9). The emergence of the “illiberal pillar of civil society” (Ekiert, 2020, p. 9) worldwide was preceded by cultural polarization, which gave rise to populism. The process has been described by another analyst, too, Bernhard (2020), who identified four critical modalities of civil society in regime change in Eastern Europe after 1989: insurgent, institutionalized, uncivil, and firewall civil society. It is the “uncivil” modality that merits special attention as it fulfils only the descriptive, and not the normative standards, of civil society. The prominent rise of uncivil society has exacerbated the cultural and political polarization of Polish society and facilitated the country’s turn towards authoritarianism. This development is not unique to Poland, though, as some civil society actors in many countries in the world “support political extremism and anti-liberal practices” (Ekiert, 2020, p. 3). The pillarization of civil society is thus both a result of, and an accelerator for, divisions within societies.



Those divisions have been impacted by a variety of factors. Other than recognizing global trends, it is important to take into consideration the equivocal role played by the Catholic Church in Poland. The Catholic Church considers itself as a moral authority. In view of its support for *Solidarność* in Poland in the 1980s and its subsequent growth as an influential political actor after the fall of the previous system, it is important to discuss the Polish Roman Catholic Church's relationship to pluralism and independent civil society in a country considered one of the Catholic Church's strongholds. After 1989, this institution has established itself firmly as political agenda-setter and veto-player (Kulska, 2021). The political elites sacrificed women's rights "for the sake of an alliance with the Catholic Church" (Grabowska, 2015, p. 61). As of late the Catholic Church in Poland has joined forces with religious interest groups representing themselves as civil society actors such as Fundacja Pro, Instytut Ordo Iuris and Polska Federacja Ruchów Obrony Życia (Kowalczyk, 2019).

The anti-genderism that led to the almost total ban on the termination of pregnancy in Poland in 2020 catalysed the emergence of a new generation of protestors and activists. Much like *Solidarność* in the 1980s and its Postulates, 40 years later the Women's Strike social movement put together a list of demands including full reproductive rights, counteracting domestic violence, protection of the LGBT minority, removal of religious education from Polish schools, and delegalization of fascist organizations (Strajk Kobiet, 2020). The adoption of financing rules preferentially treating organizations with a "nationalist and Roman Catholic profile" (Mandes, 2020 cited in Kulska, 2021, p. 251) was likewise discussed in civil society research. Religion-based organizations, however, have been just one of the networks that contributed to the pillarization of Polish civil society. The other culprits are "conservative, nationalistic, anti-liberal" networks (Ekiert, 2020, p. 12) as well as right-wing "mega-donors" and "pseudo-Catholic, far-right mobilisation" (Datta, 2021).

Polish civil society once again the playground of foreign donors?

These detrimental circumstances undermining civil society in Poland have also been triggered by the meddling in domestic affairs by non-Western and non-progressive international stakeholders disguised as NGOs, the backlash against neoliberalism and the exclusionary, "othering" practices of ruling political elites (Sata & Karolewski, 2020). These changes should be understood in the context of the swing of the historical pendulum towards state-led policies – albeit, in this case, populist ones – and the coming to power of a political party which devised a decidedly proactive or interventionist policy towards NGOs. The gradual delegitimization of civil society, which came to be consid-

ered as part of the problem, not the solution, came to be used as justification for the return of the strong state (Enyedi, 2020).

This is not to say that all civil society came under attack. Since 2015 the coalition government led by the PiS (Law and Government) party has enhanced its financial support to “conservative” NGOs while cutting funding for NGOs which were allegedly favoured previously by state and private donors alike. A study of watchdog NGOs’ reaction to the new legal environment has found that, unlike Hungary, where specific NGOs have been targeted, in Poland the focus has been on “dividing the civil society and marginalising the NGOs who are not in favour of the government” (Szuleka, 2018, p. 18). As a result, NGOs had to “rethink their methods of work and adjust to the new reality”, but they also “joined their forces” and started to get engaged in previously neglected activities, like developing strategies of direct fundraising, enhancing their engagement with their constituencies, and becoming more active at the EU and Council of Europe level (Szuleka, 2018, p. 20).

The state-funded means to “provide equal access” was reportedly needed to bring about the correction of the so-called “historical injustice” caused by the internalization of the imported notion of civil society, which supposedly overlooked indigenous forms of self-organization (Marczewski, 2018). As a result, Poland secured the dubious first place in the ranking of “autocratizing” states which over the last decade have been most effective in attacking their media and NGOs believed to promote liberal and/or progressive values, as well as polarizing their societies (Alizada et al., 2021, pp. 7, 9). The deepening cleavage in civil society and accordingly in research and policies towards NGOs in Poland should be understood in light of the turn towards illiberal democratic practices where “dissenters are typically regarded as existential enemies in a zero-sum political game” (Krawatzek & Soroka, 2021, p. 16).

## What future studies should focus on

There are reasons to agree that neoliberalism “has progressively diminished the capacity of nonprofits to fulfil their mission: to engage their publics, to empower and give voice” (Alexander & Fernandez, 2021). However, the case study of Poland also demonstrates that the return of the state, albeit under nominally democratic rules of the game, is not necessarily good news for civil society established on the principles of respect for human rights. After all, the focus on freedom only – without the normative boundary set by civility and respect for human rights – can and does unleash uncivilized movements or

associations to evolve (Chimiak, 2006, p. 25). Furthermore, let us not forget that one of the conceptions of state-led development envisaged weak civil society (Leftwich, 1994, p. 379) as a condition for authoritarian and democratic developmental states to succeed. Even though one cannot compare the current situation in Poland with the developmental states of Botswana, China or Indonesia from the 1980s, the underside of state interventionism, which is opposed to the flourishing of pluralist civil societies, is evident.

Studies of civil societies have to move away from a preoccupation with the apolitical that made *Solidarność* possible. Future studies should focus on decoupling civil society research from political agendas incompatible with democratization and the primacy of human rights in development. At the same time, the role of “uneventful politics” that ultimately begets social and political transformation needs to be further studied and theorized to account for the rise of informality in collective action (Jacobsson & Korolczuk, 2020). Activists and researchers should also be careful not to take for granted achievements in the field of democratization and development of civil society. Recent history has shown that states, like the Visegrad countries (Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia), which were darlings of foreign funders after the toppling of socialism, and even went on to become “democracy’s new champions” (Kucharczyk & Lovitt, 2008), turned out to have been vulnerable to backsliding. The pragmatic organizational form of an NGO has provided a hiding place in plain sight for populist and even extremist groups which disguise themselves as NGOs. Civil society implies pluralism, but it should also embody democratic and humanitarian values.

The case of Polish civil society and the respective studies undertaken by international and national academics as well as NGOs can be regarded as the laboratory which may show the future scenarios for other countries where externally enhanced uncivil societies work in tandem with populist political parties to undermine democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. To address the theoretical and the practical aspects of these developments, future research should focus on the conditions that determine civil societies’ potential for developing resilience and reimagining the ways to function under unfriendly governments. To this effect, future studies need to see whether insisting on past, divorced from politics, modes of self-organization actually works in present times.

The impact of national divisive politics and their external allies do not exhaust the conditions that gave rise to the previously discussed pillarization of civil society. The limitations imposed by the pandemic have “frozen” the activity of one-third of NGOs (i.e. the peripheral), voluntary-based organizations in rural

areas, whereas “central” organizations providing social assistance in cities have undergone “mobilization” in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic (Charycka, 2020). Thus, future research needs to take into account the super induction of factors as disparate as the current political climate, the ongoing legacy of developments begotten at the beginning of the transition in Poland, and the impact of pandemics and future worldwide crises such as climate change.

The case of Poland can be taken as a cautionary tale against the belief that once introduced, democracy is here to stay. As institutionalization and professional maturation of organized civil society in Poland inadvertently created the ground for undesirable practices like detachment from their constituencies, precarity, grantosis or mobbing, would de-institutionalization of civil society bring it closer to the people? In other words, future research needs to address both the internal and the external challenges civil societies face in an attempt to restore the faith placed in self-organization as the litmus test for democracy. It is hard to imagine, however, that such research would be funded by public or private institutions that actually aim to undermine civil societies guarding human rights. There should be dedicated funding for studies that focus on current developments targeting or impacting social activists and civil societies committed to defending democracy and human rights.

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# 20

## Civil society in the Southern Cone of Latin America

*Pablo Marsal Baraldi*

This chapter explores civil society issues in the Southern Cone of South America, namely Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Uruguay. I chose these countries because they all have similar societies and history and fairly represent issues in this area. I have explored and reviewed many recent publications and also interviewed distinguished colleagues who were generous in sharing their time and opinions.<sup>1</sup> I apologize for not including Paraguay, due to lack of time and unavailable resources to provide rigorous facts about civil society conditions in that country.

### **The state and civil society in the Southern Cone**

Despite the existence of associative experiences with longstanding traditions, many analysts contend that the creation of organized and consolidated civil societies was subsequent to the creation of independent states in the region, and was strongly conditioned by the same. Moreover, there are those who argue that modern civil society in Latin America has developed principally in reaction to the actions and policies of the state. (Sarnborn, 2005, p. 6)

This synthesis of a thorough study by Cynthia Sarnborn on historical and modern trends of civil society and non-profit organizations in Latin America, reflects the opinion and statements of many colleagues and scholars in the region.

For a definition of ‘civil society’ I adhere to Michael Walzer: “the sphere of uncoerced human association between individuals and the state, in which people undertake collective action for normative and substantive purposes relatively independent of government and market” (Walzer, 1998, cited in Edwards, 2011, p. 4). As I have written some years ago, in this part of the world the confusion around the concepts of ‘civil society’, ‘third sector’, non-governmental organization (NGO), civil society organization (CSO), and

so on, still prevails, and practitioners and colleagues use them alternatively (Marsal, 2009, p. 12). Furthermore, society at large is more familiar with ‘older’ terms like NGO. Behind words – as scholars know – there is a struggle between different visions of what should be the role of non-profit organizations in their relationship with the state or private corporations. Therefore, as this ideological struggle has not ended, for practical purposes I will use them alternatively in a broad sense.

As other recent writings have described the “shrinking space” for civil society (Anheier et al., 2019, p. 3) or the “State capture of civil society” (Acheson, 2021, p. 12), variable conditions sway from ‘friends to foes’ as different government policies emerge in the region. Bolivia is the country where the struggle between non-profit organizations and the government has been most exposed. At the beginning of the Morales administration, many NGO leaders were included as ministers in the new cabinet (2006–09) in alliance with social movements (Mayorga, 2010, p. 143). Furthermore, as political tensions developed, non-profit organizations and civil society as a whole became divided and took sides either with or against the government and its political projects. Non-profit organizations of the opposition grouped into so-called *Plataformas Ciudadanas* (Citizens’ Platforms). There were several issues that placed a strain on the relationships between the government and NGOs, one of the most important was the TIPNIS project (during October 2019) (Mayorga, personal communication, 2021). This was the government project to develop an important road through the Isiboro-Secure National Park, which is located on indigenous land and triggered marches against the government (Mayorga, 2020, p. 36). This project was contrary to the Morales election platform that declared in favour of indigenous rights. During these tensions and in reply to an opposition’s document subscribed to by some NGOs, vice-president Alvaro García Linera wrote a strong paper against “right-wing NGOism” (García Linera, 2011, p. 12). Later on, this faction of NGOs provided political support to plot against Evo Morales when ‘Civic Committees’ demanded his resignation, which was finally realized on 11 November 2019 (Molina, 2019).

On the reverse angle of the area in the Southern Cone of Latin America, Uruguay stands for stable relationships between the state and civil society organizations. Elections in November 2019 provided a narrow victory to a right-wing coalition after 14 years of a left-wing alliance (Frente Amplio) in office. Although there were political threats from the right-wing government (that supported a projected omnibus law to cut down services) towards NGOs, apparently the solid democratic institutions did not allow it to succeed. International funds for NGOs are scarce and almost all available funds are from state-funded social service delivery programmes towards non-profit

organizations that sympathize with the government in office. Predictably, funds will shift towards conservative non-profits – mainly foundations – but always in the calm institutional atmosphere so characteristic of Uruguayan democracy (Silva and Roba, 2021). Private and international philanthropy is very scarce and the main funds are provided by state programmes (Bettoni and Cruz, 2013, p. 1). Uruguay has a well-known umbrella organization for NGOs called ANONG which provides information and facts to members and the public.<sup>2</sup>

Chilean non-profits also depend a lot on their relationship with the state. Since 2011 an important law (number 20500) assigned permanent funds from the national budget to non-profit organizations (Consejo Nacional, 2017). This law also established that there should be a National Council with six representatives from non-profit organizations who rotate every two years. This Council supervises the flow of funds. There are also Regional Councils with the same mechanism in each of the 16 regions. Forty-one per cent of the income received by non-profits in 2017 came from different state-funded programmes and subsidies (Irrarrázaval et al., 2019, p. 26). The same authors found out that income for CSOs during 2015 was the equivalent of USD 3.581 million, of which 49 per cent was provided by governmental sources, that is: USD 1.754 million (Irrarrázaval, Streeter et al., 2017a, p. 64).

Closer to the Bolivian scenario than to the ones of Uruguay or Chile, Argentinian relationships between the state and non-profit organizations are more ideologically biased. There is no unified umbrella organization representing all non-profits, such as in Uruguay or other countries. During the Menem administration (1989–99) identified with the ‘Washington Consensus’,<sup>3</sup> state programmes were delegated to friendly NGOs under the axiom of ‘Shrinking the State is widening the Nation’. The Macri administration (2015–19) went even further by promising better legislation for non-profit organizations, but did not deliver at all. It maintained ridiculous tax exemptions for donations (that had been reduced during the Menem administration) and did not provide simple administrative reforms requested by a coalition of civil society organizations (Coalición de la Sociedad Civil, 2016). The Fernandez/de Kirchner administration that took office in December 2019 provided significant funds to *social movements* responding to social urgencies already started during the Macri administration. However, there is no formal institutional organism to link the state and non-profits providing strategic policies and accountability. There is no stable state policy, even though sporadically there is a pendulum approach depending on government ideological sways from right to left or vice versa, mainly providing funds through the ministry of social development. Non-profit organizations from different origins and territories provided great

support during the Covid-19 pandemic, but recognition from the state in the long run remains uncertain (Rofman, 2021).

## Philanthropy and accountability

Although local philanthropy in South America is way below North American standards (including the USA, Canada and Mexico), there is some funding from private philanthropy to non-profit organizations. What has been reduced significantly is international private philanthropy mainly from US foundations which were important agencies in the region, like the Ford Foundation and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. They had provided many grants since the early years of the twentieth century (Marsal, 2005, p. 52). This withdrawal had different causes; the main one being that most of the countries in the Southern Cone became middle-income economies according to World Bank metrics.<sup>4</sup> Even Bolivia, which in the early 2000s was still a low-income country, has grown by enlarging its per capita income index. The paradox is that these Latin American countries have at least one thing in common: inequality regarding income distribution. They still have huge areas of extreme poverty that would certainly require private philanthropy from international sources.

Some European political party foundations are still active in the region, like the German party-linked Friedrich Ebert, Konrad Adenauer and Rosa Luxemburg foundations. International institutions such as the European Union and the International Development Bank (IDB) also finance projects, but only a few non-profits have the professional capacity to meet their accountability standards and requirements. Local private donations vary significantly depending on state policies of tax exemption according to a 2020 study in Latin America covering 16 countries:

We discovered, for example, that the allowed percentage of deduction on rent or income tax varies from each country of Latin America; it goes from 1% in Panama to 75% in Uruguay. This represents a great difference as a fiscal stimulus towards donors. (CEMEFI, 2020, p. 23)

Besides fiscal variable benefits, conditions for local philanthropy vary from one country to the other. In a 2019 study of 325 foundations in five Latin American countries, scholars found a considerable growth of new granting foundations since 2000, mainly corporate and family foundations. Though private funds did not exceed state-provided funds, it suggests a dynamic growth of new phil-

anthropic actors with the exception of Argentina where only few foundations were created after 2010 (Berger et al., 2019, p. 20).

There are more issues concerning private philanthropy. One is how the money is used. Are the grants used for causes that support social change and strengthening citizens' rights, or on the contrary, are they mainly used for underpinning the status quo (Thompson, 2021)? Given the emergencies caused by the pandemic, have funders in the region reacted swiftly by increasing funds and loosening their bureaucratic procedures?

Another important policy issue is the registration of donations, both international and national, private and state funded. Accountability is undoubtedly linked to solid and transparent information provision by state agencies and registries. Countries vary with registries and public information is better available in Chile and Uruguay than Argentina, which has no public registry of grants and donations. Figures from the Chilean tax agency suggest that USD 250 million were donated in Chile during 2015, but there are no reliable data for the other countries in the region as tax agencies are very reluctant to provide that information (Irrarázaval, Streeter et al., 2017b, p. 58).

Similar inaccuracy exists with the registration of the number of non-profit organizations in each country. The 1995 Johns Hopkins Comparative Study, a pioneer comparative research that included 45 countries in the world and six from Latin America, obtained accurate records on this. But since then, scholars have had a hard task to obtain more recent figures on non-profits. If one succeeds at all to access some kind of official record, it is hard to know how reliable this is.

There has been a persistent effort from civil society institutions in the region to strengthen accountability: from the Instituto de Cooperación y Desarrollo (ICD) in Uruguay to the Centro de Políticas Públicas of the Chilean Catholic University. However, transparency still has not rooted in the region nor spread to other countries where registries are unreliable. ICD has started early with an accountability initiative (*Rendición de Cuentas*) producing several research products; the most recent one is the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) as part of the Open Government Partnership (OGP).<sup>5</sup> With support from the IDB they produced a mapping of non-profit organizations in Uruguay.<sup>6</sup> This tool gives an approximation of how many non-profit organizations exist in Uruguay and what their mission is. Previously, ICD produced many documents describing the relevance and structure of non-profit organizations in Uruguay (Bettoni and Cruz, 1999).

A similar mapping exercise was done in Chile by the Center for Public Policies of the Catholic University in Chile, published in both Spanish (2017) and in English (2018) (Irrarrázaval et al., 2018).

## **A new research agenda for Latin America's civil societies**

Although funding for research is scarce and university programmes focused on civil society have diminished, coordination between research centres and colleagues in the region should provide new opportunities for fresh research. The good news is that two new research centres have been founded: the Centro de Filantropía e Inversiones Sociales (CEFIS) at the Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez in Chile<sup>7</sup> and the Observatorio de ONG-UBA at the Universidad de Buenos Aires in Argentina.<sup>8</sup> Although a major step forward, many scholars agree that there is still a lack of solid research on civil society in the Latin American region.

In order to establish our research priorities, we should ask ourselves: What are the new issues in which civil society organizations are participating? What have been the consequences, results and impacts on society and the CSOs? There are several issues that should be looked at by scholars of the region in the near future.

*First:* Civil society organizations' involvement and support to their societies during the Covid-19 pandemic, an emergency that seems to last forever. There are many examples of creative initiatives in which non-profit organizations played an important role in supporting needy areas in countries of the Southern Cone (Rieiro et al., 2020; CLACSO, 2021). Some active agents of social movements and civil society organizations who, despite recognizing that during the emergency coordination with local and national state authorities has improved, are sceptical about the aftermath of the pandemic, assuming that we go 'back to business as usual'. That would imply not to recognize the role of non-profit organizations and social movements on the ground, nor to maintain a coordination with state authorities on actions and policies. In Argentina, academic centres (UNGS-FLACSO-CEUR/CONICET) and civil society organizations on the ground created in July 2020 a network called Territorios en Acción (Territories in action).<sup>9</sup> The purpose was to coordinate actions of civil society organizations and make them visible during the pandemic in vulnerable areas of cities and populations. The academic centres expressed concerns that when conditions returned to normal, policies and actions by national and local state actors should continue to allow active

participation of non-profit organizations, not only in emergency situations as experienced currently.

The new role of civil society organizations in the suburbs of Buenos Aires was analysed by Adriana Rofman from the University of Gral. Sarmiento during previous social crises that paved the way for the present situation:

The deep structural changes that Argentina has experienced in recent decades are having a notorious impact on the relations between the State and society. Reality shows the growing withdrawal of state participation in the issues that have to do with the living conditions of the population – health, education, jobs, food, social security, etc. ... Faced with this panorama, many analyses point at the new role of civil society organizations, channelling initiatives to meet their growing needs. (Rofman, 2002)

*Second:* Social upheavals by spontaneous movements, particularly in Chile and Colombia, indicated not to consider established non-profit organizations as useful tools to promote social change. Social networks mobilizing hundreds of (usually young) activists have informal rather than legal structures. This places more 'traditional' non-profit organizations in a rather awkward situation: they promote 'regular social change' and defend citizens' rights but are not at the centre of events that demand fundamental change. The description by Gonzalo Delamaza and Danae Mlynarz Puig of events in the massive Chilean demonstrations is quite revealing:

In the first place, these are mass mobilizations, especially of young people, in public spaces, mainly in regional and intermediate capital cities. Its duration is variable, its rhythm episodic and its motivations varied. The mobilization does not respond to singular calls nor does it have the backing of national or large organizations. The modality of greater horizontality and low formalization, of the assembly type with the presence of spokesmen who rotate in their positions, which the students inaugurated, has been socialized towards some other movements (feminism, territorial movements). (...) Beyond that, collectives and all kinds of informal groups have proliferated, dedicated to specific issues of the most diverse type, the vast majority without legal formalization. (...) Perhaps the most interesting feature in relation to the present and future of CSOs in Chile refers to the growing disengagement between the dynamics of organization, those of social movements and those of collective action in the public space. (Delamaza Escobar and Mlynarz Puig, 2021, p. 11)

There is a similarity with events in Argentina during the December 2001 riots and uprisings, where citizens shouted: *que se vayan todos* ('they all must go'). Repression by security forces (ordered by former president De la Rúa) generated 27 deaths and many injured. Already then, many analysts observed that traditional non-profit organizations were completely absent in a popular rebellion that practically had no leadership, being a quite horizontal movement

with ‘neighbour assemblies’. A qualitative study by Ines Pousadela gathered testimonies reflecting on that situation:

I saw how other people confronted (the police) ... the ‘motoqueros’ (moto drivers) ... the ‘piquetero movement’ without a political party. ... It was a rebellion in which lower class young people participated ... It was a popular rebellion but basically a rebellion without leadership ... (Pousadela, 2017, p. 13)

Studying this kind of ‘new associationism’ is an important issue for immediate research. In particular, what draws the attention of scholars is the departure of formal representations and not recognizing any leadership, not even well-known non-profit organizations that have always advocated for citizens’ rights and social change. As Andrés Thompson points out in a recent interview:

When we speak of civil society we have to speak more of civil society in general and not only of formally constituted organizations. There is this new phenomenon of numerous informal organizations that fight for rights, and achieve their aims such as the law of interruption of pregnancy in Argentina and other rights in the region. In general, they are promoted by young women, through internet tools, networks, etc. (Thompson, personal communication, 10 June 2021)

In addition, these organizations manage to carry out their actions by obtaining funds via small contributions from many different people, rather than from traditional institutionalized philanthropy. It is called *community philanthropy*, or in the words of Andrés Thompson: “they get funds from below the earth”. In a survey by Florencia Roistein and Andrés Thompson with 383 women activists in Latin America, the lack of support from institutionalized philanthropy for these movements and grassroots organizations was confirmed:

Organization’s resource mobilization is fundamentally monetary and local, and mainly for projects: The data collected on resource mobilization provides a clear picture of the local efforts made by these young activists to raise funds from their communities and countries, in contrast with the idea that international funding is key to the existence and functioning of their organizations. (Roistein and Thompson, 2020, p. 49)

*Third:* The international anti-laundering and anti-terrorism legislation obliges institutionalized non-profit organizations to comply with burdensome paperwork, even though often they do not have the human resources to deliver. During the November 2018 G20 Summit in Buenos Aires, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) organized a high-level meeting with the Financial Task Force and several representatives of civil society. In that meeting the effects on organizations of the new legislation were identified. Excerpt: “Practices such as bank de-risking can lead to debilitating delays in



or even denials of financial services to civil society organizations, based on the unfounded belief that they are at high risk of financing terrorism.”<sup>10</sup>

Research on these effects should be continued and tracked, as their application backfires the expected increase in accountability which is widening the gap between a few well-funded NGO and hundreds of smaller ones. This is another example of ‘shrinking space’ for civil society organizations.

*Fourth:* Why are there so few academic programmes (undergraduate or graduate) to train professionals, when there are thousands of civil society organizations that obviously need staff to manage their organizations? There are several examples of programmes that have been set up and later closed down. A comparative research project needs to be initiated, interviewing academics to provide knowledge for future initiatives to establish training programmes that may be required for CSO board members.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have tried to summarize recent trends and events of civil society organizations in the Southern Cone of Latin America. It is meant to be shared with colleagues, scholars and practitioners, hoping that this chapter will add to future debate and action. There are still many unanswered questions for deepening research: recent support provided by civil society organizations (in coordination with state health policies) during the Covid-19 pandemic may have provided better relationships; or will we go back to the usual ‘shrinking space’ for CSOs/NGOs? What is happening to ‘spontaneous’, informal, and networking social movements that are not relying on traditional and formal CSOs/NGOs for claiming their rights, as in the past? What are the reasons for these changes? What happened to civil society organizations in the recent social and political upheavals in Bolivia and Chile? Did they take sides with or against their governments, similar to divisions in society? Or did they avoid participation with governments, aiming for more stable conditions and not supporting mobilizations claiming social change? These are only some of the many questions that need to be answered in future academic research on civil society issues in Latin America.

## NOTES

1. I spoke via video conferences with: Anabel Cruz – Uruguay (2 July 2021); Gonzalo Delamaza-Escobar – Chile (5 July 2021); Ignacio Irarrazaval Llona – Chile (22 June 2021); Fernando Mayorga – Bolivia (15 June 2021); Andrés Thompson – Uruguay (10 June 2021).
2. See <https://www.anong.org.uy/>.
3. The Washington Consensus was a very popular recipe for right-wing conservative governments in Latin America during the 1990s, coined by Williamson (1989), mainly based on privatizing all state-managed programmes and properties.
4. See <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?end=2020&locations=XO-XP&start=2020&view=bar> (accessed 18 August 2021).
5. See [http://www.lasociedadcivil.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/10/Uruguay\\_Design\\_Report\\_2018-2020.pdf](http://www.lasociedadcivil.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/10/Uruguay_Design_Report_2018-2020.pdf).
6. See <http://www.mapeosociedadcivil.org/organizaciones/>.
7. See <https://cefis.uai.cl/>.
8. See <https://obsonguba.sociales.uba.ar/>.
9. See <https://politicaspublicas.flasco.org.ar/territoriosenaccion/>.
10. See <https://www.icnl.org/our-work/latin-america-and-the-caribbean-program/enhancing-international-norms> (accessed 23 August 2021).

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# 21

## The future of civil society research in China, Hong Kong and Vietnam

*Mark Sidel*

### Introduction

From the vantage point of 2021, it's difficult to be optimistic about the future of civil society research in three jurisdictions with authoritarian governments – China, Hong Kong and Vietnam. Civil society is significantly contained and restricted in each of those areas, and in each of them the restrictions are growing, not shrinking. Activists are regularly harassed, surveilled, and in some cases detained, arrested and imprisoned. How can this not affect and limit research on civil society?

And yet, there are glimpses of some hope. Perhaps paradoxically, those rays of hope may occasionally be more pronounced in China than in Hong Kong and Vietnam.

But first, and not unrelated to these issues, why is someone who is not Chinese, not from Hong Kong, and not Vietnamese writing this chapter on the future of civil society research in China, Hong Kong and Vietnam? Here I am obeying the editors' request for some “[b]rief positionality of [my] involvement in civil society research, and where [my] pre-dispositions lie.”

I have worked on civil society research, particularly on nonprofit–state relations and philanthropic issues in China and Vietnam for several decades. More recently I have been closely following the situation in Hong Kong after China took draconian steps to control Hong Kong in mid-2020, especially through the enactment and enforcement of the National Security Law applicable to Hong Kong (ICNL, 2020). I have long followed the work of civil society researchers in China, Hong Kong and Vietnam, and collaborated with some of those impressive scholars. And I have long been concerned about the future of research in this important field in those jurisdictions.

Let me discuss each of these areas in turn, with a focus on:

- Key ideas, main debates, significant relevant publications and unresolved issues.
- Observations about changes in civil society in over the past years with expectations for the period to come.
- Suggestions about the content of a future civil society research agenda.<sup>1</sup>

## **China: More third sector, less civil society – and that goes for research too**

The situation for civil society in China is both grim and, in a different way, occasionally vibrant. That may sound contradictory, and perhaps it is. But I believe it is accurate in how we should view the situation in the People's Republic.

First, since this distinction informs my discussion of China, Hong Kong and Vietnam, it may be worthwhile to very briefly set out the distinction between civil society and the third sector. In work and research on civil society we address the relationship between citizens and the state, sometimes but not always through the organizations that citizens form.

The study of the third sector is something different – it can be considerably more technical, and even feel smaller, in the sense that it deals with particular issues in how non-governmental organizations have dealt with operational and policy issues, and how the state has impacted those problems. Sometimes when we discuss the nonprofit sector, we are referring more to this idea of a third sector than to the more political concept of civil society, and that goes for discussion of research as well.

There is, of course, some considerable overlap between the two. But this distinction may help in thinking about the past and future paths for research in these authoritarian countries. And, I should point out, these are almost entirely internally generated policies and histories of research in China, Hong Kong and Vietnam. Foreign funding, while interested over some decades in third sector and civil society research, particularly in China, has not substantially changed or influenced the situation substantially in terms of work on the ground – in part because of the care that funders have taken to adapt to Chinese constraints, and the desire not to harm the scholars they support.

Perhaps the primary way in which foreign funding has influenced the situation is in providing for training opportunities for younger Chinese (and to some degree Hong Kong and Vietnamese scholars) outside of their home territories. That training – short-term, master’s doctoral, and even sometime in-country – has had a broadening effect on some scholars and helped enable them to think about broader lines of research.

In one sense, civil society – at least the third sector side of civil society – is vibrant in China. Over the past 25 years, literally hundreds of thousands of nonprofits, charities, foundations and social enterprises have sprung up, often with government encouragement, to meet the social services and welfare needs of China’s poor, working class and lower middle class. Although comparisons are difficult to make, the rate of growth of nonprofit organizations in China has likely been faster than anywhere else in Asia since the 1990s, and perhaps anywhere else in the world.

At the same time, the prospects for civil society in China are currently fairly grim. China knows exactly what it wants from its nonprofit sector (third sector), and civil society isn’t it. I sometimes title or preface talks I give on China by saying, “more third sector, less civil society.” That is exactly the Chinese Communist Party’s goal.

China seeks to mold and grow, not eliminate, its nonprofit sector. It seeks to mold that sector into supporting the government’s social welfare policies, engaging almost exclusively in the provision of social services in coordination with government policy, and not serving as a base for criticism of the Party and state (including imprisonment and mistreatment of civil society activists). China wants and actively seeks to shape a compliant and service-oriented third sector, not an assertive and independent civil society.<sup>2</sup>

Those Party and state policies toward civil society in China deeply affect civil society research in China, a field that is, as the reader might now expect, both vibrant and grim. The vibrancy is apparent to anyone attending an international nonprofit, philanthropy, social enterprise or civil society academic conference in recent years – Chinese scholars of the third sector, both based in China and based outside China, number at least in the hundreds and produce reams of research and scholarship, much of it high quality.

China is now a world leader in nonprofit, charity, philanthropic and social enterprise scholarship, with Chinese scholars publishing regularly in the most competitive international journals and in Chinese journals devoted to nonprofit and charity studies within China itself.<sup>3</sup> Most of that work has

been institutional and technical, with focus on governance, specific forms of accountability, fundraising and similar topics.

And yet, in addition to this vibrant research community that cannot be denied, the research situation is also significantly restricted. Just as the Chinese Party and state seek to mold a nonprofit community that is third sector, not civil society, a third sector that focuses on service provision and not advocacy, that cooperates with government rather than criticizing it, Chinese scholars have learned – particularly in the last decade – that there are real limits and real boundaries to civil society research in China.

Most topics centered in civil society advocacy and civil society power are largely off limits to scholars in China today, either because they are directly discouraged in universities or because they are impossible to publish in China. The result is a vibrant but often neutered civil society research community in China that focuses on a range of third sector issues, but is increasingly unable to focus on power and advocacy.

And yet it must be said that Chinese civil society researchers are undertaking valuable work even within the significant constraints in which they operate. To put it in a slightly different way, the conditions that Chinese civil society researchers face also, sometimes, give rise to strategies to pursue broader and sometimes more political topics in their work.

So, in recent years, some civil society intellectuals have even produced work on advocacy, on the complex roles of overseas nonprofit organizations and foundations, on differences between Party and state management of the nonprofit economy, and on other important and complex topics. And some of the more technical topics that Chinese academics and graduate students have focused on bear direct relationships to issues of power and advocacy in a system where the nonprofit sector is dominated by the Party and state.

In particular, in China, research on the depoliticized topic of “social innovation” is generally stripped of references to power and the stifling role of the state over advocacy. And yet social innovation, and the innovative work that nonprofits are doing, themselves or in cooperation with the state, are important entry points into broader questions about the role of civil society and the third sector vis-à-vis the state. And at least some Chinese civil society scholars understand the social innovation research agenda in that way, even if they cannot always explicitly say that in their work.



So, for example, recent work on fundraising and donations in China, while often highly technical given the intricate system of rules that governs fundraising in China, implicitly raises important issues of nonprofit power and state control.<sup>4</sup> So too does important work – work with international ramifications – on the purchase and contracting of social services by the Chinese state. That topic too, while often highly technical, raises significant questions about the role of the charitable sector vis-à-vis the state, and the degree to which the state “buying” the work of the nonprofit community weakens or strengthens that sector’s independence, autonomy and skills.<sup>5</sup>

Over the past decade, we have seen that the work of some more independent scholars of civil society in China can be stifled. In a few cases those individuals have been unable to continue the research they had planned, and have been unable to leave China for academic work, sometimes for long periods of time. Yet for the most part such individuals continue in scholarly employment, perhaps waiting for a day when a broader range of civil society research – not just research on service-providing third sector organizations – may be permitted.

Let me also point out that in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) itself, the limitations on civil society research are political, not based on resources. There are hundreds of nonprofit researchers in China today. Many centers and projects have been funded in the past two decades. But their work is constrained in some cases, and, from the vantage point of writing in early 2022, the prospects for liberalization of that civil society research regime look dim.

### **Hong Kong: The rapidly emerging restrictions on academic life, including civil society research**

We are all affected by conditions when we write, and so it is impossible not to be affected by the exceptionally difficult situation for civil society research in Hong Kong as I write this in the fall and winter of 2021–22. In the past eighteen months China has substantially taken over Hong Kong’s political and university life, bringing fear to academics and many others as detentions and trials have begun, and civil society organizations have closed, since the enactment and enforcement of China’s National Security Law for Hong Kong in the summer of 2020.<sup>6</sup>

The repression of university and intellectual life in Hong Kong is quickening. Many scholars are leaving Hong Kong when they can. Others are reworking

research plans, or moving to less controversial fields of study. Major research efforts to study and help reshape Hong Kong's nonprofit regulatory environment have been shelved. Even those in Hong Kong who choose to stay within the field of civil society research are shifting, at least in some cases, to more technical areas of research such as evaluation or governance, in an attempt to remain within the field but not run afoul of the increasingly strident and repressive authorities.

So, one cannot be optimistic about the future of civil society research in Hong Kong. But I cannot be entirely pessimistic as well. Civil society research in Hong Kong has a long and rich history, and the impetus to carry it out cannot be fully extinguished by authoritarian policies and laws emanating from Beijing. At some point, we must hope, and I know Hong Kong colleagues hope, that conditions will re-emerge for creative, daring, critical scholarship on civil society in Hong Kong. It will, however, not likely be soon.

### **Vietnam: Political, resource and personnel constraints**

In Vietnam, the future of civil society research is somewhat clouded, but for somewhat different reasons. In recent years, there has been a flowering of creative, imaginative, important research on civil society in Vietnam by Vietnamese scholars. As examples, let me cite the work of Dr. (Ms.) Anh Vu among several others that I could also mention.

Dr. Vu's work on the complexities of nongovernmental organization (NGO) activism in Vietnam (Vu, 2019), and her moving and thick case study of the movement to save Hanoi's trees, a key symbol of the city for its residents (Vu, 2017), is civil society research of a high order. What we see from this work and the work of other civil society scholars in Vietnam, is also occurring in other fields, in which Vietnamese scholars have begun making significant marks in their fields in the social sciences.<sup>7</sup>

But despite this terrific work I cannot be entirely optimistic about the future of civil society research in Vietnam. Some of the best of Vietnam's civil society researchers find it easier and freer to work abroad than in Vietnam. The conditions for excellence in research on civil society in Vietnam are considerably constrained for scholars whose primary affiliations are with Vietnamese universities and research institutions. This is not just because of political limitations, though that is sometimes an issue. Those restrictions often have more to do with bureaucratic and resource limits; with very heavy other professional

burdens; and with the lack of an intellectual community for some civil society scholars.

Those restrictions may begin to improve in Vietnam over time, but numbers of scholars and resources for civil society research remain a significant problem. The number of working civil society scholars in Vietnamese institutions or working abroad is still perhaps measured in the low dozens, compared to the hundreds or thousands in China (of course, a much larger country). So even if political and bureaucratic constraints on research improve in Vietnam the relative lack of people in the field and resource constraints will remain a significant issue.

## Concluding reflections

All of these issues in China, Hong Kong and Vietnam implicate the theme of “knowledge and power” that our editors have raised with us. When the production of knowledge must bend to authoritarian power, as it does at various levels in China, Hong Kong and Vietnam, the state is truly the guiding power in the production of civil society knowledge and the field is weaker for that power.

In earlier years and decades, foreign funds provided a kind of counterweight to the state’s domination of knowledge production in the civil society research arena in China and Vietnam. Foundations, UN agencies, Nordic aid agencies, the EU and others were substantial supporters of an expansion of civil society research in China and Vietnam.

Those days have largely ended. China no longer seeks foreign funding for such purposes, and discourages the domestic research institutions that seek it on their own through draconian and highly complex legal requirements.<sup>8</sup> Vietnam has also begun to raise barriers for foreign funding of academic activities.<sup>9</sup> These constraints are now a very significant fact of life for academic institutions and scholars in China and Vietnam, but I should point out that they are occurring elsewhere in the Asia Pacific region, including India<sup>10</sup> and many other countries.<sup>11</sup>

The result is that the state, in China, Vietnam and beyond, is now the monopolist power in the funding and support of civil society research. That position, combined with intensifying political restrictions on civil society research,

means that we are in a dark time for research on civil society in China, Hong Kong and Vietnam.

In the longer term, however, what might a broader research agenda that focuses somewhat more on civil society under conditions of authoritarianism look like? Are there ways of expanding the research agenda beyond more technical and less political issues of the third sector?

Our colleagues in China, Hong Kong and Vietnam are, to some degree, already doing that, as I mention above. In China, in particular, academics working formally on the third sector are adept at obliquely, indirectly, raising questions of power, the state and civil society even in difficult times. They can sometimes do so more directly in overseas publications than in domestic journals and books, for example.

And, when political times are easier, they are often able to approach issues of power, the state and civil society more directly. Caution prevents me from referencing such examples under current conditions, particularly in China and Hong Kong, but close observers of the student of civil society, particularly in China, will recognize issues and themes raised in less constrained times that are not possible today.

In that sense, perhaps, scholars of civil society in the authoritarian environments of China, Hong Kong and Vietnam are not so different from the strategists of some NGOs when faced with strategic difficulties and opposition to raising issues of power. In the institutional context, Alan Fowler has called this, in Michael Edwards's description, "the 'onion-skin' strategy for NGOs – a solid core of concrete practice (either direct project implementation or support to other organizations and their work), surrounded by successive and inter-related layers of research and evaluation, advocacy and campaigning, and public education."<sup>12</sup>

We see scholars in China, and now in Hong Kong, and to some degree in Vietnam, employing something akin to this strategy – focusing on technical, third sector matters, around a core of questions of power and the state, and awaiting better days when those core questions can come to the fore, in ways that make sense within their own institutional and political contexts and with careful regard for political and academic risk. In that sense, it is well worth supporting third sector research in the knowledge, as well as the hope, that it surrounds and presages more direct focus on civil society research in the decades ahead.

## NOTES

1. These areas have been lightly suggested by the editors as topics for discussion; my fellow chapter authors and I have perhaps honored that suggestion more in the breach than in obedience. Fowler and Biekart would have it no other way.
2. For more on this theme, particularly in the Covid era, see Hu & Sidel (2020).
3. For a sense of the high quality of civil society research in China, albeit under the constraints of the Chinese political system, see the Chinese and English versions of the China Nonprofit Review, published by the leading nonprofit and philanthropy research group at Tsinghua University: [http://iptu.tsinghua.edu.cn/info/qkzz\\_zgpl/1135](http://iptu.tsinghua.edu.cn/info/qkzz_zgpl/1135) and <https://brill.com/view/journals/cnpr/cnpr-overview.xml>.
4. See, for example, in one effort that was published outside China, Hu & Guo (2016).
5. For some examples in this line of work, some published outside China and some within China, see Zhao & Wu (2016); Lin, Yin & Li (2020); Martinez, Qu & Howell (2021).
6. See, among other writings on these issues, McLaughlin (2021).
7. In law, for example, see Son (2020), among other leading works.
8. On these developments, particularly since the promulgation of the Overseas NGO Law of the PRC in 2016 (effective January 2017), see Sidel (2021).
9. For an overview of restrictions on the work of international NGOs and foundations in Vietnam, including recent regulations, see, e.g., Council on Foundations, *Nonprofit Law in Vietnam* (June 2021) at <https://www.cof.org/country-notes/nonprofit-law-vietnam>. *Decree No. 80/2020/ND-CP of the Government of July 8, 2020, Issuing Regulations on Management and Use of Foreign Non-governmental Aid*, increases the constraints on foreign funding by these groups.
10. The best overview of the key legal barrier to foreign funding in India, including for academic research, is Agarwal (2021). See also Srinath (2020).
11. For more on these developments and other constraints on civil society around the Asia Pacific region, see Sidel & Moore (2019).
12. Michael Edwards, Have NGOs made a difference? From Manchester to Birmingham with an elephant in the room (Global Poverty Research Group), at <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.128.9233&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

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# PART IV

## Conclusions





# 22

## Civil society research: future perspectives

*Alan Fowler and Kees Biekart*

### Introduction

This volume came about in a way that creates inevitable overlaps and problems of comparability in identifying future research agendas. What this plurality offers, however, is an opportunity to search for underlying and connecting themes. Put another way, this final chapter does not summarise the ideas for research agendas in each chapter. Rather, it takes a bird's-eye view of what can be discerned as recurrent perspectives and shared (aspects of) narratives. In this respect, conclusions highlight ideas and agendas emerging from the sectional divisions which are relied on to make the content more accessible for a reader. In other words, conclusions themselves are not 'sectionalised'.

The Introduction (Chapter 1, Biekart and Fowler) referred to 'themes' or areas of research interest coming from the webinars. This concluding chapter differs by teasing out what the contents of this volume point to as future research themes, together with what their content could look like. They are not intended to be predictive. At best this chapter provides indications of where research concerns, interests and energy might lie, which may not, however, correspond to where dedicated or mainstream research investment is heading.

A future research agenda requires attention to time frames. In most chapters this dimension is implied but seldom clearly set out. What do their implications suggest? First, a reasonable assumption is that the context-setting meta picture of geo-political realignments with their uneven and non-linear effects are *the* future. Within this expectation, some authors are grappling with issues, such as language and de-colonising a civil society lexicon, that are already decades old and, unless the locus of research shifts, may remain so. Others are aiming at advocacy into policy-making processes which are sensitive to political cycles and institutional reforms that can be measured in terms of a decade. Yet others are aiming at altering perspectives and advancing new narratives,

such as emergent civic agency, within academia that can move more quickly. In sum, the future for civil society research is many.

However, a speculative reading of the chapters and where energy lies, could translate into researchers in developing countries continuing to take initiatives into their own hands by establishing new research centres in or alongside academia. Perhaps even more speculative is that researchers in 'EuroAmerica' will actually start to see the value of applying the concept of civil society to their own settings, displacing non-profit, third sector and similar institutional frameworks that do not adequately resonate with the political moment where incivility challenges civic norms not just episodically, but structurally as well. One example is the *gilets jaunes* spontaneously expressing sentiments that still live in the polity, albeit no longer on the streets.

One of the main messages is that the future of research on civil society will be more openly politically sensitive and potentially riskier for those undertaking the effort (Fowler & Biekart, 2020, p. 7). Unlikely is a repeat of Western-inspired, globally oriented and orchestrated 'grand' research undertakings of the past unless, that is, the subject is sufficiently apolitical. An example might be the call for a global, comparative study of individual civic agency in terms of an (apolitical) behaviour of personal generosity (Wiepking, 2021, p. 200). If 'big narrative' large-scale international empirical research projects are probably not the case, future efforts are more likely to be aggregations of national data, and grounded studies driven by individuals or as self-organised groups that may be linked through national or regional structures and professional platforms. Consequently, it makes more sense to speak about research agendas in the plural.

Our review of chapters in terms of their research themes suggests that, while much future work will grapple with ongoing issues in both pre-existing and additional ways, there are emerging areas inviting advance in this field of study.

## Future research agendas

The following sections put forward elements of future research agendas for civil society and what they might contain. By 'theme' we mean a relatively coherent alignment of ideas, perspectives or topics, and justifications for them. That there are connections between themes should be apparent from the, often, multiple viewpoints put forward in each chapter. For example, Chapter 6 by Ali Bakir Hamoudi and Chapter 7 by Susan Appe, speak to the potential

'misuse' of mapping. In other words, the issue of in whose interests and what purpose do civil society researchers serve is likely to be an abiding concern. Their cautions reflect a somewhat naïve view of how research would be used, which does not fit future scenarios. A consequence is that researchers need to be (more) sensitive in terms of their own ethics.

Future agendas for civil society research can be summarised in terms of (a) the rules of the game and conceptual issues when studying this field; (b) taking a deeper historical approach to better locate and interpret civil society in national contexts; (c) giving specific attention to contending norms and values informing self-mobilisation by citizens; associated with (d) emergent forces and forms of civic-driven associational life.

### The study of civil society

Whatever the agenda will be – with examples to follow – studying civil society will have to grapple with issues old and new. One, embracing both, is an updated geo-politics of finance for researching civil society. In the context of development cooperation, much has been written about the priorities and practices of the public and private entities funding civil society organisations and their activities. However, there is scant research on the governance of financing civil society research itself. Chapter 2 by David Sogge goes an insightful and comprehensive way to filling this gap. Adoption of an historical perspective shows linkages between the provision of research resources and the financiers' political concerns that extended to (inter)national infrastructure infused by the interests and logics of the funder. Chapter 8 by Antoine Buyse and Verónica Gómez speaks to and illustrates this issue in terms of the protection of human rights. A situation where dependency on an official funder to take on the task of critical oversight of governments providing resources creates a structural paradox, inviting analytic restraint or self-censorship.

An update to funders' politics as driver – be they public or private – will be seen in ways co-determining what research resources are made available to who for what ends. One perspective will be more governments constraining or preventing their domestic research community from accessing external finance for topics considered sensitive, for example encroaching on issues of sovereignty. In parallel, or complementary, domestic finance of research on civil society will be guided towards aiding government policy development and implementation. As voiced by Mark Sidel (Chapter 21), one prospect is that official research resourcing will be directed towards apolitical third sector issues rather than political civil society concerns, such as human rights. In itself, a political choice. To the extent that it was ever the case, the scope

for researchers' autonomy in determining what is to be investigated, why, and to what end is likely to become more limited, including in democratic dispensations.

With its potential dilemmas, this suggests a future 'pragmatic' financing which consciously expands the notion of 'research' beyond that being undertaken by a theoretically informed, objective and rigorous academia to include the systematic gaining and interpretation of evidence of civic agency by many parties with multiple types of resources. That is, an orientation to actively pursue collaborative research that is less susceptible to the utilitarian needs of the existing funding governance landscape. Such a perspective points towards adopting a network-based approach to knowledge generation about how civic agency plays out and why.

Returning to a concern about mapping in terms of possible risks to those who are doing so voiced by Ali Bakir Hamoudi (Chapter 6) is the danger of empirical distortions to the lived reality of civil society as the associational life of citizens by reliance on commonly flawed and incomplete official data. Given the political times and prospects, a concern is about the merits or otherwise of, as an instrument of statehood, standardising evidence for statistical treatment (Salamon, Haddock & Toepler, 2022) of phenomena that are highly contextualised and not representative of the global diversity of nation statehood as practised. Many chapters suggest that an assumption that such enumeration is *a priori* in the interest of civil society needs to be problematised.

Such a research issue is compounded by a common elision between and equiv-  
alencing of civil society with non-profit organisations – often referred to as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Susan Appe, Chapter 7). It will be beholden on those studying in this field to avoid such epistemological dexterity. The more so because a major challenge for future research is to get below the radar of the 'formal' and statistically malleable to the real life of how people exert collective agency as well as its virtual emergence referred to below. The complex demands on methods to do so is both real and inviting.

Another continuing agenda for research in this field is to find a lexicon and vocabulary which is not almost exclusively imbued with EuroAmerican pre-  
cepts and assumptions about how nation states are configured, function and governed. Ironically, the concept of civil society is seldom encountered in public discourse or language in EuroAmerican countries themselves. The term is for export by aid mechanisms and similar means and is seldom for domestic consumption, hence creating a sort of research enclave. Chapter 3 by Patricia Mendonça speaks directly to this problem in terms, for example, of defini-

tions, as does Pablo Marsal Baraldi for a number of Latin American countries (Chapter 20) who traces the infiltration of contending labels and terminologies to global surveys. Latin America grapples with undoing a legacy of contending imposed vocabularies for research and interpretation that poorly resonate with indigenous perspectives that inform an emancipatory, post-colonial logic. The general point is to add energy to a research agenda that seeks to ‘de-colonise’ the civil society lexicon.

Also apparent is that countries governed along fundamentalist or theocratic lines and principles do not acknowledge civil society as an expression of civic agency. The concept does not fit into their understanding of statehood. Consequently, using current language and conceptualisation, the prospect of expanding civil society research into these jurisdictions is far from encouraging. But this cannot be equated with the idea that citizens do not, in some way exert agency as, for example, observed in organised protests in Iran.

### Norms and values

A recurrent topic is one of future research dedicated to understanding and explaining the advance of uncivil groups and deviant civil society: where it is occurring, how is it being expressed, by who and why (now)? (See Chapter 19 by Galia Chimiak for Poland; Chapter 5 by Roseanne Mirabella and W. King Mott for the United States; Chapter 4 by Mário Alves for Brazil.) As a research topic, incivility is not new (Anheier, 2007; Monga, 2009). But its significance has been masked by the implicit assumption of civility – fairness and tolerance of difference – as a characteristic of civil society itself, with respect for human rights as a ‘natural’ corollary. Such values are assumed to inherently emerge, justifying its promotion (Kopecký & Mudde, 2008). A future research agenda cannot rely on this assumption.

This conclusion implies not just calling for a more explicit inclusion of the normative basis of a research initiative but for dedicated study on the relationship between the effects of uncivil behaviour in democratic and autocratic political dispensations. This is not just an issue of how types of regimes respond to uncivility, but also what occurs within civil society, for example a (deep) fracturing of the social order and contract. What is it that makes a society resilient, or not, to authoritarian advances which tap into contentions stemming from deeply held values that emerge in (violent) intolerance (Mário Alves, Chapter 4)? Such an agenda can no longer principally look for uncivility in capital cities and on the streets (Mirabella and King Mott, Chapter 5), but also in the ether (Anderson et al., 2013). An implicit future research agenda is to disentangle

and categorise types of incivility, their origins, durations and effects both local and (far) beyond.

### Making historiography matter

Inevitably, various aspects of the research topics spoken of above arise in the many chapters that take an historiographic approach (John Godfrey, Chapter 16; Alan Fowler and Shauna Mottiar, Chapter 17; Jenny Paturyan, Chapter 18; Galia Chimiak, Chapter 19; Pablo Marsal Baraldi, Chapter 20; Mark Sidel, Chapter 21), which deepen understandings of causations. To some extent, these efforts point towards Escobar's (2018) call for an 'ontological turn', that is, gaining a deeper understanding of the universe in which identity and collective belonging that informs civic agency arise.

Typically, this type of analysis is used to explain findings from (comparative) landscape-type surveys of civil society and national case studies which accompany them (Salomon, Sokolowski & Haddock, 2017). The latter authors' sample does not include, but insightfully observes that the character of civil society in autocratic or fundamentalist regimes is small, is constrained, has little volunteering and enjoys minimal government support (Salomon, Sokolowski & Haddock, 2017, p. 127). Anticipated trends in global and national governance discussed in the Introduction (Chapter 1) suggest national contexts which are moving in this direction.

This perspective invites a research agenda to explore, for example, the extent to which historiography can explain tendencies towards closing civic space in previously open countries tracked by the CIVICUS Monitor. Examples are the United States, Poland and Hungary, which may signal an interesting 'reversal' feature of social origins theory (Salamon & Anheier, 1998) reflecting the, now discredited, assumption of global convergence towards EuroAmerican systems of governance. To what extent, if at all, do the (four) patterns emanating from the historiographical underpinnings of social origins theory explain speeds and modes of democratic backsliding and similar signs of power shift from citizens to state? Can future civil society research explain the relative tendency and 'recessive' rates between countries and a polity's responses to it (V-Dem Institute, 2022)?

### Reconsidering civic agency

A number of chapters speak to the emergence of different types and aspects of civic agency inviting research attention. We start with volunteering and move

on to emergent features of associationalism and civic action to arrive at the ways in which civil society is being ‘captured’ by regimes.

In respect of voluntarism, Chapter 12 by Lucas Meijs and Stephanie Koolen-Maas points out the advent of volunteering which is exporting instrumentalisation by third parties in the West to other contexts and cultures with different ideas of what volunteering is all about. Is this a new facet of neo-colonialism or an effective transfer of innovation? Or both? Alongside and potentially complementary is the research question posed by Philine van Overbeeke and Malika Ouacha (Chapter 13) that hinges on the dynamics of volunteering associated with migration. Does a cultural affinity of a volunteer with the ‘recipient’ country and cultural-linguistic groups within it offer both more effective transfers of skills, knowledge even, perhaps, affecting the political pre-dispositions of the communities involved? As a type of civic agency, to what extent does emigrational volunteering play a role in political remittances, such as fostering human rights (Piper, 2009)?

Chapter 14 by Cristine Højgaard, brings a growing dimension to volunteering as civic agency through the fluid organisationality resulting from collaboration through social media. This obviously has a bearing on other chapters and themes above in terms of modes of organising for public action, be it civil or otherwise. Amongst others, she points to a research agenda focused on how digital platforms channel and shape decision-making associated with collective agency. She invites reconsideration of the civic agency of volunteers outside of formal organisations and its role in the reform of institutional set-ups, effects that are gaining traction and scale.

An unexpected starting point for reconsidering associationalism is what has emerged in terms of civic agency spawned by the Covid-19 pandemic. Both Chapter 20 by Marsal Baraldi and Chapter 11 by Guijt et al. look at what emerged from and by citizens in response to the effects of a viral infection which left no part of society untouched, but affected the most vulnerable to the greatest degree. In the Southern Cone of Latin America, during the pandemic, spontaneous mobilisations and collaborations across many elements of civil society altered the rules of the game with governments. A research question resulting from this experience in many (other) countries is the extent to which there will (not) be reversion to the pre-existing interfaces and power relations between the governed and those governing that are becoming characterised by a process of shrinking space for civic agency, some aided by Covid-inspired restrictions on civil liberties.

Here, Chapter 15 by Chris McInerney poses this issue in a complementary way in terms of the mechanisms and pathways that civil society organisations can use to gain influence and leverage on public administrations towards more social justice that the disruptions Covid-19 may have provided. His conclusions suggest that (unusual) coalitions of civil society emerging from Covid-19 would be in a better position to do so.

The factor of emergent civic agency stands central to the contribution by Guijt et al. (Chapter 11). Their focus on structural inequalities exposed by Covid-19 have also exposed the significance of local civic action with a potential for altering the civic system that four research priorities can help both ascertain and support. It is beyond the intentions of this chapter to summarise each of these priorities which link, *inter alia*, to issues of whether or not permanent change will result; will new responses to inequality be adopted; will civil society relational innovations be sustained; and what can be learned from the digital enabling that facilitated emergence?

This chapter ties to Chapter 10 by Ana Luísa Silva, which deals directly with civil society as a much-touted source of innovation, particularly in the digital sphere. Here, research needs to take a systemic rather than case view, as well as treating failures as important sources of learning. The general point, aligning with Højgaard (Chapter 14), is that it makes little sense to reconsider civic agency without a digital dimension.

A fourth aspect of reconsidering civic agency – reflected in other chapters – is the mobilisation by ruling regimes of their own civil society organisations (governmental NGOs or GONGOs identified by Buyse and Gómez (Chapter 8) and self-driven anti-humanitarian ‘uncivil’ CSOs observed by Dorothea Hilhorst and Margit van Wessel (Chapter 9). In both cases a research question is: what rights or interests of which groups are such initiatives dedicated to undermining and why? Put another way, be it in long-term development or humanitarian aid, research agendas in the field of civil society need to be sensitive to opposition and resistance from within civil society itself: a major research topic as it emphasises the desired research agenda *of* civil society.

## Closure

A theme linking the themes, so to speak, is that a future agenda for research on civil society can no longer be apolitical, nor normatively inexplicit. Geo-political shifts, contending models of governance that posit different



relations between citizens and states, is a fast-emerging reality. At the time of writing, Russia's armed reconfiguration of Western Europe illustrates a disruption to fundamentals of statehood that civil society research has relied on. Epistemic assumptions that democracy is the natural order – and is here to stay, even where it is currently practised – needs critical questioning, as does how a polity responds.

With this prospect in mind, a concluding reflection is not just about the future of civil society research, but also about researchers themselves. To different degrees, the chapters in this volume reflect an author's positionality which is 'pracademic' (after Posner, 2009). That is, individuals who maintain or have had scholarly positions allied to practical engagement with civil society in its many expressions and grapple with the implications of aligning both roles. A speculative observation is that this combination – and its obstacles – brings a particular value added that has yet to be fully appreciated, with applications in emerging times that are worthy of attention. This related future agenda merits active exploration, too.

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