RELOCATING CIVIL SOCIETY IN A POLITICS OF CIVIC DRIVEN CHANGE

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Abstract

Politics is central to development discourse, yet remains peripheral. Over some twenty years, a civil society narrative has not fulfilled its potential to 'bring politics back in'. Reasons can be found in conceptual confusion, in selectivity in donor thinking, in policies towards civil society and in the growth-driven political economy of NGO-ism. Remedies for the political lacunae are being sought through a focus on rights, citizenship and leadership that show valuable, focused progress. This article examines a comprehensive complement to such efforts referred to as civic driven change (CDC). Originating in a grounded empirical approach, the constituent principles and elements of CDC offer a lens that can both sharpen and deepen insights and advance analysis of socio-political processes.

INTRODUCTION

The insertion of 'civil society' into development debates has not lived up to expectations. The concepts' theoretical provenance offered an opportunity to respond to an oft repeated call to 'bring politics back in' to an essential position within aided development thinking and practice (e.g., Berntzen and Selle; 1990; Nederveen-Pieterse, 2002; Hickey, 2009).[1] Some twenty years of experience shows that selective variations of 'civil society' have been deployed by many member governments of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in support of a utilitarian interpretation and agenda propagating a western universalism into the world order (Wallerstein, 2006). The international aid system has been one important mechanism for doing so. A shift of policy perspectives from nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in a 'third sector' to civil society as a political category offered an opportunity to re-think development in terms of the evolution of power relations between a state and the polity. It also offered a conveniently messy empirical category that could politically legitimate the conditionality of aid funding. Yet, over this period, civil society discourse has not managed to "(…) establish politics as a central concern within development studies" (Hickey, 2009:141).

The fact that official aid for development and the dominant narrative of development itself are political instruments in a repertoire of international relations is hardly contested. Riddell (2007:398) contends that until aid is de-coupled from the systemic problems stemming from the bi-lateral interests of donor countries the quest for greater effectiveness will remain undermined. Yet, this reality is masked by assertions of poverty as the guiding criteria for aid with the Millennium Development Goals acting as the public justification overlaying the deeper real-politic of aid allocations shown in their volatility an unreliability (Cogneau and Naudet, 2007; Bulir and Hamman, 2008; Faust, 2010). Whichever way one approaches aided development, politics matters a lot. This article describes an ongoing effort to bring politics and socio-political processes into the core of

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[1] Following Bebbington et al (2008) a distinction is made between big 'D' development of societies as a whole over time and the little 'd' development associated with international aid and cooperation.

development discourse and policies.[2] It details the substance of 'civic driven change' (CDC) as a novel narrative recognising, but conceptually relocating, civil society.

CIVIL SOCIETY AS A DISCOURSE

Triggered by the implosion of authoritarian regimes in Latin America, Asia and Central Europe in the 1990s, a re-emergence of the notion of civil society into political theory with its contested meanings and interpretations is well documented and critiqued (e.g., Cohen and Arato, 1992; Hann and Dunn, 1996; Deakin, 2001; Hodgkinson and Foley, 2003; Chambers and Kymlicke, 2003; Edwards, 2004). Narrow geo-historical origins of some two hundred years in Western Europe and North America spurred debates on the concept's broader international validity (e.g., Blaney and Pasha, 1993; Kumar, 1993; Mamdani, 1996; Lewis, 2003) which have not produced a convincing outcome. In this sense, the search for a resolution of a civil society narrative has reached a dead end or remains an ongoing challenge. In either case, empirical study and resolution of contending positions is exacerbated by the difficulties of applying the concept to countries such as China and Vietnam which are adopting market economic principles while maintaining socio-political configurations deeply rooted in communism (Howell, 1993; Howell and Pearce, 2001).

It can be argued that civil society has been so variously understood as to be almost meaningless in terms of providing a coherent conceptual and empirical political-analytic framework. For example, the concept is used in a singular fashion, arguing that there is a 'civil society position' or a 'civil society interest', thereby ignoring those that disagree. A condition of multiple meanings is perpetuated because the alternative conceptualisations on offer are self-referential in terms of how civil society is defined and located in analysis of political processes and power relationships (Van Rooy, 1998). This makes robust comparison and empirical validation somewhat illusory. Glasius (2010) argues that a mix and match of attributes and perspectives leads to different versions of civil society that satisfy neoliberal, liberal, radical and post-modern predispositions. Such a rendition corresponds to a debate which seems to be unable to advance a compelling theoretical proposition about the role of civil society in the trajectories and outcomes of ongoing political evolution within, between and above nation states. Assistance from other disciplines, such as international relations, does not seem to offer much hope for reconciliation or coherence. For example, when comparing three 'big visions' of the future world (dis)order Richard Betts (2010) argues that there is no unequivocal sign of a global convergence towards western configurations of state-society relations and related internal distribution of power. Modernization does not necessarily equal westernisation and economics does not necessarily triumph over (cultural) identity and dignity. Consequently, it is unwise to assume that an uncontested version of civil society will arise from processes of globalization any time soon.

Another problem is that the slant of these normative positions is one of civil society as naturally 'good' in the sense of seeking justice, fairness and some understanding of a collective good and collaborative problem solving that are all conducive to (re)establishing social order. The so called 'non-civic' part of civil society that also drives and act as protagonists in socio-political processes – 'clubs' of oligarchic elites, terrorisms, cartels, traffickers, sects or groups pre-disposed to violence, xenophobia and so on – seem to be ignored. Yet their existence and influence on socio-political process, such as curtailing civil liberties, are patently clear. A 'warts and all' civil society, and in development itself, need to be better theoretically recognised and accounted for (Monga, 2008).

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[2] Here we borrow from Hickey (2009:142) in adoption of Mouffe's distinction between *politics* as the practices, discourses and rules of the game required for social order, while the *political* stems from the issues and struggles between social groups for power and resources.

The conceptual and normative ambiguities of civil society described above are compounded by the empirical messiness of the socio-political motives, relationships, structures, forms, functions and expressions of a polity as its members exert agency. [3] Experience of multi-country research projects on civil society – such as the Johns Hopkins quantitative comparative study (Salamon et al., 2003) and the qualitative Civicus Civil Society index (Heinrich, 2007) – show a struggle to both delineate and investigate configurations and socio-political conditions, processes and agents that are 'invisible' to outsiders but very much visible to those involved. This empirical difficulty is being exacerbated by the spontaneity and transience of collective-action politics made increasingly possible by advances in communications technology where 'everybody' can be at the table (Shirky, 2008).

In sum, as currently pursued, civil society discourse is unresolvably too 'plural' and its context-specific expressions too diverse to offer a prospect of a making an unambiguous contribution to political theory and action. In a world that is becoming more interdependent, with states less able to solve complex problems and dilemmas alone, a civil society story will remain a useful but limited vantage point to adequately comprehend and explain the socio-political processes involved at their inter-connected scales. A more directly political approach is called for.

THE POLITICS OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Premised on their assumed comparative advantages, prior to the era of civil society discourse, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were the principle non-market driven, non-state actor gaining prominence in development theory, policy and practice of the last three decades (e.g., Brown and Korten, 1989). Their subsequent global growth in numbers, scale and diversity makes general statements about NGOs problematic – exceptions in time and place will always exist. With this caveat in mind, the advent of civil society discourse involved twin processes of adjustment within the aid community. First, it was necessary to determine how exactly this concept would alter existing thinking about how change happens by whom. Second, was a challenge to incorporate NGO-ism[4] into this evolving and, for donors, new way of modelling development while, at the same time, operationalizing 'good governance' objectives and mainstreaming the, then, New Policy Agenda.[5]

Much intellectual effort was applied to the former challenge. Contending ideas about what civil society was and did in 'big D' development were identified in terms of their 'small d' equivalents (fn.1., Van Rooy, 1998; Pratt, 2003). Others analysts took a more critical stance, pointing out the contradictions between the conceptual options on offer. With increasing NGO dependency on official aid, observers also questioned a willingness to make hard choices between options under dominant conditions of neo-liberalism (Eade, 2000; Howell and Pearce, 2001). Expectations about NGO roles in support of material improvement and democratization in post-Soviet countries tried to combine these twin processes of adjustment to new conditions (Clayton, 1994, 1996). A moment and potential arose for civil society thinking to bring a more directly political dimension not just to national development but to NGOs themselves (Clark, 1991, 1993) and, subsequently, transnationally (Clark, 2003; Taylor, 2004; Batliwala and Brown, 2006). Some observers wondered if such an unanticipated shift in discourse with its multiple interpretations could re-invigorate an anticipation, from the nineteen seventies, that NGOs would offer an alternative, more politically

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[3] HERE: INSERT A DEFINITION OF "POLITY", see comment A 7

[4] Following Hilhorst, (2003) NGO-ism are expectations, assumptions, vocabulary and performance metrics of public benefit meriting tax concessions associated with western non-profit organisations.

[5] This so-called New Policy Agenda emerged in the early 1990s , and became part of a market-based 'good governance' donor agenda. Political conditionality became linked to aid delivery, putting pressure on countries of the South and East to introduce multi-party politics, slim down their bureaucracies, be more transparent and accountable, respect human rights, advance women's position in society, create greater space for civic action and reduce military expenditure (Robinson, 1994; Fowler, 1998).

'activist' and progressive model of development thinking and practice. In other words, could and would NGOs exploit the moment and re-grasp an opportunity to counter the social-welfare and participatory 'voice' bias of official aid policy towards NGOs (Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin, 2008:11-15)? For reasons set out below, this did not happen to any substantive degree. The result was that expectations about the political potential of (global) social movements and networks increased at the cost of NGOs. (Ghimire, 2005).

At a similar moment, the official aid system made a relatively narrow selection between contending theories of civil society in favour of those most consistent with liberal market democracy premised on negotiated processes of change in society (Riddell, 2007). This choice is illustrated, for example, in the remedial roles allocated to NGOs, now called CSOs as part of structural adjustment policies (Lipton, 1991). Subsequently, the introduction of poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) required these CSOs to take on 'participatory' functions that would generate a more 'enabling environment' to civic engagement (World Bank, 2003). Sensitive to the 'sovereignty constraint' in international relations, alternative theories of civil society that embody political disputation and struggles for power were marginalised.

Within this overall ideological template, donor policies towards civic society as organisations (CSOs) showed modest variation in the mix of concepts employed (Giffen and Judge, 2010). Depending on the donor country concerned, normative plurality allowed for greater or lesser accommodation of social-change oriented, so-called 'progressive NGOs'. Over time, donor policy space opened up for inclusion of other types of entities. Faith-based groups, trade unions, and professional associations were recognised as member-based constituents of organised civil society with a developmental contribution to make. Be that as it may, the 'intermediation' function of NGOs in and between societies remained the dominant character of what, in many aided countries, became understood as civil society. Correspondingly, in equating NGOs with CSOs, regimes computed the latter as being of value when supplementing state social development efforts but with suspicion of non-service 'political' functions, such as advocacy. A 'backlash' against NGOs at the United Nations signalled the discomfort of many (autocratic) regimes when CSOs gained a bigger presence and influence in (inter)national bodies (Mohammed, 1997).

More directly, NGO-ism served as a financing source to the relief complements of armed resistance movements, such as the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Association. They also acted as a 'holding ground' for political aspirants within the then prevailing autocracies and single party political systems. It was tacitly understood that NGO-ism would and could be 'political' in serving a donor's foreign policy imperatives, but could not be overtly recognised as such. Thus, by and large, NGOs did not provoke an open debate on the politics of development and were criticised for simply aiding and abetting western interests. For example, protagonists across the NGO fault lines in the *Fifty Years is Enough* campaign against the World Bank speak to the different political positions in play. The mainstream NGO adoption of critical engagement towards such (inter-)governmental institutions may incrementally shift ideas and practices of official development institutions, but do not upset the prevailing neo-liberal perspective on civil society (e.g., World Vision, 1996). Looking back, the resulting conditions attached to public financing of NGOs for development activities - and the latter's responses to such conditions - point to a significant, but not exclusively, political-economy imperative for their self-sustainability that has mitigated against them bringing politics back in.

Official conditionality towards aided CSOs has played out in many ways that lead to apolitical outcomes. First, it has discounted the significant diversity of inspirations, contending political forces and interfaces within civil society in favour of the service delivery and public accountability functions common to domestic non-profit organisations. As a consequence, an NGO choosing an alternative

concept of civil society and other roles tends to self-exclude from direct support from official aid agencies. But, it also means that such NGOs are better able to mitigate against overly growth-driven organisational strategies which – in the name of the poor – would make them supplicants that typically means compliance with officially 'approved' technocratic development practices (Wallace, Crowther and Shephard, 1988; Wallace, Bornstein and Chapman, 2006). However, the proportion of official aid NGOs rely on has increased significantly over time.[6] This suggests many NGOs have not chosen against seeking public finance for their work, often leading to self-restraint in adopting development theory or practice centred on politics. That is not to say, that NGOs are not politically aware or informed. But dependency on public finance, allied to risk aversion, predisposes to status-quo reinforcing development practices – service delivery typically wins out over overt civic activism.

Second, a predominantly service and market perspective on what civil society has to contribute to 'small d' development has been reinforced by applying the concept and language of a 'sector' with roots in the economics of comparative advantage. This 'third sector' is often portrayed as a harmonious sphere in which all the anomalies of the market and the state are compensated, while conflicts between interests and anti-social behaviour are ignored. A non-normative sector influence on identity is reinforced by the proposition that, as a sector, civil society can be 'enumerated' and its economic value computed (e.g., Salamon, 2010). Such a proposition and its effects on public policy negate and camouflage a civil society's fluid, spontaneous and politically dynamic expressions seen recently in North Africa and the Middle East. Negotiation within this frame impacts on NGO self-understanding towards an economic rather than political perspective (Johansson, et al, 2010).

Third, treating oneself as part of a 'sector' relies on (accountability) logics of efficiency and effectiveness of outputs. These metrics can also foster identity ambiguity for NGOs whose theory of change is disposed towards a more progressive position on civil society and hence on themselves (Shutt, 2009). The portrayal of civil society as one constituent in a tri-sector society model serves to either de-politicise or to tightly frame discourse towards existing dominant definitions of reality.

Fourth, as aided civil society, NGOs have often adopted an official development agenda focussed on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as paralleling efforts at donor harmonization - the Paris Agenda on aid effectiveness (Booth, 2008). The absence of politics associated with these frameworks is readily observed. So framed, advocacy and lobbying are, for example, directed at reforming governance through public policy and respect for human rights. In parallel, organisational competencies required to demonstrate a tangible contribution to MDGs associate NGO professionalism with (business) managerialism and its metrics. This expectation reinforces a common internal/governance pressure for year on year financial growth. This stance is inherent to non-profits as an organisational type (Kanter and Summers, 1987). An NGO growth orientation also typically has its origins in charity, where monetary turnover is a proxy measure of success, combined with a business logic and measures in a prerogative to sustain the organisation.[7] Together, these factors bind NGOs to a political economy of 'follow the money' (Albertyn and Tjønneland, 2010). This imperative is seen in International NGO organisational adaptations to match changes in resource distribution mechanisms, such as donor decentralization in funding decision making (Ronalds, 2010). Moreover, the introduction of market-inspired competitive bidding accentuates commodification of an NGO development approach. Such allocation practices work against treating sustainable development as co-produced socio-political processes between people who are (not)

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[6] Reliable figures on sources of NGO financing for development over time are not available. OECD/DAC statistics signal twenty years of substantial increases to NGOs as a 'sector'.

[7] The technical difficulties of measuring development performance help perpetuate growth as a proxy for success and indicator of organisational health.

poor and those working in solidarity with them. This negation of people's direct agency plays through the intermediation mechanism from North to South.

As role models, in aid recipient countries Northern NGOs invoke an exogenous understanding and frame of reference for what civil society means and does. A common result is the emergence of a strata of local NGOs playing an intermediation role that are semi-detached from their own society in terms of norms, cultural embedding and financing (cf. Hearn, 2007; Holmén, 2010). The processes involved correspond more to social entrepreneurship than the spirit of civic voluntarism that NGO-ism used to portray (Fowler, 2000). In itself this outcome is not necessarily harmful, albeit difficult to sustain outside of foreign funding. But transmission by Northern NGOs of the economic imperative to be self-sustained, works against taking a politically-centred stance to change society. Risk aversion is also involved, from which NGOs are seldom sites of mobilization of a followership with a political agenda. While they may help create supportive conditions and helpful capabilities, as seen in, for example, in Egypt and Malawi, this type of civic action is more likely to arise within endogenous forces of civil society.

The forgoing does not imply that aided civil society has failed in its quest to save lives, help people escape poverty, protect the vulnerable, increase resources for non-state actors, introduce valuable innovations, influenced critical national and international policies, provided political refuge and form important international networks across civic actors. The point is that these achievements have not substantively advanced the political character and foundation for realising development outcomes. We are not arguing that civil society discourse as currently applied has lost its value or should be replaced. Rather we contend that the way civil society is understood and deployed within the context of aid policy and practice is too limited and de-politicised to illuminate contemporary socio-political processes of change within, between and above nation states. Something else is needed.

CIVIC DRIVEN CHANGE: ESTABLISHING A NARRATIVE
What has emerged as a narrative of Civic Driven Change is the product of multiple discussions with some of the key Dutch development NGOs.[8] The debate was driven by frustration at the lack of a self-determined and robust story with which to proactively shape how the Netherlands' government was shifting its policy and practice of funding towards these private aid agencies. Over several political cycles, Dutch NGOs - working for 75 per cent or more with government subsidies - had questioned state-crafted understandings and positions on what was proposed as its NGO funding priorities, criteria and measures. The Ministry's perspective increasingly reflected a utilitarian ascription of the role of civil society organisations. Investing in the search for a NGO/CSO narrative that would stand in its own right with its own ontology would be a valuable but uncertain effort worth taking. Following a grounded empirical methodology, a multi-disciplinary international team contributed to the emergence of a narrative centrally informed by civic agency. The following sections concentrate on CDC's substance with selected illustrations and discussion of its theoretical location. It is a work in progress continuing to absorb feedback and critique.

Civic Driven Change - Composition
Civic driven change is a composite of pre-existing ideas and theories connected in a novel way (Berkhout et al, 2011). In order to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding and misappropriation of meaning, to describe CDC we try to avoid using vocabulary commonly deployed in aided-development discourse. For example, in CDC terms, a *participant* is a *citizen*; *participation* is understood as *civic agency*; *partnership* is understood as a type of *collaboration*; a policy outcome translates into a *domain of change*; a *project* is treated as a *case* of civic agency; and beneficiaries are *constituencies.* The substance of CDC can be summarised in four basic propositions and eight

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[8] These Dutch NGOs included Hivos, Cordaid, Oxfam-Novib, ICCO, SNV, Pax Christi, and Context.

elements. These form a composite lens that can be applied to illuminate and understand human agency in processes of socio-political change.

The individual and comparative case analysis underpinning CDC pointed towards four critical perspectives on how society can be conceived and its trajectories understood. It does so within a political framework provided by a nation state and its foundation on the concepts of citizenship and rights – both of which can be problematized. For CDC, the first proposition is that societies are regarded as 'political projects' where all walks of life contain various types of power, political forces and players. All people act politically in what they do or don't do with their lives, a requirement for political centring in development thinking (Hickey, 2009:142). Second, civic agency is the principle, normative unit of concern where history, context and power to define the situation matter (Goldfarb, 2006). Being 'civic' is understood to mean pro-social behaviours that respect difference between people and shows concern for the whole of society and not just for self.[9] Historically, countering uncivil behaviour – intolerance, discrimination, exploitation – are part and parcel of social structuration and a polity's struggle with itself.[10] Socio-political change in society is driven by both civic and uncivil agency. A third proposition advances an appreciative position (Srivasta and Cooperrider, 1999) on social realities which are understood as the unfulfilled imagination of a preferred situation which inevitably create dilemmas of collective action calling for the initiative, energy and agency of many (Ostrom, 2005). Fourthly, development is an inherently uncertain, complex, indeterminate process involving societal co-production for good or ill (e.g., Jervis, 1997; Beinhocker, 2006). The drivers involved demonstrate conflict and contention as well as collaboration and sharing (Seabright, 2004).

These propositions translate into a set of elements that are connected in different ways by existing bodies of theory and practice discussed in subsequent sections. The constituent elements of civic driven change have the following eight characteristics. In a sense they compositely 'define' what can be understood as civic driven change in their combination rather than in their singularities.

(i) CDC relies on a rights-based understanding of political agency tied to citizenship that is simultaneously an individual and a collective identity. It is a defining relationship between a state and the polity. Legitimacy of the former calls for active, informed involvement by the latter. Where citizenship is not in play and the right to have rights is not honoured, this enabling condition needs first to be fulfilled. The ideological stance of North Korea towards its citizens, intolerance of public dissent in Turkmenistan and rule by autocratic regimes create conditions where active citizenship, be it allowed on paper, is denied in practice.

(ii) CDC is not sector-bound. A CDC lens focuses on civic action for good or ill throughout all realms and institutions of society rather than a pre-occupation with civil society that has been uncritically conceived as only working for public benefit. Put another way, CDC is not located in institutionally specific ways – it does not 'belong' to civil society. The recent revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and similar civic action elsewhere did not emerge from a 'sector' but from people in all walks of life that had experienced unemployment, giving bribes to stay in business, been compromised by security services to spy on their neighbours and family, experienced repression as political opposition and so on (Abd el Wahab, 2012; El Naggar, 2012). These micro politics combine to frustration that breeds individual radicalism (Al Aswany, 2004) and mass public dissent with unlikely triggers, such as self-immolation. Drivers of civic energy are not confined to the poor, marginalised or civil society as such, but stem from the polity at large.

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[9] In Confucian philosophy, these two conditions are prerequisites for social order.
[10] The paradox of uncivil behaviour - like street mass protests and insurrection - for greater civil ends can only be judged case by case.

(iii) CDC is open and scalable. Civic agency can be observed at any (aggregate) level of socio-political arrangements as well as horizontally through, for example, autonomous relational networks. CDC incorporates links from local to global change and back again as an iterative process. There are growing political effects of aggregating civic agency through social media – again Egypt is an illustration, as was the Battle for Seattle at the World Trade Organisation Ministers meeting in 1999. While most visible when involving violence which draws mass media attention, such events show how what is politically micro and local can self-organise and scale in organic ways nationally and internationally. The UN Global Compact for Business and the impact of transnational civil society on multi-lateral institutions are both examples of micro to macro scaling of civic agency, most acutely illustrated in responses to environmental concerns. On a daily basis, changes in household decision making and behaviour towards domestic waste and its local processing add up to a significant scale in environmental effects but offer no dramatic images that capture mass media attention. The propositions underpinning CDC are not self-limited in terms of the socio-political span they can embrace and connect.

(iv) CDC takes as a maxim the requirement for equity of political agency rather than equity of economic opportunity that informs dominant sector-based theories of change. Inequity in political agency is often captured in the notion of 'exclusion' from power relationships. Typically, this results from a lack of capability for socio-political engagement stemming, for example, from lack of organisational skills, inadequate knowledge of rights or of how decision making should work, or historical-cultural barriers to recognition as a political actor. Overcoming exclusion may call for 'uncivil' behaviour. Naomi Hossain (2009) shows that 'rude' claiming making on bureaucrats by poor women from socially excluded groups can make good against gender-based inequities in agency.

(v) CDC looks beyond political structures and mechanisms, such as voting, to the historical processes and fundamentals of power accumulation and reproduction in a country and internationally. Politics in much of, for example, Central America and Africa, cannot be understood outside of the social fracturing caused by colonial penetration subordinating whatever socio-political arrangements were already in place (e.g., Herbst, 2001). What becomes political and why in whose favour over time is the exposed tip of an iceberg composed of deeper political forces that establish regime (il)legitimacy to be recognised but not to be simply interpreted on exogenous terms.

(vi) CDC is sensitive to contention between endogenous and exogenous values, measures and processes. It distinguishes between aided and unaided change in society, which heightens attention to the role and power of outsiders in influencing socio-political and other processes, including how risks are distributed. The continual struggle for 'authentic partnership' is a well documented case of structural power asymmetry between aid actors. It is tied to money and assumed primacy of western 'enlightenment' norms and predispositions towards tangible forms and products over relationships and intangible processes. This 'values' factor in aided change plays out strongly, for example, in prescription of institutional forms that simply will not work as outsiders intend (Moore and Unsworth, 2010).

(vii) CDC recognises multiple knowledges and communications that inform agency. It places trust in people's own sites of knowledge-making which does not necessarily make them right, but is the well-spring for learning and self-capacitation. Farming systems in developing countries have long been sites where endogenous agricultural knowledge has gained a place alongside that of scientists to steer research investment. In South Africa's Eastern Cape, on-the-street knowledge about local conditions is being captured and disseminated by a civic unit of a Newspaper's journalists who set up shop in cafes and taxi ranks to directly hear what is bugging people on public issues. This daily

monitoring of what people see municipalities are doing is increasing bottom-up pressure to improve public services.[11]

(viii) CDC recognises multiple types and locations of authority and reactions to them. Authority over and accountability to a polity is located in different places for different things. For example, in signing up for Codes of Conduct and accountability charters, NGOs choose to cede some sovereignty in exchange for the collective value of complying with negotiated standards. In the European Union, elevation of political authority to a multi-country parliament while pursuing subsidiarity creates new sites of governance that citizens interface with, but may not trust or understand. The World Trade Organisation can pass binding 'top-down' judgments on the legal provisions of member states. The Kwanda project in South Africa illustrates how increases in a community's capabilities for self-organisation can, from the bottom up, impact on many levels of public authority and policy. Examples include: changes to national approaches to community policing; changes in municipal conditions for liquor licensing; local enforcement of bar owners making food available with closing times that reduced incidents of rape.[12] Poly centricity of governance is an increasing phenomenon to be factored into viewing socio-political processes and the institutions involved (McGinnis, 2005).

For any given context and socio-political process, each of these elements has its own scales, time lines, metrics and relative weights that are not static or immutable. Crudely framed, driven by inspirations to change domains of life within society, the CDC narrative is often about the politics of people moving *From Clients to Citizens* (Mathie and Cunningham, 2008).

Domain orientation

CDC relies on the concept of socio-political *domain* centred on an imagined future of a 'solved' societal problem. The idea of a domain has a strong affinity with Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'social field'. These are understood as social arenas governed by distinctive values and approaches which emphasise their contested nature and the role of power in resolving the disputations which are inherent to complex problems and social dilemmas.[13] *The significance of social fields is their detachment from any particular actor* because they also exist as internalised mental elements or frames of reference or norms and cultural rules that co-inhabit a person's psycho-social construct, their *habitus.* In practical terms, a domain can be viewed as a substantive theme or desired future condition which holds society's attention and attracts civic agency from any quarter. Examples are corruption as a non-sector specific uncivil behaviour; as is discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation; or social enterprise heralded in new forms of 'low profit limited liability company (an L3),[14] or mega-philanthropy as a composite of public and private, market and on-market principles with 'undemocratic' political effects (Edwards, 2009). Informed by an imagined future, domains supersede and selectively combine sectors. A domain can incorporate a polity's transnationalism, accelerated by expanding internet access as well as net-enabled cell phone technology fostering social networks and user-driven media (Kanter and Fine, 2010). Figure 1. Illustrates the centrality of civic agency in the CDC narrative. Though difficult to illustrate in this figure, domains form an appreciative, outcome-defined overlays, such as gender equality, a corruption or xenophobia free or sustainable society, that are not *a priori*, actor specific. Rather, domains firstly invite investigation of socio-political processes that co-determine societal conditions and (policy) outcomes.

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[11] http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/15/52619.html, accessed 29 August 2011
[12] www.seriti.org.za http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOnb4HRJTp0
[13] Social fields, are also found in complexity theory as forces operating and amenable to transmission over a societal distance. Jung's notion of collective consciousness of a society acts in such a way.
[14] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L3C

Figure 1. CDC: Illustrative framework
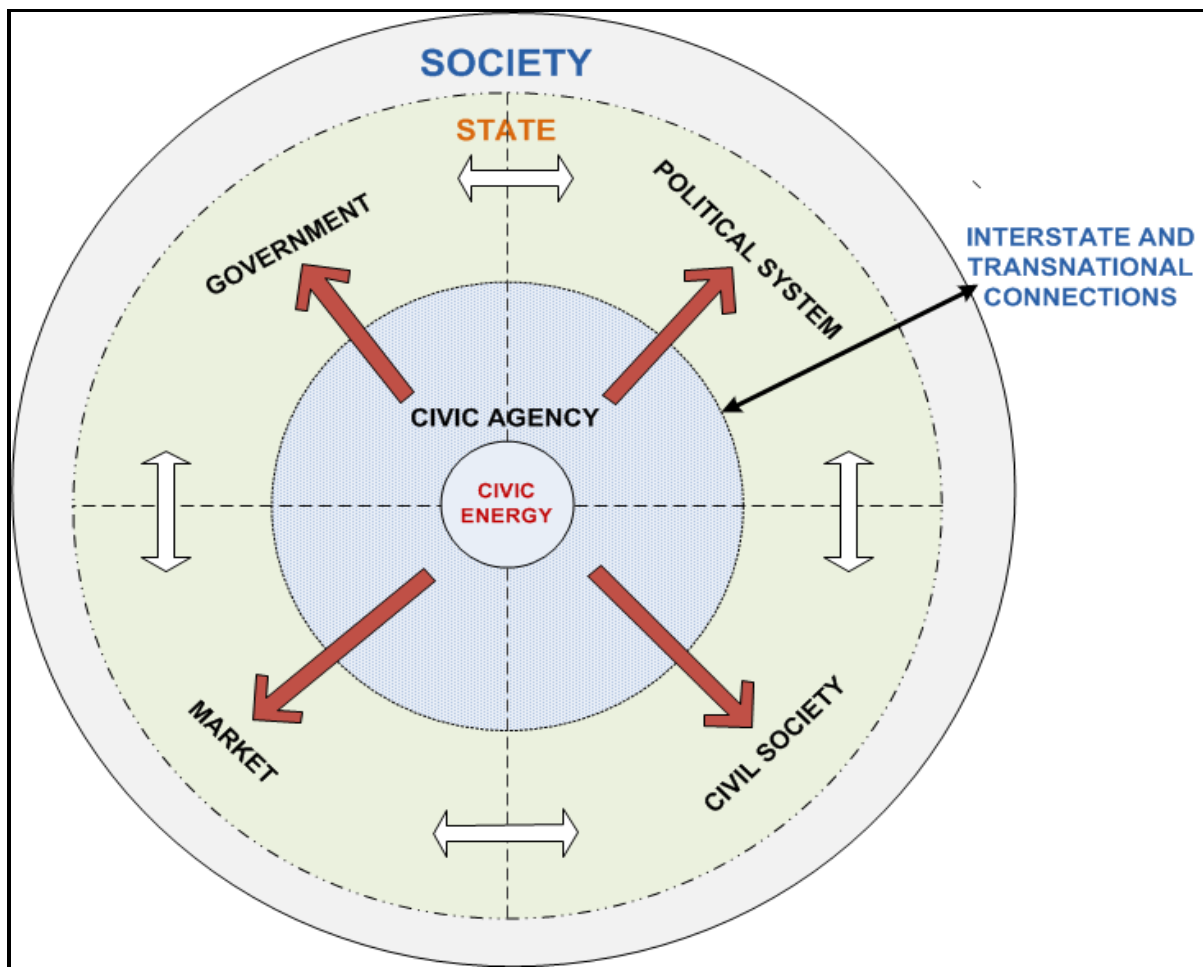
Operating within families and often mediated through groups – for example, with religious or cultural ties - civic agency is motivated human energy with sources and drivers. A core task of a CDC lens is to assist in homing in on the origins, expressions and combining of civic energy with a sorting and filtering through socio-political processes and power to shape collective action and institutional responses to wicked problems, understood as selected domains of change.[15] Simply put, to deepen and sharpen insights in why and how polity, politics and the political work as a society's drivers. This challenge is described by the Development Leadership Programme in the following way:

> "… if one is taking politics seriously, *agency matters*. By 'agency' is meant the choices, decisions and actions of individuals, groups and organizations and, in particular, their leaders and 'elites'. They have the potential to change things. Just as structures (institutions, rules, cultural norms) have 'causal power' (that is, they have power to influence what we do), so too do agents, though their causal power is different …" (DLP 2010:5, emphasis in original).

Power and empowerment

Political discourse is about power. The IDS programme researching citizenship provides an accessible categorization and analytic entry point (Gaventa, 2006:2).

> *"Power 'within'* often refers to gaining the sense of self-identity, confidence and awareness that is a pre-condition for action. *Power 'with'* refers to the synergy which can emerge through partnerships and collaboration with others, or through processes of collective action and alliance building. *Power 'over'* refers to the ability of the powerful to affect the actions and thought of the powerless. The *power 'to'* is important for the exercise of civic agency and to realise the potential of rights, citizenship or voice."

From a CDC point of view, this formulation is helpful but incomplete. Applying a power lens to socio-political processes needs to include theory that interrogates power as both individually socialised and embedded and actively constructed by interaction. This type of analysis spans from covert or hidden power to its more overt, institutionalised and transactional dimensions. For example, Bourdieu (1977) exposes power deeply hidden with acculturated world views and resulting predispositions towards and interpretations of identity and life's experiences (Navarro, 2007). The work of Lukes (2005) and others point to additional, progressively overt, expressions of power. One is the function of language to define the parameters of thought and nature of knowledge. Language also dictates public and private discussion, communications and messages, typically favouring existing systems of dominance A further influence of language is to label 'reality' in ways that manipulate or mislead peoples' predispositions or cause them to misrecognise their 'objective' interests (Moncrieff and Eyben, 2007; Lukes, 2005:149). Further, Haugaard (1997) demonstrates how structuration of power co-determines processes of (political) inclusion and exclusion and the rules of the game in socio-political arrangements and engagement. Finally, many authors treat physical coercion and force as, often, the most visible manifestation of power upon which – in the Weberian sense – states enjoy a defining monopoly. To fully interrogate social arrangements with their political processes, a CDC lens should draw on comprehensive theories and articulations of power as process and as empirical, practical expression.

By way of illustration, Table 1 combines ways of appreciating the qualities of power as an individual, collective and transactional phenomenon that can be empirically investigated, often in terms of civic agency capabilities and outcomes The table shows that power should be seen preferably as an interactive feature, even though it is exercised in various ways and with different purposes. The question of where a CDC 'power lens' would focus on depends on the 'domain' that is chosen by

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[15] We are grateful to Mike Edwards for this observation.

change agents? This is turn will have to be refined further through research on practical applications of this power lens.

Table 1. <u>Power from a Civic Agency Perspective</u>

Power Expressions/ Power Processes	Power Within	Power With	Power To	Power Over
Socio-psychological forming	Empowering acculturation and socialisation	Associating for public action	Selecting and living a self-determined identity	Assertion in society as a personal and joint political project
Controlling Language	Applying critical interpretations	Creating a shared vocabulary	Imposing or challenging discourses	Diversifying and gaining access to information
Controlling Rules	Knowing and asserting rights and interests	Negotiating collective outcomes	Imposing or challenging exclusion	(Co-)determining conventions, laws and policies
Applying coercion	Questioning expectations of self-compliance	Adopting protective collaboration	Opposing unaccountable authority	Just use of public instruments of physical force

Allied to power categories are theories of empowerment which link CDC to a family of ideas associated with an 'activist' reading of socio-political change. Drawing on the renewed interest for empowerment by liberation theology and feminism in the 1970s, CDC is inspired by the work of Friedmann (1992) who has criticised the neo-liberal use of empowerment. He theorised poverty as the lack of access to social power, and pointed out that constraints were put on collective self-empowerment by rights-based tendencies to 'personalise' empowerment strategies, so reducing attention to tackling structural conditions causing poverty. Despite this weakened use of 'empowerment', the concept remains very relevant for CDC especially when the meaning of power is further unpacked in ways described above.

A central feature of CDC is to counter the disempowering effect of 'internalised powerlessness', which had been flagged by Fanon (1986), Foucault (1987), and Freire's (1974) 'critical consciousness', as well as by several feminist authors (Rowlands, 1995; Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999). They point at the danger of stripping power from its transformative quality. Indeed, (civic) agency is a tool for targeting disempowering structures. In this vein, a CDC narrative combines toward a theory of empowerment beyond 'participation' to a developmental democracy emerging though active engagement of the polity which reinforces both citizenship and the state as an accountable and effective bearer of legitimate authority.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article responds to an enduring observation that, as a discipline, development studies is incomplete in the sense that politics as process and the political as substance have remained marginal. Recent analysis of development research continues to argue the case for bringing politics back in. We do so through a critical conclusion that twenty years of civil society discourse has not realised its potential to make the political central. While still of use for examining societal change, a more robust and comprehensive understanding of development would emerge if civil society is 're-located' and refined to sharpen and deepen the political contours and dynamics involved. Civic driven change is a potential way of doing so. The core of the CDC lens, also identified by others, is located in the notion of civic agency as an empirical category.

Experience to date signals areas where attention is required if development activism, practice, strategy and policy are to benefit from an additional lens. For example, a central policy objective of aid is to improve governance. Can CDC assist in taking on board why and how, in Goldfarb's terms, the poorly visible 'politics of the kitchen table' remain fragmented or assertively aggregate when interfacing with formal political systems and players exemplified in the Arab Spring, in Malawi's

citizen's 'uprising', or in Chile's student revolt against the consequences of privatising public universities? A central challenge is to further explore the ontology relied on as a source of imagination-driven civic energy where complex human drivers of reproduction, identity and meaning are likely to be in play. Another issue is to 'reconcile' the normative premises of civic agency with endogenous norms and values. The supposedly ontological roots of pro-social behaviour remain open to contextual interpretation that has to be dealt with conceptually and methodologically. A third challenge is how to make CDC-illuminated processes visible in terms of knowledge and inspiration. This requirement is particularly tricky when interventions, aided or otherwise, are not in play. In effect it requires exposing and communicating about underlying forces that inhabit daily practices and relations that drive the socio-political factors in domains of concern. In turn, this calls for practical ways to understand and delineate what a domain involves. Attention is also called for in terms of the moral dilemmas of applying uncivil means – such as public disobedience and confrontations with authority and between social groups – to achieve civic outcomes. Finally, an issue remains about what, if anything, CDC can contribute to the generally unsatisfactory state of effectiveness with international aid. If aid as currently envisaged and applied is too seldom able to support endogenous civic agency without undermining it, can a CDC perspective assist in revising development practice towards a better and more honest appreciation of power and the limited role of outsiders?

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