

# The Critical Issue of State - Society Relations

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## Introduction

The role of the State in economic development in Third World countries is a highly debated issue, not least under influence by prevailing neo-classical thinking and resulting World Bank policies, according to which the credo is being spread, through Structural Adjustment policies and otherwise, that the less state the better. While this notion in particular at the beginning of the Structural Adjustment era had a rather crude and unreserved expression, lately some modifications and nuances have been added.

Although a number of issues are continuously hot, unresolved issues, such as the relation between State policies and functioning and the recent tendencies of democratisation, decentralisation and empowerment of the local population, and, in particular, how these new tendencies may or may not further economic development, the debate on the State has somehow reached a more prospective, and less ideologically biased stand. Now the debate is more focused on the form of the State, accepting that the State actually is there and has a role to play, rather than discussing its size, where the World Bank notion of the minimalist State has been the preferred theme for too long.

A number of factors have contributed to loosening up former more rigid and orthodox notions of how the State in Third World countries should be shaped (read: reduced). Such factors include: the experience from dynamic high-growth countries in South East Asia<sup>1</sup>, where the State often has been extremely active in providing the regulatory incentive structure for local capital

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Christer Gunnarsson's contribution in this volume.

accumulation to evolve but also actively intervened in a great number of other areas; discussions on markets and how they operate, where markets are only expected to fully function when supported by an active state structure<sup>2</sup>; contradictions in the perceptions of the State, where necessary economic adjustments can only be successfully implemented by a relatively strong, capable and accountable State, not a reduced-to-the-bone minimalist State; etc. The quite mixed experiences from structural adjustment programmes, at least in Africa, have also contributed.

The difficulties in analysing the complex relationship between state and society are plenty. Some of these are associated the fact that the European based concepts of state and civil society cannot automatically be used in an African context, due to the much more complex web of institutions existing and the specific historical trajectory which these countries have gone through. It would, however, be too easy to reduce these analytical calamities to a question of heritage and transposition from the outside, however valid. Another part of the difficulty is the way in which the state - civil society relations have been structured in the post-independence period, where the original state-centrist perceptions have been taken over by intense efforts of cutting back the state. While these efforts in rolling back the state are understandable, at least in part, seen in the light of the often proved inefficiency of the state and its neo-patrimonialist character, the often uncritical and unreserved support to the institutions of civil society projected in many donors circles, is less obvious. At least this project is of an immense size, where the institutions of civil society, however fragile, are expected to play a crucial role in transforming the entire society, ensuring a vibrant, viable and to the West acceptable democracy to evolve.

As a corollary to the credo of rolling back the state, focus has shifted towards the institutions of civil society. The institutions of civil society are here expected to partly fill the void left by the retracting State (adhering to the requirements of structural adjustment programmes), while providing essential support to processes of decentralisation, democracy and local governance. How this is going to be realised is not clear. Which institutions

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Granovetter, 1985 who refers to the neo-classical conception of the market as a "fiction", as it cannot unfold only with a minimalist State.

will take over which role? By which means and resources are which institutions expected to fulfil which political and economic roles? Why are the institutions of civil society believed to have a priori superior qualities compared to state institutions, regarding for example accountability, transparency, representativeness, efficiency, etc., etc.?

While such questions belong to the dilemmas which in particular donors are facing when trying to support in practice what economic and political reform programmes tend to prescribe, behind it lies a more basic and fundamental theoretical problem, namely how the difficult state - society relation is to be conceived, conceptualised and analysed.

Simultaneously, it brings to the fore the role - and analysis - of institutions, formal as well as informal, but in particular those institutions which belong to the civil society, rather than the state<sup>3</sup>. For Hyden, as shown in a number of empirical examples, "the informal aspects of organisations are particularly important in Africa. They are evident in the context of political patronage relations, in economic and social interactions at various levels, and in the context of natural resource management, the specific focus of this workshop" (Hyden, this volume). It should, perhaps, be added (also very much in line with Hyden's thinking regarding "the economy of affection") that when other societal mechanisms fail to provide, particularly those associated the state, informal institutions represent important sources of survival and livelihood security, but at the same time these institutions represent important sources of political change. Even in less strained situations informal and formal institutions represent, as pointed out by Sara Berry (1993), more continuous sources of involvement - and investment, in order to situate and position households or household members in anticipation of future gain possibilities, or risk avoiding situations. In the state - society discussion which follows, it is, however, mainly the political role of institutions which is in focus.

The discussion of the role of formal and informal institutions is therefore pertinent, illuminating a problematique anchored

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<sup>3</sup> In the words of Hyden: "The lack of fit between state and society that is so prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa calls for greater attention to institutions evolving from society rather than state", Hyden in this volume.

within the state - society debate, and actualised by the attack on the state and the often uncritical support (not least by donors, but in more ideological overtones by representatives of the neo-classical school as well) of the institutions of civil society.

In the following, the difficult relations between the state and society will be further discussed. This will lead to a discussion of the concept of civil society, followed by an introduction to three different, although connected, approaches to the study of state - society relations, represented by Naomi Chazan, Joel Migdal and Robert Fatton. The aim of this discussion is to get closer to an understanding of how useful the concept of civil society is for the analysis of state - society relations in Africa to-day. Finally, a number of hypotheses concerning how the institutions of civil society may foster or constrain development will be suggested.

## **The Difficult Relations between State and Society**

Part of the problem of conceptualising and analysing state - society relations in Africa is that we are dealing with concepts developed out of the particular historical context of Western development. With colonization, the state was imposed upon Third World countries from the outside, and it may equally be argued that the notion of civil society is not applicable outside European history, as Bayart mentions (Bayart, 1986, p. 111). The result has been that in Africa the relations between state and (civil) society have been artificial, mirrored on the West, but never organically developing as in the West.

As stressed by Médard, African states are a product of a radically different historical trajectory:

"...in Europe, the legal rational state proceeds from the feudal-patrimonial state, it is the reverse which has happened in Africa: an approximation of a legal rational state (in fact, a rather mixed state) was exported to Africa through colonization. It was with the colonization that Africa discovered both the modern bureaucratic and the territorial state" (Médard, in this volume).

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A state imposed from the outside upon structures and institutions which are partly primordial gives rise to what Médard states as the confusion between "the public and private" (or, one could add, between individualism and collectivity, or universalism and relativism), and is at the heart of his patrimonialism conception of the African state: that the main characteristic of African political life is a lack of this distinction, as the public becomes private, and the private means personal. In addition, there is also a lack of differentiation between economic and political resources, as "power is personalized instead of being institutionalized in the sense that no distinction is made between the office and the person in charge of the office" (Médard, in this volume).

While one could maintain that Médard with his patrimonialism concept is generalising too much (although he stresses that the concept is only "an ideal type of reference") and risks being blamed for anything between racism, euro-centrism or moralism, he is dealing with a touchy issue which cannot be hidden, namely that in Africa examples are rampant of "rent seeking", clientelism, despotism, nepotism, etc.

Hyden's "economy of affection" (which he maintains as an even more useful concept nowadays, see Hyden in this volume) strikes similar important veins as Médard. Hyden emphasizes "the informal economic relations embedded in social organizations, typically small units such as communities, small-scale organizations dealing with local issues. It (the concept of "economy of affection") suggested that the key unit of analysis was not class but primary organizations like family, clan, village, tribe or race". And he goes on: "It also included its more specific political articulations: the personalized nature of power relations expressed in patronage and clientelism" (in this volume). Contrary to Médard, Hyden's concept, however, is developed in a broader theoretical framework, and is not suggested as the only way to go <sup>4</sup>. And Hyden is not as easily falling into the moralist trap, as it is the study of institutions, formal as well as informal, which matters, and where the "economy of affection", to him, may be the most important framework, but not exclusively the one.

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<sup>4</sup> Taking this into consideration, Fatton's harsh criticism of Hyden goes somehow beyond the point. See Fatton, 1992, p. 4.

They share, however, a perception of the state as autonomous contrary to the conception of the state as rooted in society. In addition they share a concern for the deplorable and depressing signs of rent-seeking and patrimonial features which can be identified in most African countries, but at the same time encapsulates all problems in Africa (as the neo-classicals do) to state failures, patrimonialism, personal rule and "economy of affection", in isolation and separated from the wider socio-economic context. For Hyden in particular, the concept of class is, for example, termed unuseful, or at least subordinated the concept of "economy of affection". The failure, shared by both, to see the state - society relation in a dynamic, process-oriented perspective, where the state shapes society and vice versa, in a dynamic, often conflictual process, determined by class, political or economic dominance relations, institutional affiliation or "economy of affection" somehow limits the approach of neo-patrimonialism (as Médard prefers to call it).

Beckman expresses similar criticism (and refers to many more expressing the same concern, such as Peter Gibbon and Mahmood Mamdani). According to Beckman (1993, p. 24), in the theories of rent seeking and neo-patrimonialism, personal rule and clientelistic relations are stressed, and state and politics reduced to rent:

"Both sets of theories obscure how power relations and appropriations articulate with social forces, reinforcing or modifying the manner in which social contradictions are resolved. Government spending is reduced to the distribution of patronage, favouring some sectional interests and discriminating against others in a pattern of ethnic or clan politics" (Ibid.).

For Beckman, the function of the state "cannot be reduced to the parasitism of rent-seeking classes, however extensive they may be" (p. 25). What is needed is an analysis of "both national and class contradictions", and "the 'political rent' appropriated by the 'political class' must be discussed in relation to what happens to this 'national rent'".

While the theories of neo-patrimonialism, rent seeking and "economy of affection" may have their limitations, they are nevertheless addressing issues which are there and easily

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identifiable. And these factors dramatically contribute both to the "African predicament" and to the theoretical problems of analysing the state - society relationships.

These and other factors, such as the observed tendency by producers to withdraw from the market and reject state intervention in every area, when the state continually fails to provide - with Hyden's term, and based on his notion of state autonomy, resulting in the peasantry being "uncaptured", or as Chazan states, based on her "interactionist" conception (see later), producers becoming "disengaged" from the state - add to the analytical problems which are associated with the way in which the state - society relations have evolved in the post-independence epoch. Bratton (1994, p. 232) refers to this relationship between state and society (social actors) as "ambivalent and contradictory, a love-hate relationship"<sup>5</sup> and is based on a "dialectic of mutual attraction and repulsion", where the state is seeking to expand its territory while social actors may or may not resent this based on their assessment of gains involved.

Bratton thereby points at some of the most important aspects of the troubled state - society relation: traditionally (until around the early 1980s) the state has been seeking to expand its territory, controlling all levels of society, while neglecting the development of civil society and its institutions. The institutions were according to this state-centrist notion seen as being within the "jurisdiction" of the state to control and regulate, often only being mobilized when in support of state policies. The failure to see institutions as players in the game, actively involved in political change and shaping the form and function of the state, is at the roots of the problem, not only in the sense of getting a better understanding of state - society relations, but also seen in the light of creating democratic institutions, even fostering broadly democracy, decentralisation, empowerment and local governance.

It is primarily in this context that the concept of civil society has gained so much ground recently. Whether the concept is a useful tool for this analysis, will be addressed in the following.

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<sup>5</sup> Others refer to the "precarious balance", see Rothchild and Chazan, 1988.

## The Concept of Civil Society

As mentioned by Peter Gibbon (1996, p. 21), since Gramsci the discussion of the concept of civil society has been lying dormant for almost 50 years. Only with the developments in Eastern Europe in the 1970's, and followed in Africa in the 1980's by discussions on the misgivings of the state, whether in the form of the predatory, patrimonialist or simply inefficient state, did the debate surface once more. Then, on the other hand, it seems as if the lid has gone off the kettle, as the previous state-centrist approaches<sup>6</sup> and analyses now have been replaced by a strongly increasing interest in analysing the civil society, its form and institutions, and, in particular, its relation to - or with - the state.

Behind this renewed focus is a number of diverse interests, scholarly as well as political. The research interests are closely related to efforts in seeking explanations as to why it did go so wrong in Africa. The political interests are associated with neo-liberal thinking and structural adjustment reforms, where donors in particular seek to strengthen the institutions of civil society, which are expected both to take over some of the functions of the rolled-back-state while, simultaneously, they are seen as supporting processes which will create the background for a more lean, but yet accountable and legitimate state structure to evolve, and also strengthening local governance, democracy, participation, empowerment of the local population, etc. Quite an ambitious task to expect the institutions of civil society suddenly to shoulder!

The interest in studying the civil society and its institutions has also been fostered by the effects of the inability of the state to do what it was supposed to do: as the states in Africa in many instances proved unable to deliver, the direct producers retracted from the market, instead concentrating on food production and securing their survival outside the formal economy. This exit option of, for example, the peasantry in Tanzania, as studied by

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<sup>6</sup> The predominance of state centrist approaches is stressed by Azarya: "After focusing for a decade or more on the capabilities of the state in its incessant efforts to mold society in its image, scholarly debate has shifted to the state's incapabilities, its functional decline, instability and inability to bring about intended changes in society" (1988, p. 3) as well as by Chazan (1988, p. 121 ff.).



Hyden<sup>7</sup>, has paved the way for similar studies of state-society relations, characterised by incorporation as well as disengagement (Azarya, 1988 and Chazan, 1988). With this process of disengagement taking place in a number of cases, the legitimacy of the state further dwindled and a negative economic as well as political development spiral was initiated.

Before entering a discussion as to how different scholars approach the state -civil society analysis, it is worthwhile dealing with the concept of civil society itself, which, in the words of Gordon White (1996), has a number of different meanings to different people, and which is "commonly used in vague, simplistic or biased ways. This encourages wishful thinking and blunts (the concept's) practical utility". White goes on:

"Over the past decade it (the concept) has been dusted off and deodorised to suit a variety of ideological and practical needs. The result is that, though there is now a paradigm of thought and discussion about the developmental implications of 'civil society', the term means different things to different people and often degenerates into a vapid political slogan. The resulting confusion could wreak havoc in the real world, given the fact that the civil societies of developing countries have now been recognised as a legitimate area of external intervention by aid donors as part of an ever deepening process of international social engineering" (White, *ibid.*).

But, as mentioned by White, the scientific value of the concept of civil society remains doubtful with the many different uses, particularly as the concept has been "hijacked" in order:

"to further various developmental or political projects, each with its own preferred sector of associational life.

Neo-populist development theorists and practitioners extol virtues of grass-roots non-governmental organisations as paradigms of social participation, alternative developmental agencies and potential building blocks of

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<sup>7</sup> Hyden mentions this as the peasantry being uncaptured by the state.

democracy. Economic liberals bolster their case for deregulation and privatisation by emphasising how these policies contribute to the emergence of business interests to counterbalance and discipline wayward states. Treasury-based cost-cutters see devolution of government functions to voluntary organisations as an ideologically palatable way of reducing state expenditures" (White, 1996, p. 3).

In Marxist inspired theories, often the concept is used as synonymous with bourgeois society or, as derived from Hegel, as "die bürgerliche Gesellschaft", which is placed between the patriarchal households and the (universal) state. The relations to the state are characterised on the one hand by an antagonism, or contradiction, on the other hand interdependence: In the transformation towards capitalism, the state has to build on civil society, even if its "uncivilised", and the modern state is made necessary (and at the same time limited) by the characteristics of civil society<sup>8</sup>.

The consequence of this is that civil society (or rather the institutions of civil society) are not homogenous nor unilateral. On the contrary, civil society is a myriad of particular interests, which have institution form or an institutional expression, and which mirror conflicts, rivalry and power struggles. And the role and function of these organisations may be integrating, or disintegrating.

While Marx drew a line between the individual and the state, or between the public and private domain, eg. between state and society, Gramsci, maintaining the private and the non-state sphere, insisted on the interrelationship between the two. In other words, while Marx insists on the separation between the state and civil society, Gramsci emphasizes their interrelationship and argue that the concept of the state includes elements of civil society. For Gramsci, the distinction between civil society and the state was only methodological (Bottomore, 1983, p. 73).

While the lines of demarcation between civil society and the state may be blurred, due to the civil society not being embodied

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<sup>8</sup> See T. Bottomore, 1983.

in an easily identifiable structure, and due to the fact that historically "state and civil societies have mixed with, penetrated and contaminated each other, have shared common ideologies for so long that everywhere there is much statishness in society and much that is civil in all states" (Bayart, 1986, p. 113, quoting Lavau) this does not mean that they are interchangeable or more or less the same. Analytically, the two are distinct as they each are pursuing their separate projects: the state is pursuing (apart from its capital accumulation project) its hegemonic project, trying to resolve the abstract problem or conflicts between particular interests and the general interest (Jessop, 1990, p. 208), while the institutions of civil society are representing the "myriads of particular interests", but as voiced, expressed and fought out with the state! Partly in consequence of this reasoning, Bayart defines civil society as "society in its relation with the state...in so far as it is in confrontation with the state or, more precisely, as the process by which society seeks to 'breach' and counteract the simultaneous 'totalisation' unleashed by the state" (Bayart, 1986, p. 111).

For most, however, civil society often means "society as opposed to the state, or an intermediate sphere of social organisation or association between the basic units of society - families and firms - and the state" (White, *op.cit.*). For Habermas, the institutional core of civil society comprises anything outside the realm of the state, and he thus suggests one of the more fully encompassing definitions :

"Unfortunately, a search for clear definitions in the relevant publications is in vain. However, this much is apparent: the institutional core of "civil society" is constituted by voluntary unions outside the realm of the state and the economy and ranging from churches, cultural associations, and academies to independent media, sport and leisure clubs, debating societies, groups of concerned citizens, and grass-roots petitioning drives all the way to occupational associations, political parties, labor unions, and "alternative institutions" (Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1962, p.):

A rather common (Hegelian) definition of civil society is, therefore, one which follows along the lines suggested by

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White: "an intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organisations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or advance their interests or values" (White, op.cit., p 5).

Still others would suggest a definition along the following lines, while emphasizing the nature of the work of these associations :

"...individuals, groups, and associations are part of the political order to the extent that they seek to participate in those processes for making binding choices on social values. Correspondingly, they are part of civil society to the extent that they seek to define, generate support for, or promote changes in the basic working rules of the game by which social values are authoritatively allocated. In spatial terms, therefore, civil society is not simply synonymous with associational life; rather, it is confined to associations to the extent that they take part in rule-setting activities" (Harbeson, 1994, p. 4).

To overcome the problem of the dichotomy between state and civil society being taken too far, White suggests a distinction between the state and civil society as an ideal-type concept "which embodies the qualities of separation, autonomy and voluntary association in their pure form, and the real world of civil societies composed of associations which embody these principles to varying degrees" (emphasis mine). This distinction allows for analysing state - civil society relations as often blurred, as the two may in many cases overlap as they influence each others constitution, and see the associations and institutions of civil society as entering into this interrelationship to a varying degree (and, particularly, with varying degrees of autonomy), while opening up for individuals playing their roles in both sectors simultaneously, while still maintaining the state - civil society relation as analytically distinct.

Yet the concept of civil society is debated, and its usefulness questioned. Some maintain the normative aspect (Cohen and Arato, 1995), others accept the analytical value of the concept, but express skepticism as to its empirical existence (Bratton and Young, 1994), while again others question the concept itself

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(Callaghy, 1994). Bratton (1994b, 51 ff) is however, offering some help. To him, civil society "embodies a core of universal beliefs and practices about the legitimation of, and limits to, state power" (p. 52). And he is searching for "convergence" by suggesting that the definitional notions about the nature and civil society ought to comprise the following:

"1) civil society is a public realm between the state and the family; 2) civil society is distinguishable from political society; 3) civil society is a theoretical rather than an empirical construct; 4) state and civil society, although conceptually distinct, are best considered together; and 5) civil society is the source of the legitimation of state power." (p. 55-56).

In other words, civil society is a "synthetic conceptual construct that encompasses the wide variety of forms of popular collective action that occur in the public realm", meaning a composite concept, which is not easily observable.

In the following, different approaches to the study of state - society relations will be discussed, taking representatives from the interactive approach as point of departure.

### **Different Approaches to the Study of State - Society Relations: The Interactive Approach**

The interactive approach to the study of state - society relations took its departure in the incorporation/disengagement relation between state and society, as explained by Azarya (1988, p. 6 and 7):

"Incorporation and disengagement denote societal responses to state actions (or anticipated state actions) which lead to a perceived change in the field of opportunities of given groups or individuals.(...) Incorporation is the process whereby large segments of the population associate with the state and take part in its activities in order to share its resources.(...)...the state is a magnet; substantial segments of the population

find it desirable, for whatever reason, to have close ties with the state".

Disengagement, on the other hand, is

"the tendency to withdraw from the state and keep at a distance from its channels as a hedge against its instability and dwindling resource base(...) Typical forms of disengagement include moving away from the state-cash nexus to a subsistence economy or to alternate channels such as black markets and smuggling(...) Production either falls or is diverted away from state control. State enacted laws and ordinances and the judiciary system lose their credibility and noncompliance with laws become commonplace".

While this discussion is seeking to throw more light on how different groups of people react or respond to state actions (or missing state actions), either using a "voice" option in actively expressing political quests, or the economic "exit" option mentioned above, focus is continuously on the state: the options selected and the underlying considerations are expressions of attitudes and choices made in contrast to the state (as Bayart would also express it)<sup>9</sup>.

In this the incorporation/disengagement debate is being pursued within the dichotomous conception of state - society relations characterized by polarity, although this very debate at the same time is giving rise to an integrative connotation, where the mutual influence of state and society is increasingly being emphasized.

Chazan is representing an interaction perspective on state - society relations. Her point of departure is an ambition to provide some more specific, analytical meaning to the concept of civil society, which in much of the literature is ill-defined, as an all-encompassing concept, which covers anything between the state and society, and which is often used as synonym for society. In this, she tries to avoid a "conceptual vision that either pits

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<sup>9</sup> "The state can have distinctive interests and self-generated preferences, but by the same token, various segments of the civil society will react to it as a separate actor and will use it as a specific referent in their attempts at incorporation or disengagement", Azarya, 1988, p. 10.

society against the state or allows for cooperation or collusion with the state", which inevitably represents "a mechanistic view" (1994, p. 256).

In her definition, she maintains that the civil society is separate from the state, but relates to it, and that only those organisations which contribute to the growth of civil society deserves to be part of civil society - which, it appears, is a rather tautological notion. She adds, however, another qualification, namely that associations and organisations should have an interest "beyond their immediate concerns", most likely developed in relation to state concerns:

"The state encompasses a complex set of institutions that operate at different levels of human agency. Similarly, the special forces that make up society embrace a wide variety of movements, networks, cells, and formal organizations that differ substantially in size, scope, purpose, composition, and resources. Not all social associations are part of civil society: some organizations contribute to its growth and others do not. Civil society is separate from the state but relates to the state: parochial associations that do not evince an interest beyond their immediate concerns, groups that do not have a concept of the state independent of their own aims, and those totally controlled by state agencies are excluded from its domain. State organs and social groups continually engage each other in multiple settings that are arenas of struggles for domination and accommodation. The constantly changing interactions that occur in these spaces mold and redefine the nature of state structures and social forces, generating an ongoing, mutually transforming, dynamic" (1994, p. 256).

Later, however, Chazan makes further limitations on the civil society concept. To her, civil associations provide particularly valuable points of entry for the analysis of civil society (they are "the building blocks of civil society"), as these groups "constitute the locus of interaction", both horizontally in relation to diverse interest groups and other groups in the formal organizationally hierarchy, and vertically in relation to state and state structures.

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At this point, Chazan still maintains the larger definitional context, although having narrowed down the institutions of particular interest: civil associations. Later (p. 261), this analytical (and strategic) interest is turned into the overriding delimiting criteria, namely that civil society implies an aggregation of interest beyond the local level, and the term intermediate organizations thus come to the fore, conveniently situated vertically and horizontally in the web of mainly political relations.

This is so much more strongly formulated on p. 278 when the intermediate organizations are made identical to the institutions of civil society. The local level institutions (community organizations, self-help groups, farming associations, the associations surrounding what Beckman calls the public service nexus (health, education, etc.)) are, according to Chazan, seemingly not part of civil society, particularly if these organizations pursue broader, more comprehensive "developmental", rather than specific political objectives, or are formed for purposes of ensuring basic subsistence needs:

"...civil society encompasses only one portion of what has become a complex and diverse associational scene. What distinguishes those groups incorporated in civil society from other associations is their partial nature. They are separate from but address the state. These networks do not attempt to offer solutions to existential problems (as do some sectarian organizations), nor do they seek to capture the state (as do some populist groups). They therefore occupy a conceptual - although not always locational - middle, nurturing both horizontal and vertical ties" (p. 278).

To the extent the above interpretation is correct, Chazan's middle-level, intermediate organizations surely exclude a good number of organizations from the realm of civil society, far more than the original definition offered would suggest. Although a narrowing of the definition is needed, compared to the often rather broad definitions used in plenty, the limitations offered by Chazan seems in part, at least, to be generated by an obvious political science orientation. She is obviously primarily interested in political processes, and how classes or social differentiation patterns might affect the organizational

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landscape of intermediate associations, is nothing of her concern<sup>10</sup>. This project of hers thus seem to exclude more socio-economic, "developmentalist" orientations, even if associations/organizations are formed both as local-level organizations and having a reach beyond the local (as many NGO type of associations would have), and combining a "partial" interest with a broader developmental one, while seeking to confront state structures, perhaps in order to capture a greater part of the "public service nexus" from exactly the state.

Chazan's merit is, however, that she demonstrates how state and civil society are interwoven, mutually influencing each other in their interaction and requiring each other for both their survival. As Chazan has mentioned elsewhere: The state and civil society stand and fall together (in Hyden and Bratton, 1992).

But perhaps this emphasis on the interactionist relations is leading to another slight exaggeration. One thing is to stress how the state and civil society mutually interact - and need each other. Another is to suggest that these mutually dependent relations mainly are positively reinforcing each other:

"The weblike expansion of the associational realm was not, however, necessarily accompanied by a retreat of state agencies. In very important respects, the strengthening of civil society has also had the effect of enhancing both the autonomy and the capacity of the state. Structurally, developments at both societal and state levels were mutually reinforcing" (p. 275).

Before this observation takes us too far into a completely harmonious web, it should perhaps be stressed that a good number of conflicts have surfaced recently, particularly between NGOs and the state, where foreign donors' preference for strengthening the institutions of civil society through NGOs have diverted a great deal of (financial) resources away from

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<sup>10</sup> This is in contrast to Bratton (1994b) who in the study of civil society as a heterogenous entity includes the study of social classes, along with other social groups: "The contours of civil society are shaped by the social groups and classes that come out openly in favor of political liberalization" (p. 60), and he then continues to identify the three broad classes relevant in the African context.

state coffers and left a disillusioned and, compared to salaries paid in the NGO sector, underpaid work force. At the same time has in a number of cases NGO activities within in particular the "public service nexus" tended to further erode the state's legitimacy and ability to deliver basic services<sup>11</sup> and thus, maybe, created the conditions for an exit option to be followed by the direct producers, or "disengagement", to use a Chazan term. But such associations/organizations and their acts are seemingly not part of her civil society!

Although still within an interaction perspective, and also recognising the importance of intermediary organizations, Migdal has, however, a slightly different perspective in focusing on struggle and arenas for struggle (Note: The interest in struggle and, in particular power relations, where political autonomy and political capacity of institutions are critical "resources", is shared by Bratton, 1994, p. 235). His preoccupation is still to move away from extreme state-centrist theories, but his project is to understand in disaggregated terms both state and society<sup>12</sup>:

"My central argument is that patterns of domination are determined by key struggles spread through what I call society's multiple arenas of domination and opposition. Officials at different levels of the state are key figures in these struggles, interacting - at times, conflicting - with an entire constellation of social forces in disparate arenas" (p. 9).

Conceptually, Migdal is "breaking down states and societies, and the junctures between them", and the inherent struggles may lead to either "integrated domination, in which the state as a whole...establishes broad power and in which it acts in a coherent fashion" or "dispersed domination, in which neither the state (nor any other social force) manages to achieve countrywide domination..." But the struggles between them may "end up reshaping both the state and society" (p. 9 - 10). His focus in analysing state - society relations is, thus, to identify

<sup>11</sup> See for example Terje Tvedt, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> "We need to break down the undifferentiated concepts of the state - and also society - to understand how different elements in each pull in different directions, leading to unanticipated patterns of domination and transformation", Migdal, 1994, p. 8.

the struggles for domination in society, as fought out in various arenas.

Social forces are thus pertinent to identify and this is where the institutions of civil society once more are entering the scene, because;

"Social forces in society represent powerful mechanisms for associative behaviour. These forces encompass informal organizations (such as Senegal's patron-client networks, or friendship groups and old-boys networks in other societies) as well as formal organizations (such as business and churches). They can also be social movements, including those held by common, strongly motivating sets of ideas/even where obvious organizational ties are absent)" (Migdal, 1994, p. 20).

While Chazan has narrowed the focus (and definition) of civil society by emphasizing intermediate organizations and their thematic, even locational, placement in the vertical and horizontal web, but outside the local and pursuing partial interests, Migdal is in a sense again opening up the field. However, what makes the institutions/organizations interesting is for him not their structural placement but their substantive role, eg. whether they play a role in the struggle for domination or opposition - regardless as to where these institutions are structurally placed. At the same time, Migdal seeks to transcend the political realm - which is the main focal point for Chazan:

"The focus is here on precisely those environments - those arenas of domination and opposition - where various social forces engage one another over material and symbolic issues, vying for supremacy through struggles and accommodations, clashes and coalitions. These are not simply "policy arenas" in which various groups attempt to shape public policy. In addition to contestation over governmental policy, struggles and accommodations take place over the basic moral order and the very structure within which rights and wrongs of everyday social behaviour should be determined: Who has the right to interpret the scriptures? Who is to be respected over others? What system of property rights will prevail? How will water and land be distributed

within the context of the prevailing system of property rights?" (Migdal, 1994, p. 21).

Admittedly, it is not obvious which definition of the civil society Migdal adheres to. It is thus not clear whether the arenas where struggles are fought involve exclusively the institutions of civil society - or is a broader notion. However, when discussing the civil society explicitly, he seemingly expresses views which are broader and which reach beyond the restricted notion of Chazan. He is for example opposing the idea that the state and civil society are seen as integrative entities only, as mutually reinforcing each other. Civil society as an aggregate of diverse interests, which pull only in one direction, is misleading and neglects the social forces which are not always aggregated:

"...even within civil society, various social forces are not always aggregated and inclusive, leading to a hegemony of fundamental ideas. We need to develop a much more careful understanding of the constitutive elements in civil society and not assume it is made up only of interest groups and private voluntary organizations, which tend to create a harmonious consensus in society. Also, an integrative view of civil society misses entirely cases of dispersed domination. Society and civil society are not synonymous; the heterogenous struggles in society's multiple arenas of domination and opposition in which social forces pull in different directions also affect the state profoundly" (Migdal, 1994, p. 28 - 29).

Using the concepts of social forces, struggles and arenas is definitely adding to how analysis of the difficult state - society relation may be pursued, as it brings in both conflict and harmony, domination and accomodation in the struggles for hegemony, in other words it brings to the analysis a clear dynamic perspective. However, the concept of social forces (and arenas) is not well defined, and seems to be a broad label used for both social classes, institutions of civil society, individuals or any grouping which enters an arena.

Much more specific is Fatton when he insists on using a class perspective and a class notion: "The entrypoint of my map is class" (Fatton, 1992, p. 1), and this map is dominated by "three

fundamental sites: ruling class formation, class disarticulation, and subordinate class resistance" (p. 2). He continues,

"a site constitutes an organizational space within which social actors mobilize their resources to exercise political power or to protect themselves from the predatory reach of existing regimes. A site is therefore the prime arena within which groups or classes seek to create a cultural identity, articulate historical projects, and unify their disparate forces to defend their most fundamental political and material interests" (Ibid.).

Fatton's "sites" are crosscutting "the two main ensembles, the state and civil society, which are dialectically integrated". He maintains that the two, state and civil society, although interacting and mutually influencing each other, are (and ought to be) analytically and conceptually separated, as collisions, contradictions between them can only be explained if they are to some extent independent. Yet he has an observation which nearly to the word repeats what Chazan has said: "...in Africa, state and civil society depend on each other for their very existence and cannot stand alone" (Ibid.).

Fatton's "sites" may resemble Migdal's "arenas". However, the sites are closely related to the three "class spaces", namely ruling class formation, class disarticulation and subordinate class resistance<sup>13</sup>. How the struggle in these sites between the forces associated state and civil society respectively will be fought out is not to be determined on beforehand, but the old mixes with the new as "African political systems are above all a synchronic amalgamation of old and new phenomena. African history, like any other history, does not unfold in a linear movement" (p. 7).

While Fatton in a number of respects come very close to the interactive interpretation of state - society relations, his focus on mainly the negative aspects of state rule and state formation in Africa brings him closer to Bayart, or Hyden, even if he is harshly criticizing the new paradigm of "governance" (to which

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<sup>13</sup> While Migdal's project involves a disaggregation of the state, Fatton's can be perceived as a disaggregation of the sites of struggle and clashes between state power and resistance in civil society.

Hyden adheres), particularly because this approach completely neglects the class concept.

For Fatton, "the ruling classes are predatory" (and, one must conclude, to the extent they control the state this is only to be seen as an instrument for their predatory behaviour): "They try to establish a set of property rights that enhances their revenues, status, and wealth even if it has devastating effects on the rest of society. Their ultimate objective is to maximize their rent irrespective of the consequences on welfare and economic efficiency" (p. 3). And, when discussing the economic crisis in Africa, he prolongs his predatory notion to also including the state:

"These grim realities reflect the fact that African rulers have built what Douglass North has termed a predatory state. Being the "agency of a group or class," the predatory state functions primarily "to extract income from the rest of the constituents in the interest of that group or class..." (Fatton, 1992, p. 121).

Such sweeping statements, however, can only be classified in the neo-patrominialist category, where the ruling class occupy the state apparatus and acts only in their material self-interest (nearly as part of their "nature") and where the author's moral preoccupations have lifted him off the ground of his own project of class analysis. Gone is any possibility that African states can take on their capitalist progressive role in advancing capitalist relations of production, even maintaining the class character of the state, or where the state in contributing to this "progression" will act as a cohesive force (but of course not outside the arenas of conflict and struggle).

Fatton emphasizes that his own project stands in stark contrast to "the new paradigm, which has been termed "governance", (which) portrays politics in the continent as an ensemble of "reciprocal practices" embedded in a moral economy of affection in which "there is no irreconcilable contradiction between "individual" and "collective" interests. It assumes that the essence of African politics is a common discourse of "togetherness and commitment to the common good"" (Fatton, 1992, p. 4).

While Fatton may be right in criticising Hyden and others for their neglect of the class concept, and may be right in seeing them overemphasizing how political authority can operate for the benefit of "common societal values", the direct opposite contention that the ruling class (and the state) is only predatory, is in no way any better. However, the value of Fatton's approach is that he places classes and arenas of struggle (sites) squarely in the middle of his analysis, thereby adding to and broadening the scope of some of the theorists of the interactive approach, who are favouring (and being restrained by) an obvious political science orientation.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The critical issue of state - society relations has in recent years gained in importance very much under influence of, on the one hand, the African "predicament", on the other hand efforts in implementing structural adjustment reforms.

While the theoretical debate over state - society relations in Africa, including the concept of civil society, has been constrained from the fact that the notion of the state has been imposed upon Africa from the outside (and the concept of civil society similarly imported from the West), such problems of trying via structural adjustment reforms to construct both a state and a civil society mirrored on the experience in the West, does not seem to worry current neo-liberal thinking. As expressed by Beckman, the common sense notion of the state and civil society has been "appropriated by and geared to the neo-liberal agenda. By pretending to be civil society's best friend and by assigning the state the role of the enemy of civil society, the neo-liberal project conceals its own massive use of state power, transnational and local, for the purpose for constructing a civil society according to its own image" (Beckman, 1993, p. 30).

The discussion above has hopefully demonstrated that in particular the interactive approach to the study of state - society relations is offering an analytical point of departure which seeks to overcome some of these common sense notions. With representatives of the interactive approach, the complex issue of state - society relations has been addressed in a way which invites further empirical studies of how these relations are mutually influencing each other, in struggles which are both

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conflictual and mutually reinforcing. In this, the empirical "project" of disaggregating both the state and the institutions of civil society becomes important, whether the struggles are fought out in "arenas" or "sites". Seeking to include more materialist and economic factors to this so far mainly politicist project, not least by incorporating the concept of class, will further add to the value of this approach.

In particular the concept of civil society is a hotly debated issue. Some outright reject the concept, (most) others maintain that it is a theoretical construct without any clear empirical foundation. It cannot be directly observed, and "it encompasses the wide variety of forms of collective action that occur in the public realm (Bratton, 1994b, p. 57). This does not imply, however, that the difficulties associated with defining the concept should lead to giving up the efforts in delimiting it, particularly as related to which institutions/organizations with what characteristics should be included<sup>14</sup>.

Civil society is not a uniform and homogenous group of institutions. On the contrary, the institutions of civil society are a myriad of particular interests, which have got an institutional form or an institutional expression. They express conflicts, rivalries and struggles - or consented action. They may act as integrating - or disintegrating elements, and the interesting research question to pose is whether the institutions contribute to political conscious action, generate solidarity and a collective identity and whether collective initiatives appear via their associational form.

Civil society represents political renewal and a renewal of the political culture, closely related to democratic movements. It is a public sphere which acts politically, but which is in need of a state, which can guarantee fundamental political rights, and a populace, which can ensure that political reflection is transformed into collective action. It is, in other words, institutions which have certain resources, human as well as

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<sup>14</sup> Bratton recognizes the difficulties in using the concept of civil society, but maintains that it "is a useful formula for analyzing state - society relations in Africa because it embodies a core of universal beliefs and practices about the legitimation of, and limits to, state power". Bratton, 1994b, p. 52.



financial, at their disposal and which can reach beyond the immediate private realm.

To participate actively in the organizational and associational life, a number of prerequisites thus have to be in place. As mentioned by Fatton (1992, p. 5), it requires relatively high levels of education, easy access to financial resources, and free time. It also requires a certain level of political consciousness, as small "groups of individuals who are conscious about their special interest and of their capacity to affect desired changes" have better prospects of mixing into the public sphere. In other words, civil society reflects the wider society in which it is based and in order to grow and play the role anticipated, certain material, organizational and ideological conditions will have to be met.

This may imply that the role institutions of civil society play, whether actively involved or only partly so, whether contributing to an integrative or disintegrative process, etc. is very much dependent on the countries specific historical trajectory, particularly how and in what role the countries have been placed (or positioned themselves) in the international division of labour. Agriculturally based societies may, therefore, have greater difficulties in exposing a vibrant civil society compared to early industrialized ones, or countries where urban political culture has evolved over longer periods. Industrialization, commercialization and market integration, the production of cash crops rather than food crops, reproduction through external means, etc. are thus factors which may act in favour of a strong civil society.

Bratton (1994b, p. 58) maintains that civil society is slow to emerge in societies which are "deeply divided (and) where ethnic particularism is pervasive, for example, citizens enjoy few opportunities to build consensus on moral and political values or establish constructive linkages among political organizations", while, on the other hand, where the formation of social classes is in progress, "this tends to accelerate this process".

Other important characteristics as sources of power are autonomy and capacity, as stressed by Bratton (1994a, p. 235) and partly also Chazan (1994, p. 271), whether analysing the

state - or civil society. Autonomy refers to "the latitude of social actors to take political initiatives unconstrained by the claims of others" and "An organization is autonomous to the extent that the interests of its members, in contrast to some external force, drive a distinctive program of political action" (p. 235). Capacity, on the other hand, is "the ability to implement political decisions" and "Capacity exists when an organization possesses the full range of resources - human, financial, material, coercive, and symbolic - required for implementers to get things done" (Ibid.).

With the above, a number of factors have been outlined which may determine how the institutions of civil society may function viz. the state, which, again, can easily be formulated as hypotheses. The theoretical debate on state - society relations will no doubt continue. The empirical study of the institutions of civil society have only begun. Both have to proceed, not least seen in the light of the political importance which in particular the donor community ascribes to the relations between state and civil society. That this perception in donor's circles is often biased, only adds to the need for further research on institutions, formal as well as informal.

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