

## **CIVILIZING CIVIL SOCIETY: DONORS AND DEMOCRATIC SPACE**

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### **Introduction**

Discussions of democracy in Nepal, as in many other “less-developed” countries in the current era, more often than not emphasize the necessity of the existence of a vibrant and active ‘civil society.’ The latter has been seen as being especially important in this period of Nepal’s history with the cease-fire, peace talks and the attempt to move to a post-conflict Nepal. However, the reification of civil society as the panacea to all of Nepal’s ills does more to obfuscate than clarify understandings of the nature and potential of democratic space in Nepal. Nepali analysts have commented on the manner in which civil society and other discourses of “democracy,” “development,” “empowerment,” “gender” are utilized in simplified and sanitized forms (Paudel 1997; Shah 2002; Tamang 2002). “Shorn of their particular political and economic histories, these privileged discourses get circulated as transparent and free-floating normative orders.” (Shah 2002: 137). That this is not a specifically Nepali phenomenon is clear. The idea of civil society has been speedily embraced in a wide range of contexts, coming to the fore in not only political science but development (Van Rooy 1998, McIlwaine 1998, Blaney and Pasha 1993). The concomitant unwillingness to interrogate the term only adds to the confusion and ambiguity surrounding the idea of civil society (Haynes 1996; Blaney and Pasha 1993)

Drawing upon my experience working with international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in and outside of Kathmandu, in this article I critically analyze the concept of “civil society” -*nagarik samaj*- as it is used in Nepal today. Beginning with a general theoretical overview of civil society, I sketch out the manner in which civil society is predominantly understood in Nepal. I then show how from both within the liberal tradition in which dominant notions of civil society in Nepal

are embedded, and from the angle of neo- or post-Marxist<sup>1</sup> understandings of civil society, the reification of the latter as the panacea to all of Nepal's ills is problematic. This is specifically linked to the dynamics that are introduced into the functioning of civic organizations in Nepal by foreign aid donors – actors usually ignored in analyses of civil society. More specifically, this article argues that in the context of civil society, more complex and contradictory understandings of the role of donors and foreign aid is necessary in two main ways. One, is the role of international donor aid in inhibiting the very sorts of behaviors, attitudes and orientations critical to normative understandings of associational groups working together for the creation of democratic space. And secondly, the manner in which foreign aid structures, defines and legitimizes very specific, neo-liberal ideas of “democratic” activities which are embedded within the dominant geo-political and economic framework. I end by drawing on studies conducted in other non-western countries to push for the study of other forms of politics in Nepal for a better understanding of how state-society relations are structured and the consequences this has for the potential expansion of democratic space.

### **Situating civil society and Nepal**

The history of the concept of civil concept is long and diverse spanning a range of theorists such as Hegel, Marx, Gramsci, Adam Smith and De Tocqueville.<sup>2</sup> In so far as a mapping of the history and contours of civil society is not possible here, given the vast range of interpretation, for the purposes of this paper conceptions of civil society can be broadly divided into two categories, liberal and the Marxist – with their respective neo/post permutations. It is generally agreed that civil society is based on some form of coordinated activity beyond the individual and household and beyond the confines of the state. It is said to be an arena of associational culture that implies a sense of collective action. Broadly, civil society serves as a sort of bridge between the realms of society (defined here as an aggregate of individuals and households living together within a more or less ordered community) and the state (defined

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1 For the purposes of space, the complexities and contradictions within both streams of thought have been omitted. See footnote two for references to relevant literature.

2 For historical and theoretical overviews of the concept see for example Keane 1988, Cohen and Arato 1992 and Kaviraj and Khilnani 2001.

here as a set of government norms and institutes for the purposes of structuring and controlling a given territory).

The bridge of civil society can be built from two directions. If it is built from the direction of society towards the state, it serves to enforce societal norms on the operations of the state. If on the other hand the bridge is built from state to society, a Gramscian hegemony is created which normalizes state domination over society. In either case, civil society legitimizes the state. The difference between the two constructions is normative - whether the legitimization rests upon an actual integration of societal values into state functioning and apparatus, or upon the effective exercise of state ideology and control over society.

In the liberal approach, derived from de Tocqueville's work on democracy in 19<sup>th</sup> century America with its emphasis on the beneficial effects of civil associations for the creation and maintenance of democracy (Tocqueville 1969), it is civil society imposing and enforcing societal norms upon the workings of the state which is key. Putnam's work which has been particularly popular and influential among policy makers, stresses the necessity of a vibrant organizational culture as a prerequisite for a stable democracy with horizontal solidaristic groups which cut across vertical ties of kinship and patronage (Putnam 1993). In the neo- or post-Marxist reworkings, civil society is seen as inextricably linked with the state and political organizations, with the power of the state sustained through the indirect domination of civil society (Gramsci 1971; Pasha 1996). Importantly, civil society – while an arena of oppression with internal divisions and power inequalities – is also the site of struggle and resistance against authoritarianism. The literature on “social movements” are linked to Gramscian ideas of challenging and transforming structures and identities (Lewis 2002: 572).

Dominant understandings of civil society in Nepal reflect the liberal/neo-liberal approach, with most analyses focusing on the need to promote practices and strategies to strengthen a vaguely defined civil society. This is not surprising in so far as the concept of “civil society” was introduced into Nepal via the world of development which has tacitly taken the liberal perspective (McIlwaine 1998:654) and that as a whole, the “recent interest in civil society is clearly linked to the global dominance of neo-liberal ideologies during the past decade” (Lewis 2002: 571; Seckinelgin 2002). In so far as “Nepal's own experience and transformation during the past decades becomes intelligible only when it is framed in the backdrop of ...transnational discursive flows” (Shah 2002: 139), it is important to understand the manner in which in the 1970s

and 1980s, the idea of civil society had formed the rallying cry for critics of authoritarian regimes in Latin America and East Europe (Arato and Cohen 1992: 29-36, 48-69). In the backdrop of notions of “the third wave of democratization” and the faith in ‘people power,’ external forces including transnational advocacy networks, facilitated by international and Western NGOs, were to play important roles in strengthening the capacity of local NGOs to alter and shape domestic political discourse via “the boomerang pattern” of transnational networks bringing to light domestic issues, and thus aiding endeavors to change state behavior (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Diamond 1995; Whitehead 1996 ).<sup>3</sup>

While civil society was theoretically understood as being constituted of associational life beyond that of just NGOs, the latter have been taken to be the major representators of civil society (McIlwaine 1998: 655; Kim 2000: 598; Van Rooy 1998b: 16) and the emphasis has been laid on the role and potential of the latter. Ideas of ‘strengthening civil society’ in the context of economic and political liberalization were central to the ‘New Policy Agenda’ pursued in the late 1990s by multilateral and bilateral organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, the Inter-American Development Bank and the US Agency for International Development’s initiative for ‘sustainable democracy’ (McIlwaine 1998: 654).<sup>4</sup> The emphasis continues today with the strengthening of civil societies becoming “more and more central in the context of development cooperation carried out by Western governments, the World Bank, and other Bretton-Woods institutions, the United Nations’ family organisations and other aid agencies” (Hakkarainene et. al., 2002: 12). From the economic point of view, and in the context of reducing the role of the state, the private sector and NGOs function as ideal service deliverers. As a more recent trend that adds to the “traditional area of service delivery” (Hakkarainene et al 2002: viii-ix), NGOs have supplemented the delivery of “democracy” and “civil society” on top of their “agents of development par excellence” role

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3 Important to remember is the fact that INGOs in the 1960s, 70s and 80s were campaigning bodies, doing consciousness raising in the North and often based mostly on their own public fundraising. They were therefore to some degree genuinely independent. Over the last 10 or 15 years, these institutions have become much more dependent on institutional funding, governments, EU, USAID etc., and more likely to be dependent project implementers. I thank John Bevan for this insight.

4 For an analysis of the ambiguous manner in which donors such as DFID, the World Bank and USAID use the term “civil society,” see Seckinelgin 2002.

(White 1999). In this role, NGOs as civil society organizations (CSOs) serve as founders of ‘civic culture’ which form the bastion with which to combat non-democratic powers threatening the state. Here the emphasis is on the contribution of “civic organizations” to the process of democratization (Van Rooy and Robinson 1998: 35), with donor support to civil society also “frequently justified as a direct measure of support to the creation of a vibrant free market” (Van Rooy and Robinson 1998: 37).

Thus Nepal’s own 1990 democratic revolution which saw the end of the repressive autocratic regime of the Panchayat opened up political space for autonomous organizing at precisely the time in which much foreign aid assistance was channeled into, among other things, the construction of a civil society.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing both the changing forms that INGOs and NGOs have taken over the years and the specifically political spaces that NGOs in Nepal have gained since 1990,<sup>6</sup> it is however important to interrogate the manner in which these civic actors have been shaped – knowingly, and unknowingly – by international forces.<sup>7</sup>

#### **The liberal rhetoric of civil society**

The widespread validity of the currency of “civil society” in Nepal can be traced to the mid to late 1990s. Not a few INGO funded books on the topic were published during this time (Bongartz and Dahal 1996; Shrestha 1998; Thapa 1998) along with many articles in various newspapers and magazines. Much of this output, continuing today, is embedded in the liberal civil society agenda in all its “development” approaches<sup>8</sup> and aims to curtail the excesses of the state (Bongartz and Dahal 1996; Sharma 2057a v.s.; 2057b v.s.; Shrestha 1998; Gyawali 2058 v.s.). For example,

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5 While Bhattarai et. al., argue that two forces *led* to the emergence of civil society organizations in the country – “the political space for autonomous organizing and the increased emphasis by the development actors on the role of NGOs and civil society organizations for the delivery of development programs” (my emphasis) (Bhattarai et al 2002: 7), it may be more correct to say that these two forces strengthened already existing organizations and enabled the numerical growth of such organizations. McIwaine 1998 makes similar arguments in the context of El Salvador.

6 I thank Anil Bhattarai for reminding me of the need to historicize and map out such changes.

7 To clarify, this is not to equate civil society only with NGOs. It is however, to critique that part of civil society that consists of NGOs and that is currently taken to be, implicitly and explicitly, civil society in its entirety.

8 See also Onta 2058 v.s.

in a piece titled “Foundation of an autonomous civil society and the environment of the citizens in Nepal,” Dhakal writes, “[t]he quest for the foundation of an autonomous civil society can only be realized when centralized power and authority is well decentralized to the development actors in various forms” (Dhakal 2000: 111). More recently, according to Dr. Alfred Diebold, Resident Representative of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Germany, which has sponsored much of the literature on civil society, “In developing countries, the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society have a primary responsibility for addressing the concerns of the poor and powerless and [sic] lend support to the politics of transformation” (Diebold 2001: foreword). The language appears to have changed, but the development agenda is still clear.

Furthermore, the predominant notion of “civil society” used in Nepal is one premised on groups working in association together for a better normative life of liberal democracy.

Associational life is the heart of democracy. The idea of civil society captures the essence of associational life of people and motivates them towards social, economic and political cooperation. Democratic communities require a public space – a space unfettered by the state and market institutions – to forge solidarity with each other and work for social justice. Without this space, people’s ability to overcome the problems of collective action remains unrealized (Maskay 2001: foreword).

These are, as a whole, premised on the prescriptive, with accompanying laments on the lack of civil society associations (Pant 2052 v.s.; Sharma 2058 v.s.). The latter are vaguely defined and equated with the non-state sphere as a whole such that there appears to be no difference between society and civil society (Mahat 2058 v.s.; Bista 2003; Hākā-Hākī 2058 v.s.).<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore academic analyses of civil society in Nepal - many of which have been sponsored or co-sponsored by donors - are as, if not more, conceptually troubled, and quite deceptive in their presentations. In Dahal’s “Civil Society in Nepal,” both Marx’s and Gramsci’s views are simplified so that their very different conception of the role of civil

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9 Nepal is of course no different to other countries in which the generic use of “civil society” occurs. For detailed critiques of the problem in such usage see Blaney and Pasha 1993: 10-16 and Chandhoke 1995: 35-42. Dhakal provides hilarious examples of the widespread use of the term civil society in Nepal, be it in the context of “civil society” buying tomatoes and cauliflower or “civil society” stealing domestic water meters ( Dhakal 2057 v.s.).

society and the implications this has for the manner in which democratic struggles can be imagined is ambiguous (Dahal 2001: 9). This replicates the maneuver made in his earlier co-written work in which the Gramscian idea of “hegemony” and civil society is sanitized to fit the following liberal conclusion that

Gramsci, therefore, underlined the importance of human ideas and efforts in changing the course of history and altering the process of development. Participation of the masses in decision-making and applying the methods of mediation can be expected to achieve pluralistic consensus and enable the social, economic and political systems in adjusting to the needs and aspirations of people as well as to link human consciousness with the maintenance or peaceful change of the system” (Bongartz and Dahal 1996: 69).

For Gramsci, civil society is a handmaiden to the state in so far as it is the sphere where the capitalist state constructs its project of hegemony (Gramsci 1971:208-9). The state finds its acceptance of its policies and programmes in civil society which is in stark contrast to the liberal idea of pluralistic consensus and dominant systems changing in accordance to the needs of people mapped out above. In his more recent book, Dahal relegates the relevance of both Marx’s and Gramsci’s thoughts to the past, in opposition to “the modern version of civil society” which constitutes a space in which ideals of democracy and human rights are unproblematically realized (Dahal 2001: 9).

Overall, a lack of conceptual clarity, intellectual rigor and basic theoretical foundations underlies most of these analyses as is epitomized by the following statement: “The common tendency of civil society to escape from both the paternalistic values of communism and laissez faire value of capitalism underlies its salience as both overlook voluntary, non-profit, and non-monetized functions of the society” (Bongartz and Dahal 1996: 79-80). In another example, in the introductory overview of a 1998 book based on several seminars throughout the country, titled “The Role of Civil Society and Democratization in Nepal,” the editor laments the fact that in the seminar on civil society and gender, “in spite of explaining to the participants the concept of civil society in relation to democratization and the importance of the gender perspective in achieving [the aim of civil society], the discussion, more often than not, strayed from the major theme and concentrated heavily on the sad plight of women in a male dominated society like Nepal” (Shrestha 1998). The de-legitimizing of women’s concerns about their lived realities and the imposition of explanatory categories from above, hints at the dis-

empowering manner in which ostensibly “democratizing” principles or objectives are actually wielded in Nepal.

The inability of academics and analysts to move beyond “trendy” and other jargon which may have limited explanatory power is made clearer when one first considers the manner in which civil society is, in general discourse, equated with NGOs (Onta 2055 v.s.; Acharya 1997: 72; Sharma 2058 v.s.), and secondly, the manner in which NGOs have in both academic and general parlance, been critiqued from a variety of angles. If some herald NGOs as alternatives to the state (Tamang and Rademacher 1993; Paudel 2056 v.s.; Nepal 2056b v.s.; Acharya 1997), NGO culture has also been variously called “dollar farming,”<sup>10</sup> a “begging and cheating bowl,” “slave of the foreigners,” “preventing revolution” (Bhattachan 2001: 67)<sup>11</sup> and as family entrepreneurial endeavors (Deshantar 2055 v.s., Chintan 2000: 135) Yet, these sorts of critiques leave untouched the consequences of NGOs for the manner in which civil society and its democratic promise can be realized.

The issue is not just that accounts of civil society are more prescriptive than reality based and that the use of “civil society” as an alternative to “NGOs” avoids the latter’s negative stigma (Onta 2058 v.s.). The problem in Nepal - as in other places - is also related to the fact that despite conceptual confusion and its limited value in either explaining Nepal’s past or future, imported concepts maintain public and official importance because of a basic unwillingness to interrogate terms by intellectuals and development practitioners alike and because of the manner in which the concept is linked, pushed and advocated by the world of development and donors for various geo-political and economic reasons.

### **The Problematic Foundations<sup>12</sup>**

Van Rooy provides a useful overview of the manner in which civil society can be usefully understood in analytical terms – as values and norms, as a collective noun, space for action, an historical moment, an

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10 NGOs are usually accused of “dollar farming” or “dollar kheti” – i.e. of being established solely for the purposes of receiving foreign funding and making money in general.

11 Bhattachan 2001 includes a helpful bibliography of these various arguments. These critiques of NGOs are also common place in Bangladesh (White 1999: 311).

12 Much of this section draws upon Henderson’s (2002) work.



anti-hegemonic movement and as an antidote to the state (Van Rooy 1998b: 12-27). But as theorists from various different fields and orientations have made clear (Henderson 2002; Mohapatra 2001; Jayal 2001; Pai 2001), the rhetoric of a vibrant civil society for political and economic democratization in whichever form does not actually interrogate the manner in which these high ideals actually play out in reality.

To begin with, a basic understanding of the relationship between democratic stability and civic groups is premised on the fact that internally civic groups inspire habits of cooperation, solidarity, public-spiritedness and trust. Externally, these networks then aggregate interests and articulate demands to ensure the government's accountability to its citizens (Henderson 2002: 140). Civic associations socialize participants into the norms of generalized reciprocity and trust, the value of group action and the dependence of their welfare on others – all essential for social solidarity and the social capital needed for effective cooperation between individuals as well as between citizens and the state (Chandhoke 1994: 34; Putnam 1993).<sup>13</sup> In all, “[d]ense, horizontal networks of civic associations promote the stability and effectiveness of the democratic polity through both the effects of association on citizens’ habits of the heart and the ability of associations to mobilize citizens on behalf of public causes” (Henderson 2002: 161).

However, what Putnam and other peoples’ work occludes when imported into civil society arguments is the unrealistic manner in which it is assumed that all civil society organizations are implicitly working towards common objectives latently assumed to be democratic in some form or another (McIlwaine 1998: 655; Foley and Edwards 1996). However, not all organizations falling under the rubric of civil society are necessarily working towards the promotion of democratization. In Nepal, for example, the World Hindu Federation is as much a part of civil society as ABC Nepal, an anti-trafficking organization. In the same vein, civil society does not consist of only noble causes and well intentioned actors. “[C]ivil society everywhere is a bewildering array of the good, the bad, and the outright bizarre” with, as one analyst has pointed out, former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic (as representator of aspirations of

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13 In Putnam’s words, “[s]ocial capital here refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (Putnam 1993:169).

ordinary Serbs) being able to rightfully lay as great a claim on being an exemplar of civil society as Vaclav Havel (Carothers 1999).

Furthermore, it is quite clear that various associational groups are organizationally structured differently. Many if not most of Nepal's most well known NGOs are structured very differently to trade unions and/or neighborhood organizations. In general NGOs in Nepal are more vulnerable to authoritarianism with low potentials for genuinely democratic membership-participation (Mishra 2001: 5). Putnam excluded Catholic associations from his study of associations relevant for the formation of social capital as "[h]ierarchical associations are not likely to create the sort of psychological and moral preconditions for democracy" (Rudolph 2000: 1766). With authoritarian leadership and competing groups with different aims and ideological goals, the space of civil society is a conflicted terrain (McIlwaine 1998: 656).

Moreover, the fact that an active, diverse civil society can often play a valuable role in the advancement of democracy also needs to be balanced by the fact that the proliferation of interest groups can have negative effects in terms of choking the workings of representative institutions and distorting policy outcomes in favor of the better organized – which implies in most realms the most rich and well-connected (Carothers 1999). Berman has argued that the richness of Germany's associational life in the 1920s and 1930s – ie the density of its civil society – ultimately facilitated the rapid rise and success of the Nazis in so far as citizen organizations shifted their allegiances away from the weak political institutions which could not respond to their many demands, to nationalist populist groups and finally to the Nazi party (Carothers 1999).

What also needs to be included in discussions of civil society and concomitant notions of trust, collaboration, cooperation, social capital etc., is the manner in which these dynamics play out in segmented societies. Studies in India reveal that while social capital may exist within certain social groups, such as castes and religious communities, this does not necessarily translate into the creation of more broad based social capital (Pai 2001; Mohapatra 2001). The logic of segmentation works to shape collective life. Harijans of a village in Orissa revealed the problematic of trust and social capital within the village settings in their relations with upper castes (Mohapatra 2001) while a study of protest mobilization in the same state revealed that strong communal ties – 'bonding social capital' - prevented the coming together for a common cause, restricting associational life and curbing popular mobilization (Swain 2000 quoted in Blomkvist and Swain 2001: 641). In Uttar Pradesh

social capital in the form of communal solidarity united Dalits making them conscious of their particular problems, brought them together for joint social and political action against upper and middle castes and provided them collective mobility upwards. However, “increased social awareness, politicisation and improvement in their economic position, have divided the chamras from other groups of their own community...and sections of the rural poor...with whom they have common economic interests” (Pai 2001: 652).

Furthermore it has been revealed that while social capital did help Indian villagers negotiate their difficulties better, the presence of social capital internally did not “play a decisive role as far as the output side of the democratic performance in the village is concerned”- i.e., in the extraction of resources or concessions from block/district administration (Mohapatra 2001: 670). As a whole, comparatively high social capital at the village level does not necessarily imply high social capital at the district or state level, or vice versa (Blomkvist and Swain 2001: 640). Mohapatra’s study (2001) also problematized the assumption of the continuation of a linear cumulation of social capital in the context of periodic conflicts and violence which disrupt collective life. Social capital accumulation and use needs to be understood as disrupted and intermittent processes – “disrupted by harsh confrontations of unequals trying to become equals, by challenges to established hierarchies by new forces trying to displace or replace them” (Rudolph 2000: 1766). Overall, in the context of segmented societies, Rudolph points to the necessity of differentiating types of associations (political or non-political/hierarchical or egalitarian/voluntary or ‘natural’) in generating different results – both internally for the organization and externally for the wider public and politics (Blomkvist and Swain 2001: 641; Rudolph 2001). These case studies illustrate the misleading manner in which the civil society argument is predominantly made. “[I]t presupposes precisely the sort of political peace that it imagines civil society providing” (Foley and Edwards 1996: 47).

Central for the purposes of this paper and as Henderson makes clear, civic association kind of arguments do not take into account the manner in which international influence impacts the two key components of civic theorists’ arguments: horizontal ties and the norm of reciprocity (Henderson 2002: 161). In the context of Nepal, the role of international foreign aid influences is almost always forgotten or sidelined. For example while recent reports on the Maoist conflict make cursory introductions to Nepal and include the number of years that foreign aid

has been in Nepal, no mention is made of the connection between current political, social and economic malaise and active donor involvement in its historical and current construction.<sup>14</sup> This is all the more remarkable given that many of them have pointed to the “structural dependence of Nepal on foreign assistance” which in the words of one DFID report signifies, with historical amnesia, “the potential for aid to have a significant influence – either positive or negative” in greater measure than in “many other contexts” (Goodhand 2000: 5). Another DFID sponsored research report while pointing to the possible role of development aid in contributing to the Maoist conflict could only see that contribution in terms of “raised and unfulfilled expectations” and “inequity in the distribution of resources” (Brusset and Regmi 2002: 11). Reinserting the role of foreign donors within the Nepali context requires a more thorough analysis that complicates the easy recipe of “add foreign assistance and stir” to build up civil society.

To begin with, as most people in Nepal are very aware of, groups that have received aid are not more likely to develop networks of accountability to citizens as well to the state, which are crucial from the perspective of governance. Critics have noted the manner in which NGOs are not publicly accountable, transparent or subject to monitoring (Mishra 2001: 5, 7; Acharya 1997: 86, 87; Kantipur 2055a v.s.), except perhaps to constituency/stakeholders in the North (Mishra 2001: 7).

Neither are they more likely to be embedded in more dense networks of association with other civil groups. Instead these groups – with all their organizational facilities, glossy publications etc., – are very much removed from the groups they claimed to represent. Their use of global language occludes the manner in which they and other NGOs are closer to their transnational partners than “the people” that they claim to represent (Henderson 2002: 142, 160). Western funders on which they are dependent constitute their constituency (Mishra 2001: 7; Chintan 2054 v.s.; Kapali 2050 v.s.); and not the population at large, to the extent that it is claimed that many do not make villages their working area (Regmi 2053 v.s.). All of this has resulted in shifting of priorities from domestic needs to those that reflect the priorities and agendas of foreign assistance programs (Hudock 1999).<sup>15</sup> “[A] very large proportion of the NGOs are engaged in the delivery of services on behalf of such agencies

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14 I am grateful to Pratyoush Onta and Ian Harper for this insight.

15 See Bhattarai 2052 v.s. for the stronger left version accusing NGOs of being part of imperial forces.

rather than in the promotion of belongingness, mutual assistance, solidarity, volunteerism, advocacy etc.," (Mishra 2001: 4-5). While the delivery of services and the promotion of "belongingness" etc., need not be mutually exclusive, the issue raised points to the disjuncture in being dependent and beholden to interests other than those of groups that NGOs serve, and the consequences this has for the development of civil society (Hudock 1999: 5).

Studies in post-Communist countries and in Russia have revealed that while enabling groups to aggregate interests, foreign aid does little to help group's abilities to instill habits of cooperation, solidarity, public spiritedness and trust (Henderson 2002: 144). Sperling specifically reveals how foreign aid has been decisive in fostering internal rivalries, jealousies, and overall divisiveness in the women's movement in Russia (Henderson 2002: 144). In Nepal, the failure of women's groups to establish viable networks among themselves – from the politics surrounding anti-trafficking endeavors, to the Women's Pressure Group, and current peace initiatives – is demonstrative of not only political rivalries (Acharya 1997:87; Sherchan 1997) but also the economic benefits at stake in a *bikas*-driven land of associational groups. The splitting into two of INHURED International, the Center for Women and Development and the Women Development Center (Chanda 2058 v.s.) can also be read in this way. In the "hills of distrust" between NGOs working in the same field (Onta 2058 v.s.: 14), it is clear that of funded civic groups in Nepal, few are engaging "in activities that one might associate with 'civicness.'" (Henderson 2002: 142-3).

Hudock states the problem very clearly:

One of the most fundamental weaknesses of the NGO literature is its suggestion that NGOs possess a value base that drives them to act on 'altruistic' motives. This absolutely contradicts one of the key tenets of organizational analysis; namely that organizational survival is every organization's goal and that, to survive, an organization must place its own interests before those of others, especially those which are potential competitors...The goal of organizational survival is met through self-serving behaviour, and this has implications for how NGOs acquire resources and the effect it has on an organization. First, the competition for scarce resources militates against the formation of networks or coalitions which actually be very beneficial mechanisms for obtaining funding. Second, it is often the search for resources that shifts NGOs away from any value base that they did possess (Hudock 1999: 20-21).

Clearly, the economic fruits to be gained from a funder is far more than the domestic market could ever provide. Thus, regardless of their desire to build a civic community, the need to continue their own funding base causes them to focus on producing results for the funder rather than necessarily making a substantial community impact (Henderson 2002: 147). In addition, the material gains from grants provide incentives for groups to engage in activities counter to the ethos of building social capital. Fear of jeopardizing their own funding possibilities results in the unwillingness to share grant ideas (Hakkarainene et. al., 2002: ix, Henderson 2002: 159) and rather than building networks and developing publics, groups consciously retain small memberships, withhold and stash information, duplicate each other's projects and engage in uncooperative and even competitive behavior with other civic groups (Henderson 2002: 147).

Despite the current buzzword of "networking", and in contrast to stated goals in publicity brochures and grant proposals, given the incentive structures of the grant game it is not rational for groups to behave in ways that might build networks and horizontal ties with members of the community or with local business. "Dollar farming" kind of arguments misses the systemic nature of such behavior.<sup>16</sup>

In so far as equipment and training<sup>17</sup> giving by donors has increased the organizational capacity of recipient groups, it appears "best at fostering groups' abilities to perform civil society's external functions of advocacy and interest articulation"(Henderson 2002: 140,164). This is as applicable to the Nepali context where the positive contributions of NGOS have been listed as consisting of: organization and leadership; increased awareness; reaching poor and disadvantaged people and areas; expanding access to basic services; giving voice to disadvantaged people; internationalization of issues and government policy change (Action Aid 1997: 16). However, as Henderson points out, aid "does relatively little to improve how these groups perform civil society's internal functions of developing networks of communication and trust (Henderson 2002: 164).

Illustrative of this is the fact that the funding of groups in civil society has resulted in the "emergence of a vertical, institutionalized, and isolated

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16 This obviously is not to argue that all Nepali civic activists are financially driven, selfish amoral actors but to point out the manner in which the "funding game" structures and influences these sorts of behavior.

17 For critiques of the limited benefits and negative fallouts of trainings see Miszlivetz and Ertsey 1998: 91.

(although well-funded) civic community – “principled clientelism” – with funding “creating a different brand of civic activism” (Henderson 2002: 140).<sup>18</sup> In Nepal, donor reports have acknowledged this effect of aid. For example, a DFID sponsored report refers to aid having “sustained Kathmandu elite patronage systems,” and reinforcing local patronage systems (Goodhand 2000: 32,33).

It is in this context that that recommendations made in a recently completed Finnish report on donor and recipient Southern civil society organizations needs to be situated. The report called for, among other things, more institutional and open funding, the promotion of self sufficiency, longer terms perspectives from donors, support for networks, support for national umbrella civil society organizations, training and technical assistance, and constituency building and advocacy (Hakkarainen et. al., 2002). Again, beyond increasing organization capacity, these recommendations leave untouched questions of how co-operation, solidarity, public spiritedness and trust are to be created, and how the aggregation and accumulation of demands can be made in practice given this environment. These questions are heightened in the context of issues of long-term sustainability given the reliance on donors and their need for quick, short-term products at the expense of long term goals<sup>19</sup> (Henderson 2002:144,146) and the overall inability to measure the “success” of democracy promotion programs. Efforts to report on the “increased participation in local government decision making” in Poland by a Washington DC development consulting firm which had won the USAID \$26 million contract on promoting democracy in local government in Poland, lacked a baseline to show how public participation had risen over the project’s lifetime. If increases could be shown, it could not be linked directly to the project’s activities as opposed to other more widescale changes taking place in Poland as a whole (Dobbs 2001c). All that one opinion survey revealed was that “one in six citizens had attended municipal budget presentations and one in four citizens had met with their local representatives at some point during the previous year” (Dobbs 2001c).

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18 See White 1993 for arguments about the creation of patron-client relations within NGOs and their “partners”.

19 In such a context, donor reluctance to fund long term social science research is not surprising. Thus “research” will continue to be dominated by donor reports with all their concomitant shortcomings.

### **Elite Nagarik Samaj and the Sieving of the Public Sphere**

Chandhoke makes clear that civil society as public space is not a *tabula rasa* but as an historically constituted and socially produced, is inscribed with previous power plays and struggles (Chandhoke 1995: 179). In Nepal analysts have argued that historical privileges have enabled a certain caste and class group by virtue of their education to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the development world (Dixit 1997; Bhattarai 2054 v.s.; Tamang 2002; Pant 2052: 6).<sup>20</sup> What has not been sufficiently analyzed is the effect that the emergence of a distinct civic elite within the NGO community (Henderson 2002: 157) has for the structuring of democratic space and the extent to which foreign assistance has reinforced structured inequalities of caste, ethnicity, gender and religious belief. The problem of liberal discourse with its construction around formal terms of political democracy, participation and rights is that “it is profoundly indifferent to the ability or the inability of the inhabitants of civil society to participate in the sphere of discourses and debate on equal terms. It is simply a primitive form of conceptualization” (Chandhoke 1995:12).

Civil society conceptualized as a sphere of social reproduction and association, has many tiers and scales of organizations and overall much internal heterogeneity (Sharma 2058a v.s.; White 1999: 314, Bhattarai et. al., 2002) and conflict (McIlwaine 1998). McIlwaine (1998) differentiates between small neighborhood groups which emerge from the bottom up (which she terms as ‘informal civil society organisations’) and large organizations which are more national and/or international (labeled ‘formal civil society organizations’) which tend to be formed from a more top-down perspective. It is the more visible, Kathmandu-based, formal organizations which form the first line of recipients with established track records of funding legitimizing the further funneling of resources to these “proven” organizations. An estimated 100 NGOs mobilize 80% of total funds channeled through the NGO sector (Action Aid 1997: 15).<sup>21</sup> This has further exacerbated already significant inequalities between Kathmandu-based and regional groups in Nepal (Acharya 2002; Goodhand 2000: 34). According to one donor funded report on conflict

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20 Clearly there are exceptions to the rule, especially with the rise of *janajati* politics and its importance in both the development and political sphere.

21 This number excludes “special/mega NGOs” like Family Planning Association, the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation and the Nepal Red Cross society (Action Aid 1997: 15).



and development, of the “unintended, collateral effects” of aid, one has been “an excessive focus on some regions and on capital intensive projects, strengthening patronage systems and regional cleavages, in particular between the Kathmandu valley and the rest of the country” (Brusset and Regmi 2002: 14). As a whole aid widens the gap between rich and poor directly or indirectly through high salaries for those working in donor projects (Acharya 2002: 16) and for elites who establish NGOs.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, much has been said about the culpability of Nepali intelligentsia and professionals for the “failure of development” – be it issues of co-optation, lack of independent research and research agendas (Shah 2002: 147; Chintan 2000; Dixit 1997) and unwillingness to critique development powers that be. However, in terms of the arguments being made in this paper, their involvement within the development world raises other questions concerning their role in the development of “civil society.”

In a non-colonized country where English as a medium of communication is both marginal yet powerful, development elite with their language skills (written and oral) and stature as “authentic Nepalis” serve as gatekeepers of information to their non-Nepali speaking bosses and/or office mates. The importance of the English language in working with donors has allowed certain elites to have privileged access to resources (Tamang 2002a; Onta 2055 v.s.) such that “[r]ather than facilitating horizontal networks among groups, foreign aid [has] strengthened the division of the civic community between the haves and the have-nots and centralized resources in the hands of the NGOs that connections with the West” (Henderson 2002: 142). According to a DFID report,

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22 Voicing concerns similar to those in Nepal, Agbaje has argued that the recent NGO arrivals brought into being by elites may be no more than money making endeavors – in Africa as part of the coping mechanisms in the face of structural adjustment (Agbaje 1990: 36 quoted in Hudock 1999: 16). The role of donors in the creation and sustaining of new circles of inequality are clear. It is interesting to note here that despite quoting Agbaje, Hudock’s (1999) main argument that southern NGOs would be able to act as more effective intermediaries and to empower grassroots groups as part of civil society development were it not for their dependence on donors, misses the agency and agendas of elites and portrays NGOs as somewhat neutral in their stance – despite their organizational imperatives for funding.

Society's caste employment and income inequalities are indeed strikingly reflected in many agency structures, which are dominated by the Brahmin and Chettri castes and the Newari group. In spite of the emphasis given to rural employment, the management of programmes is still overwhelmingly placed in the hands of a 'gate keeper' group (Brusset and Regmi 2002:15).

An European Union Conflict Prevention Assessment Mission report restated the same assessment:

The problem of politicisation, caste and ethnic inequality are the context of civil society activity. For donors, civil society is a very small group of English speaking elite operating in Kathmandu. There has been little attempt to reach out to the regional partners or capitals to plumb deeper into the social strata of Nepalese society, for partners or informants (Van Looke and Philipson 2002: 21).

Having made this candid admission the report immediately goes on to put a positive gloss on the group, suggesting without a trace of irony that the "small numbers of socially concerned English speaking elites in Kathmandu" have had a "great burden" put upon them (Van Looke and Philipson 2002: 21). Donor responsibility in generating and enforcing inequalities already evident in society and in the developing civic sphere is seldom discussed within the context of conflict.

However, important for this section, is the issue of how much information Nepali elite, usually upper-caste Bahuns and Chettris and some Newars, "sieve" before presenting to donors "facts" and "realities" which then guide funding decisions. Bhattachan (2001) and Tamang (2002a, 1998) have raised these questions in the specific context of the impact this has for *janajati* and *dalit* groups and their ability to have their views and concerns heard and acted upon. These issues need to be further situated in the general context of the importance of free information flows for the structuring of democratic space and specifically, for the bases on which donors with all their power and resources plan and carry out interventions. The censoring of information and the implications this has for the right to information and the need to be fully informed actors and the public are key democratic issues. If calls have been made for donors to listen more carefully to what NGOs are saying (Hakkarainene et. al., 2002), what has hitherto not been addressed is the type, form and extent to which information is screened from elite donor decision-makers (usually non-Nepali).<sup>23</sup>

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23 Action Aid Nepal is an exception to the rule with its Nepali director.

For example, a foreign director of an INGO a few months after his arrival in the country expressed his bewilderment at the extent to which he was actively excluded from information in his office – the exclusion gauged from the manner in which staff, even when talking in Nepali, stopped doing so in his presence and the manner in which excited chatter in the office intoned developments of some kind or another – developments/issues which were then never relayed to him. When asked if he still felt the same frustration and exclusion at the end of tenure, the director happily replied no. He had become used to, and resigned to, this facet of heading an organization in Nepal. In another example, a senior managerial staff member of a large INGO had called another INGO to inquire about certain rumors she had heard concerning another INGO and a Nepali organization that they were funding. In hearing of the call, the INGO named in the rumor called a meeting with the INGO initiating the phone call in order to clarify the issue. However, in the preliminary introduction, the non-Nepali acting head of the organization which had initially made the inquiry had no idea of either the “rumor”, nor the initiative to call undertaken by the senior management staff. Neither did the staff in question, present at the meeting, concede to making the inquiries.

Reports are also not immune to these forms of self-screening. For instance, the above mentioned Finnish report that sought to understand the nature of civil society in the South through self analysis (Hakkarainen et. al., 2002), obviously relied on selected associational groups to partake in honest and reflexive discussions about their experiences. As is clear from the Nepal report and as related by the head of the Nepal report section, Anil Bhattarai, the reluctance of certain selected authors to critically and honestly undertake this enterprise greatly undermined the effectiveness of the endeavor. In so far as their analysis informs donor perspectives, this has a clear impact on how donors can conceptualize their roles and responsibilities and programs vis a vis recipients. This is of course not to argue that donors *only* make bad and improper decisions because they have been mis/ill- informed by Nepalis. It is to highlight the increasing power and influence of this newly coalescing elite to influence decision-making in intended and un-intended ways.

This ‘sieving’ process also needs to be situated in the context in which the more powerful the partner/recipient NGOs, the more likely Nepalis working in all tiers, but especially higher up in donor INGOs and other organizations form informal and personal ties. The explicit use of “dai”,

“bhai”, “didi” – familial terminology – not only “accurately suggests the relatively personalized, charismatic character of NGO leadership, compared with the more formal systems of government bureaucracy; but it also expresses the embedding of NGO staff interactions within a broader culture of kin and clientist relations” (White 1999: 314). These relations are as valid between NGO and INGO staff.<sup>24</sup>

For example, initial forays into resolving tensions between an INGO and NGO were initiated by a senior management official of the NGO who used fictive kinship networks – as a Chettri, he sought and gained informal meetings with a Chettri high in the managerial staff of the INGO – and pleaded on the basis of specifically kinship ties for help in order to prevent the INGO from making public certain unflattering information about the NGO. In another instance, in the face of allegations of gross malpractice if not criminal activity which included violence, said to be occurring in an institution, Nepali elite of international donor organizations self-defined as working for rights, at a clarificatory meeting on the issue were unable to entertain even the *possibility* of the allegations being true, as they claimed they “knew *didi*” well.<sup>25</sup> While it is not at all clear the extent to, and the level at which such relations function in the *bikase* world, such channels do exist and are used. It is interesting to note here that Dr. Meena Acharya, a well established feminist academic, is cited as blaming the haphazardness of women’s campaigns in Nepal on “the particular relations that women’s organizations and their leaders establish with donor agencies” (Bhattarai et. al., 2002: 23).

The use of unofficial channels is not an uncommon practice the world over. However, such practices are problematic when viewing civil society not only as an associational sphere, but also as a public sphere from which to voice public concerns. The active involvement of these elite in the screening, repressing and censoring of information from the public sphere – information which would enable citizens and other associational groups to voice concerns and enable civic engagement and participation – highlights the tenuousness of democratic claims made by such organizations. For people to be politically engaged and active a space for freedoms must exist: for the “freedom of expression, publicity, free flow

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24 It is important to note, as White states, that the idiom of family still contains a hierarchy of reciprocal responsibilities albeit with a degree of informality (White 1999: 314).

25 This was in contrast to their foreign counterparts also present at the meeting, who at least acknowledged the need for further inquiry.

of opinion, access to information, dialogue, and the freedom to contest established orthodoxies” (Chandhoke 1995: 164).

All in all, given this context, the extent to which groups in Nepal that have received aid are functioning more like civil society after more than twelve years of “democracy” and donor assistance in building civic engagement and participation, needs to be questioned.

### **Donors and Brand Certification**

Criticisms of donors, foreign aid and “development” have emerged from various different perspectives both internationally (Hancock 1989; Escobar 1995; Dobbs 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Easterly 2002)<sup>26</sup> and from within Nepal (Mihaly 2002; Integrated Development Systems 1983; Fujikura 1996; Bhattarai 2002 v.s.; Chintan 2002; Dixit 1997). While in Nepal there is an overall dearth of analysis on foreign aid (Adhikari 2003), general consensus on the failure of development to fulfill its objectives exists alongside accounts of the self-seeking motives of donors.<sup>27</sup> As a whole donors, despite the rhetoric of “partnerships,” dictate the nature of relations with recipient groups<sup>28</sup> which according to Hudock only reinforce northern NGO’s dominance and southern NGO’s dependence on them for resources (Hudock 1999: 9).<sup>29</sup> Studies have shown the manner in which foreign assistance reflect the agenda and moral concerns of the donor (Smith 1990). For example, in Hungary, the USAID Democracy network was originally designed by the National Security Council, while a British Euro-MP initiated the basic idea of the

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26 Easterly 2002 reveals some of particular idiosyncrasies of the aid business including Niger’s recently completed Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) – a prerequisite for debt forgiveness and new loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The PRSP numbers 187 pages, took 15 months to prepare and includes such detailed line items as \$17,600 a year on ‘sensitizing population to traffic circulation.’ In another example, the “Monterrey Consensus” that resulted from the UN International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey Mexico in March 2002, consists of 73 actions “including such ambitions as establishing democracy, equality between boys and girls, and peace on Earth.”

27 For a short and admittedly incomplete introduction to the politics of aid in Nepal, see Sudhindra Sharma’s introductory chapter to the 2002 edition of Mihaly’s *Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal*.

28 For case studies mapping out these dependent relationships and their consequences see Hudock 2002: 59-85.

29 However, it is important to note, as Mishra points out, that recipient NGOs are not “unwitting” accomplices (Mishra 2001: 4).

PHARE democracy Program (Miszlivetz and Ertsey 1998: 98,99). In Nepal, various analysts have made similar arguments concerning the agenda of foreign powers in their development strategies in Nepal (Mihaly 2002; Khadkha 1997; Panday 1999). Dahal for example cites a vice-chairman of the Nepal Planning Commission as complaining of the difficulty of receiving aid for Nepal's priority sectors as "the donors wish to invest in political, social, philosophical and business fields of their own interests" (Dahal 1995:119).

Important to note here is that donors are not free agents. They are responsible to not only those they are supposed to be serving, but also the domestic sources of their own funding (Easterly 2002; Henderson 2002:146).<sup>30</sup> Procedural requirements of the formal bureaucracies from which funds emerge demand that funds allocated for a fiscal year must be spent on assisting credible organisations within the prescribed time if at least the same volume of financial allocation is to be made available in the forthcoming year. In the Nepali context, this was made evident in the case of donor institutions desisting from a comprehensive inquiry into the possibility of gross ethical malpractices occurring in a Nepali organisation they were funding. An attendant development was the request by a high ranking embassy official that the status of the allegations be clarified as soon as possible as he faced pressure from certain groups in his home country to give the green light to allow the flow of funds to the institution in question. This remark was illustrative of the manner in which recipients are the *raison d'être* for donors and are thus *needed* by the funders for their own continued and future funding from their funding sources.

Since funders are perpetually seeking fundable activity, there is a robust competition among donors in Nepal for "good NGOs" they can support (Skar and Cederroth 1997: 118). In these circumstances, despite the apparent urge to create the "good society" based on civil norms of public conduct, the ethics of the situation at hand are relegated to the background by the incessant and unyielding drive to spend funds in order to raise more funds. The relentless circularity of the funding process and the relative scarcity of "good NGOs" combine to produce a situation tailor-made for pragmatic compromises that vitiate the professed agenda

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<sup>30</sup> Dobbs sketches out these networks in the context of the continued high level of US aid to Armenia in the context of overall shrinkages in foreign aid – directly linked to the political connections and lobbying abilities of Armenian interest groups (Dobbs 2001a).

of bringing democracy to people who are denied the benefits of a rule-based regime.

This process also provides an insight into a similar circular process of NGO brand-certification. This is a peculiar dynamic in which country offices of donor institutions take on the task of certifying the credibility, competence and reputation of local NGOs. These NGOs are seen to conform to international parameters, and therefore the recognition accorded to them is a specie of development rating. This is typically the process by which funding agencies legitimise their own choice of partner organisations by limiting the available choice to a short list of organisations whose credentials they have themselves rated. Since “good NGOs” are allegedly hard to come by, and since a handful of such organisations in Kathmandu have managed to monopolise international endorsement and certification, the options available to donor establishments is finally very limited.

This cartelisation of credibility and international endorsement in which donor agencies actively participate has several visible consequences. Not the least of which is the fact that foreign aid has assisted in the building of national and global reputations of certain associational groups in Nepal, and donors are now faced with the *need* to fund these organizations for the sake of the prestige of being associated with them, with concomitant pressure from their own funders. The fact is that in Nepal there is the paradoxical situation in which international figures have been built by global funds, only to later emerge as national icons. As the latter, buttressed by the global reputation, they appear to have become particularly immune to any criticism – criticisms that have emerged from the field from where their true work is easily gauged and criticisms which are well known and acknowledged within informal Kathmandu networks.

This is illustrative not only of the growing internal geographical barriers to building of civic society built by aid, but the manner in which foreign aid to associational groups assists in the creation of obstacles to the building of open, democratic fields of discussion and critiques as well as issues of accountability and transparency. This argument thus goes beyond the issue of the increasing autonomy of NGO’s from ‘civil society’ (White 1999: 321), and the contradiction between NGO’s growing autonomy from recipient states and their growing dependence on donor states (Shah 2002: 141). It raises questions about whether “dependence” on donor states in turn can actually be related into accountability.

One large NGO recently turned down a NC Rs 6,250,000 grant from an INGO and ended all relations with it on the ground that it did not feel comfortable working with a “partner” which had compromised on the ethics of confidentiality and collaboration. Reading between the lines, it would appear that the INGO had raised ethical questions about the behaviour of the NGO staff towards target groups. Turning down such a large grant indicates not only the manner in which this organisation felt threatened by the sorts of questions raised by the INGO but also the extent of alternative funding sources available to it. The NGO’s diversified donor base obviously gave it significant leverage over each of its individual donors.<sup>31</sup> A senior Nepali manager of an INGO still working in partnership with this NGO, and trying to reform the institution from within, wryly acknowledged that attempting to push the NGO to change too much would probably result in her INGO “being thrown out as well” - i.e., expelled from the ‘partnership.’<sup>32</sup>

These examples raise many questions about the manner in which rather than assisting in the emergence of democratic foundations, foreign aid assists in the rise of undemocratic associations and practices. According to sociologist Mishra in Nepal

[t]here are *a few* fairly “large” NGOS that are relatively independent of any particular international donor/development agency as well as particular governments. Such NGOs do enjoy some leeway in defining their own identity as well as in formulating policies and programs relatively independently of international donor/development agencies, INGOs and government (original emphasis) (Mishra 2001:4).

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31 Hudock’s argument that the more donors, the more energy and resources recipient NGOs need to spend on managing their demands is valid (Hudock 1999:28). However, to reiterate again, the agency of NGOs and the complexities of donor-recipient relations remain under analyzed in her book.

32 The underlying imperative to fund remained unsaid. The debates that were raised by this particular case revolved around whether ‘to go public’ or remain in partnership and to try and pressure the NGO to change from the inside – generally seen as being the best alternative. Reasons for the latter centered on concerns of the fallout of bad publicity in terms of other donors pulling out and thus financially ruining the institution and the consequences this would have for recipient groups. However, moral issues of the culpability of donors – i.e., not only the responsibility in monitoring the state of affairs in such institutions especially when serious issues are raised, but their role in funding what could be possible systemic ethical malpractices – while recognized, were seen as being of secondary concern to the purported goal of building up “native” capabilities and institutional capacities.



Mishra's positive framing of this independence misses the potential negative impact this can have with such organizations essentially not accountable to any one body. Clearly the question of whether these examples are exceptions to the rule of donor controlling recipients' remains to be seen. However, in the long run, the emergence of dominant and powerful NGOs unaccountable to any regular channels, is problematic for the structuring of democratic space.

### **Financing an Agenda of Democracy**

What is less controversial but has a clear impact on public sphere activity and forms of public debate, is the general issue of the "grey" literature that is published and brought out by donors. Beyond issues of the quality of these forms of research, for the purposes of this paper, what becomes central are the questions of access, distortion and censorship. These occur in various and overlapping ways. In terms of access, these reports more often than not generated by Nepali intellectuals<sup>33</sup> are not made widely available which means that a great deal of information generated about Nepal remains excluded from the public sphere and unaccessible for Nepalis. Furthermore the practice of writing reports to reflect donor requirements is not unusual. The screening by donors as to what is acceptable to be made public is a common practice. A veteran consultant has talked about the manner in which in more than one working relationship with various donors, his research on Dalits or Janajatis has been judged as being too inflammatory for public consumption.<sup>34</sup> Reports have either been heavily edited, censored or kept confidential. For sensitive work, there is the practice of signing confidentiality clauses, of having an internal document and an external one for public distribution – the latter usually being a bland, innocuous summary. Envisioning civil society as a sphere in which people are able to form associations, to participate freely in civic debates and to influence social and political decisions is premised on a free flow of information – hence the emphasis on freedom of speech, media etc., that usually form the core of donor speeches on the merits of their countries and the weakness of countries

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33 The issue of co-optation of Nepali intellectuals and the use of valuable intellectual resources for the development industry as opposed to independent forms of analyses is an issue that needs further inquiry.

34 Personal communication. This researcher has at times resorted to terminating contracts and publishing the research in various *janajati* and dalit publications.

such as Nepal. And yet, through numerous devices, both subtle and brisk, donors actively impede precisely that flow when it comes to protecting their own complex institutional interests even while extolling the need, in the words of one donor funded report, to “support access to information and free media” (Brusset and Regmi 2002: 36).

Clearly, there are two reasons as to why donor rhetoric on democracy does not quite live up to its promise. On the one hand, the procedural rules governing the international financing of democracy promotes an indulgent attitude to the civic deficit among domestic partners in the civil society enterprise. But at a more fundamental level, the metropolitan principals of the project are themselves not immune to the profoundly anti-democratic impulses of the global neo-liberal establishment. The latter’s hegemonic interventions, informed by ideas about the universal virtue of western techniques of economic and political management, are often explicitly geared to the imposition of an elite-dominated, regimented democracy among politically backward people ignorant of the benefits of free enterprise.

The contradiction between what donors claim to be doing and what they do in practice because of what they perceive as being “best” for the people or country, not necessarily tied to ethics as illustrated in the above mentioned donor meeting, are issues that have been raised before. From avoiding areas and topic to address in Russia for fear of raising confrontations in Congress (Henderson 2002: 152) to increasing funds for Armenia because of political lobbying and not necessarily need (Dobbs 2001a), the cases are many. Describing US support for civil society in Egypt, Al-Sayyid states that it is support for a highly worthwhile cause which “ends up colored by partisanship, hypocrisy, and self-interest, precisely the opposite values of those that underlie the civil society ideal” (Al-Sayyid 1999). For US efforts to bolster civil society as part of the overall support for democracy excludes “many of the groups that constitute the most vibrant elements of Egyptian civil society” because “the United States fears displeasing a friendly government, one that in recent years has laid siege to many independent groups” and excludes others “because they are viewed as unfriendly to US policy on the Arab-Israeli dispute, even though they are genuine civic voices” (Al-Sayyid 1999).

Illustrating the manner in which “the new fusing of diplomacy, democracy, development and civil society to produce a potent foreign policy instrument in managing the global South” is evident in Nepal, Shah cites cases of the US ambassador and the World Bank and their

specific interventions into the internal affairs of the country (Shah 2002: 141-142). The role of international actors (in their various governmental and non-governmental guises) in weakening the sovereignty of Third World states has been analyzed from various different angles (Clapham 1999; Caufield 1996; Pasha and Blaney 1998). Global actors have increasing power for which they are unaccountable to the population among they work, and are “intrinsically entangled with the set of global social practices and governance structures that perpetuate neoliberal hegemony,” weakening democratic accountability in Third World states and deforming Third World societies (Pasha and Blaney 1998:431.) Nationally, the issue of: NGO’s being “agents” of the INGOs (Sharma 2058 v.s.; Bhattarai 2052v.s.); letting the World Bank and others be in “the driver’s seat” (Pant 2057 v.s.); having to behave according to donors command because one needs to “bear the kick of the milk giving cow”(Nepal 2056a) and the problem of not being able to independently make development plans because of the pressure from foreign institutions (Kantipur 2055b v.s.; Sharma 2058 v.s.) highlight concerns of the effects of outside intervention in internal affairs.

In this respect recent donor analyses of the Maoist conflict are revealing. They suggest a will to intervene in ‘civil society’ stemming from a desire not just to use civic actors for development purposes in areas no longer seen to be safe for direct donor roles. Interventions are also to be planned to see which “constituencies in civil society need strengthening” (Goodhand 2000: 35) while being aware of the dangers of “politicizing marginalized groups and generally raising unrealistic expectation in the population (a sense of rights not balanced by a sense of responsibility) leading to frustration” (Brusset and Regmi 2002: 14). The anti-politics agendas of what has been called the “anti-politics machine” (Ferguson 1990) could not have been more explicit.

The problem of ensuring that participatory citizenship does not excite expectations that cannot be met within the limitations of neo-liberal prescriptions is one that exercises the institutions of aid. Hence the frequent references to the “unrealistic expectations” that are raised by routine political activity. Civil discontent, and presumably insurgency, in this framework is the outcome of irresponsible politics, and not irresponsible policies. Bluntly put, popular expectations must not exceed the limits of what aid economists have decided is good for the people. Clearly politics must abstain from raising any expectations that a neo-liberal policy regime cannot fulfil.

On 5 July 2002, the World Bank Country Director for Nepal, Ken Ohashi, expounded this position publicly and very forcefully in an article in *The Kathmandu Post* titled “Ask for a Better Budget, will you?”, outlining the features of a good budget system for Nepal, the challenges for the Nepali government, and the role that citizens needed to play. Quoting from a World Bank Public Expenditure Review, Ohashi said, “[f]or any technical solutions to work effectively, the behaviour of political leadership and political parties needs to change significantly. The key challenge in this regard is how to redirect the involvement and energies of the political leaders and political parties in a more constructive way to facilitate the development process and public resource management.” He then went on to say

I have often heard that with the restoration of democracy in 1990, public expectations soared beyond any reasonable chance of achievement. Politicians have simply pandered to these expectations by promising everything people wanted and more, without any regard to what HMG can afford. I believe that much could have been done to manage expectation through transparency, information and a dose of realism (Ohashi 2002: 4).

The article concludes with the advice, “It is also time the citizens of Nepal demand more sensible budget decisions and more responsible budget implementation. Ultimately, lazy citizens will only get a lazy government” (Ohashi 2002: 4).<sup>35</sup>

Ohashi’s call for “the people” to ask for a better budget, is very much in line with donor suggestions to strengthen “civil society.” Given that the World Bank as an institution does not as a rule historicise its arguments it is not surprising that the article contained no hint of the complex manner in which state and society relations have historically been structured, the structural inequalities which continue to inform current relations, and the role played by organisations like the World Bank in facilitating, or

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35 Ohashi’s by-line includes his title and the caveat that the views expressed in the article “are his personal and do not necessarily reflect those of the World Bank Group.” However, this piece along with others published in various different forums are on the World Bank Group website.

It is also interesting to note that in response to this piece, I had written a fairly lengthy and admittedly rude letter to the Kathmandu Post. The letter was not published on the grounds that very few foreigners of that stature write and they didn’t want to risk offending him and potentially halting future submissions (see appendix for letter). The issue of self-censorship by media is another topic that requires further analysis in terms of its ramifications for the structuring of democratic space.

inhibiting the growth of accountability in state institutions. But precisely because he cannot afford to situate any of his suggestions in the lived realities of Nepali people, Ohashi was compelled to make technocratic and breath-taking recommendations that people's expectations should be "managed".

The irony of his argument is that on the evidence of past experience there is little to suggest that the expectations and wants of the people are high on the list of priorities of the political class. If there has been any pandering it is substantially to the demands of international organisations and not to the needs of the people. There is of course, the additional matter of how not to be a "lazy citizen" and to demand "more sensible budget decisions and more responsible budget implementation", without entertaining too many expectations that the government might forgetfully pander to.

Reflecting the same attitude, the American and British ambassadors, both prominent democracy advocates, gave the approval that Nepal's king Gyanendra had sought from them for dismissing the parliamentary prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on 4 October 2002 and replacing him with a royal appointee. A diplomat who should know confirmed in private these moves with the rationale that there was just no other alternative given the then current political quagmire.<sup>36</sup> And yet in the embassy backings of the King's move, there is a serious contradiction. In the grey area of currently defined "constitutional rights," the stringent standards of the "rule of law," as part and parcel of the movement towards democracy and thus usually so stridently called for by donors, was wavered.<sup>37</sup> Civil

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36 Personal communication. As I have previously written elsewhere (Tamang 2002d) the question then remains on what basis do embassies then back the active crippling of that which they ostensibly seek to help build? From what I understand, embassies are: historically un-informed; dependent on Nepali political analysts who for linguistic and other reasons "sieve" the information they pass on; fed appropriately contoured lines from the political leaders they regular meet and due to the barriers of language, are excluded from the debates and issues that occur in the vernacular press.

37 Describing Western policy maker's tolerance of flagrant human rights violations in Russia, Mendelson writes "...decisionmakers in Western states tend to see compliance [to human rights standards] as a value to be favored when convenient but not as an interest to be pursued and enforced at the expense of other opportunities" (Mendelson 2002: 55). Consequently, "human rights abuses do not disqualify a state from becoming a partner in the fight against terrorism" (Mendelson 2002: 55). In the same vein it is probable that in donor eyes Nepal's regression to authoritarianism does not disqualify it from

society analytically understood requires the stabilization of a system of rights as part of an enabling normative context which guarantees spheres of individual freedom within society (Blaney and Pasha 1993: 6-7; Chandhoke 1995: 204). Instead of seeking to strengthen civil society with the backing of existing laws and constitutional norms which have guaranteed rights and help create public and political spaces, unilateral decisions were made “for the good of the country” and “the welfare of the people.” In the monarch’s maneuver, backed by embassies, the rights of people were summarily dismissed.<sup>38</sup> There was no notion of the necessity of people themselves learning the trials of democracy, of understanding through their mistakes and the potential positive outcomes of reaching that level of dis-satisfaction which brings afresh the energies of people to rise up into public action on their own terms as “the people” – the 1990 People’s Movement being a key example.<sup>39</sup> This is particularly ironic given the recommendations of a donor report on conflict and development completed before the King’s takeover which emphasized the necessity of “reinforcing the rule of democratic law” (Brusset and Regmi 2002: 35). However, as in the case of Kenya where donors knowingly twice endorsed unfair elections allowing Daniel Arap Moi to remain in power (Brown 2001), it is clear that it has been the avoidance of the breakdown of the political and economic order, and not the emergence of popular mobilization and real democracy, that has been prioritized by donors in Nepal.

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being “democratic” in the same manner that it does not exclude the state from anti-terrorism partnerships even though, as in Russia, those very abuses and regressions “may create the kind of environment that breeds extremism” (Mendelson 2002: 55).

38 According to Duffield (2002) conventional descriptions of wars maps out an “us” and “them”. He writes, “*Their wars*, for example, are internal, illegitimate, identity-based, characterized by unrestrained destruction, abuse of civilians, lead to social regression, rely on privatized violence, and so on. By implication, *our wars* are between states, are legitimate and politically motivated, show restraint, respect civilians, lead to social advancement and are based upon accountable force” (Duffield 2002: 1052). It is hard to ignore this logic at play in Nepal vis a vis US interventions into Iraq.

39 C. Douglas Lummis has argued this in the context of the People’s Revolution in the Philippines and the Solidarity movement in Poland. See Lummis 1996.

### **Civilizing civil society**

It is hard to avoid the conclusion, drawing from both Ohashi's and the embassies interventions, the strategic forms of interventions mapped out in donor conflict reports and the programmatic manner in general that "civil society" is utilized in Nepal, that the intent is to "civilize" Nepali civil society and citizens in a very specific manner. Seckinelgin has revealed the dual process by which US funding of civil society organizations function. One is by funding those civil society organizations recognized as relevant which are those "associational forms that can be identified on the basis of an organizational understanding of civil life underpinned by the American context" (Seckinelgin 2002: 367). It cannot be assumed that those parts of civil society donors choose to promote is based on a disinterested, apolitical and technical basis. Donors, knowingly or not, tend to gravitate to 'partners' who share their ideological bent. Secondly, a reformulation of the space of civil society takes place (Seckinelgin 2002: 367). "Civil society as a metaphor for Western Liberalism," as his article is titled, "invites the receiver to produce and reconstitute the understanding of civil society in this image" such that applying Western liberal codes of conduct and behavior change pre-existing social relations (Seckinelgin 2002: 371, 376), motivating a very specific form of associational links along neo-liberal understandings. In the current global context of a "major radicalization of development," in which there is a new willingness "to countenance a level of intrusion and degree of social engineering hitherto frowned upon by the international community" (Duffield 2002: 1050), aid needs to be considered as a relation of government: "a set of technologies having the power to reorder the relationship between people and things to achieve desired aims" (Duffield 2002: 1050). For what is important to realize, as Henderson points out for the Russian case, "fundors are not free agents; rather, they are the expressions and facilitators of US interests as well as the monetary engine behind ...civic organizations" and "[t]hus all funding efforts, presumably designed to bring about stabilization in Russia, must also reflect US interests and concerns and be justified to an increasingly conservative Congress in terms of US national security and political commercial interest" (Henderson 2002: 146,151). The latter has been made clear in recent weeks by Natsios, the head of USAID, who has attacked USAID funded NGOs in Afghanistan and Iraq for not sufficiently promoting the fact that they were giving out donations from the US government (Klein 2003). USAID has further told several NGOs that have been awarded humanitarian contracts that they

cannot speak to the media - all requests from reporters must go through Washington (Klein 2003).

In this context, what needs to be reinserted into the civil society debate in Nepal are geo-political security concerns<sup>40</sup> which constitute an increasing important component of the metaphor of civil society organizations used by international organizations as “a part of a civilizing process” (Seckinelgin 2002: 376).<sup>41</sup> A very particular form of civil society is needed to legitimize the post 1990 Nepali neo-liberal state and connectedly, the existing global order. As in South Africa, there are few if any aspects of Nepal’s new political system that has not been shaped by donor input and as in South Africa, political aid, by funding the liberal proponents of procedural democracy in civil society at the expense of real democracy, does not just influence the rules of the games (Hearn 2000: 828). It is also constitutes part of the strategy by which a state that continues the same exploitatively economic system can be newly legitimized via the agenda of “civil society.” And furthermore, it forms part of the new democracy strategy by which international political interventions can occur overtly and with domestic and international support. Given that opposition to authoritarian rule had emerged from civil society in many countries, the imperative has become ‘to penetrate civil society and *from therein* assure control over popular mobilization” (W. Robinson, quoted in Hearn 2000: 816).<sup>42</sup>

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40 In an otherwise excellent critique of the current debate on the future role of the military in Nepal, this is an issue that Kumar fails to address in his article on the necessity of demobilization and demilitarization in Nepal (Kumar 2003). More specifically, the geo-political stakes that Western powers have in arming the state apparatus and providing military advisors and trainings and the consequent impact this has on the ability to reconceptualize discourses of “security” and “militarization” in Nepal remains to be analyzed.

41 Saravanamuttu’s cites the dilemma between foreign donors and civil society in Sri Lanka in the following way: “there is an unreality about donors professing a commitment to democracy, human rights and governance at the same time as they proclaim their respect for non-intervention in the affairs of a developing country” (Saravanamuttu 1998:133). That donor commitment to democracy, human rights and governance is defined according to their own ideological orientations and strategic purposes appears to have been missed here, as has been the long history of foreign interventions in different guises in post-colonial contexts.

42 According to Duffield, the new technologies which are to help regulate the “borderlands” where the “new wars” – understood as social regressions thereby establishing both a justification and legitimacy for intervention –



The composition and balance of power in civil society in a given Third World country is now just as important to US and transnational interests as who control the governments of those countries. This is a shift from social control 'from above' to social control 'from below'" (W. Robinson, quoted in Hearn 2000: 816).

In the context of the Maoist movement, this imperative has particular resonance.

### **Beyond civil society**

Theorists have made clear that relations between state and society in colonized countries have taken a qualitatively different form than that of the West (Chatterjee 1998, Mamdani 1996). Mamdani, for example, has pointed out that in Africa the first historical moment in the development of civil society – the realm of free association, publicity and political representation – was only among the colonizers. The second moment of civil society was marked by the anti-colonial and anti-state struggle which put into motion post-colonial reform and the concomitant creation of an indigenous civil society (Mamdani 1996). For Bayart, the African post-colonial state has been "deliberately set up *against* civil society rather than evolved in continual conflict with it" (original emphasis) (Bayart 1986: 112).

While the specificity of Nepal's experiences as a country that was never colonized necessitates a closer examination of its particular historical experience with capitalism and the West,<sup>43</sup> it is clear that state/society dynamics do take different forms to that theorized by Western theorists. Chatterjee's work is particularly instructive here. He argues that if the term 'civil society' is retained to refer to "those characteristic institutions of modern associational life originating in Western societies which are based on equality, autonomy, freedom of entry and exit, contract, deliberative procedures of decision-making, recognized rights and duties of members and other such principles," then it is clear from the modern history of such countries as India, that "the domain of civil social institutions as conceived above is still restricted to a fairly small section of 'citizens,' necessarily excluding the vast mass of

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occur, do not center on forming alliances with states. Instead they focus on modulating and changing the behavior of the populations within them (Duffield 2002: 1050,1063).

43 See Tamang 2002c for a discussion of this and the consequences this has for gendered citizenship in Nepal.

the population” (Chatterjee 2001: 172,174).<sup>44</sup> That “[c]ivil society is a sadly truncated and limited arena for large sections of the population” (Chandhoke 1995: 188) is as true for Nepal as it is for India. Thus it is not surprising that, as in Africa, the pro-democracy movements in Nepal today are mainly anchored in civil society with its lack of peasant base and consequently limited liberal agenda (Mamdani 1993 quoted in Chandhoke 1995: 188).

A focus on ‘civil society’ alone, apart from leading to modernization theory type typologies of the traditional/modern, denies the possibility that domains not yet “civil society” and thus relegated to the “traditional” zone, “could find ways of coping with the modern that might not conform to the (Western bourgeois, secularized Christian) principles of modern civil society” (Chatterjee 2001: 172-173). In India, the promise held in the ideas of republican citizenship have been overtaken by the developmental state which treats people as “population” – the “empirical objects of government policy, not citizens who participated in the sovereignty of the state” (Chatterjee 1998: 15).<sup>45</sup> The mediation between the state and population takes place not through civil society but what Chatterjee terms the site of a ‘new political society’. In the latter, mobilizations are based on violations on the laws; even as violators, governmental welfare is demanded as a matter of ‘right’; these welfare demands are seen to be collective rights and state agencies relate to these people “not as bodies of citizens belonging to a lawfully constituted civil society, but as population groups deserving welfare” (Chatterjee 2001: 177).

Examples from other countries are as instructive of the manner in which a focus on the “well-structured, principled and constitutionally sanctioned relations between the state and individual members of civil society” (Chatterjee 2001: 178) miss the different but still political manner in which people negotiate state-society relations. Ding (1994) has argued that the Western schemata of “state versus civil society” is inadequate for understanding the transition from Communism. Instead, drawing from the example of China, he states that the notion of “institutional amphibiousness” is much more appropriate in so far as it

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44 For theoretically informed discussions concerning the complexity, ambiguity and potential of civil society in the Third World see Blaney and Pasha 1993 and Pasha and Blaney 1998.

45 I have contextualized this line of argument for Nepal elsewhere (Tamang 2002b.)

captures the manner in which official and semi-official institutions are used by counter-elites for their own purposes. Rather than the civil society model of explanation that the collapse of communism was due to the growth of self-organized opposition independent of official institutions and the attacking of party state structures with mobilization from below, “institutional amphibiousness” suggests that the main reason for the collapse was “the internal erosion and disintegration of the sociopolitical organization of communist systems, which were caused deliberately by those working within and which gave opportunities for the development of unofficial structures alongside the official ones” (Ding 1994: 315). Furthermore, for Africa<sup>46</sup> Pearl Robinson suggests the use of the term a “culture of politics” as a means to better understand the nature of socio-political movements, political opposition and state-society relations. A culture of politics is the “political practice that is culturally legitimated and societally validated by local knowledge. Rooted in a community’s habits, customs and symbols regarding power, authority, participation and representation, its mores are readily accessible to elites and ordinary people alike” (Robinson 1994: 39). Such a definition allows for the study of mythology, history, subordinate social groups etc., and in Nepal, can include for example, the politics and norms of association, networking and social bonding surrounding *guthis*.<sup>47</sup> In using the term “a culture of politics,” political activity is still inscribed with the legitimacy of sociocultural norms, but is not bound to a particular space of the public realm unlike “civil society.”

In so far as all these studies have occurred in places where like in Nepal the borders of the public and private often blur into one, they illuminate the manner in which a focus upon civil society may be obscuring the breadth and significance of other forms of participatory and political activity in Nepal – other forms of politics which may lead to alternative and more effective forms of democracy.

For what needs to be remembered is that if society is defined as consisting of the entirety of social practices both public and private which mark a collectivity (Chandhoke 1995: 168-169), civil society consists of that sphere mediating the public and private where not only associationally organized politics takes place, but where public opinion and issues undergo a process of crystallization (Chandhoke 1995: 168). It

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46 For a short discussion of the problems of using the term “civil society” in Africa see Lewis 2002.

47 I thank Pratyoush Onta for pointing out this example.

is premised on a specific form of interaction based on a specific relationship between state and society and assumes fully functioning realms of state and society at large which are separate but yet mutually dependent. It is only as a result of the split between the economic and the political, the division between the private and the public and the rise of the modern state as an impersonal rule-bound system of power, that “a space is brought into existence where the individual can pursue self-defined goals and interests in association with others” (Chandhoke 1996: 180; Blaney and Pasha 1993). Thus accounts in Nepal that trace civil society into the *Vedic* age (Dahal 2001: 21-31) as a sphere that has always existed, miss the fact that civil society is a qualitatively distinct organization of social life – as a historical stage in the development of modern society. It is structured vis a vis a very specific form of state – the modern state - which has arguably only come into existence since the Panchayat years of the mass expansion of state infrastructure, institutions and ideology that sought to structure the people of Nepal into very specific relations with the state.

However, in many parts of Nepal there is a lack of state penetration which leaves society disengaged from the state putting into question the existence of a civil society bridge. Furthermore, in the context of kinship and locality networks, a web of patron-client relations personalize the state and blur the lines between state and society – lending a “neo-patrimonial” quality to the Nepali state. Thus aside from the problems associated with civil society mainly associated with NGOs funded with foreign aid described above, what space of civil society does exist, may be less significant than other forms of state-society interaction. Subsuming all forms of political participation (forest user groups, informal economic activity, non-state associations including *guthis*) under the “civil society” label holds little if any explanatory power even if groups claim such titles for themselves.<sup>48</sup> The fact that resistance to the state can be found in all forms all over the world and that an independent spirit can emerge and develop in any given political community does not automatically point to the emergence and/or existence of a civil society (Blaney and Pasha 1993: 17; Ding 1994: 296).

As Callagy forcefully argues in the context of Africa

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48 Given the positive spin put on ‘civil society’ and the concomitant reluctance to interrogate the term, it is of no surprise that groups of all types would self-identify themselves as being a part of civil society.

[N]ew or reinvigorated autonomous voluntary associations and sociopolitical movements do not necessarily a civil society make. Societal groups that interact with the state do not necessarily a civil society make. In fact, many types of state-society relations maybe quite inimical to the development of a public realm. Society finally striking back does not mean a civil society exists. Political opposition, in and of itself, does not a civil society make. In addition, civil society is not necessarily linked to political transitions; it is quite possible, even common, to have political transitions without the existence of any viable civil society, as Africa amply demonstrates (Callagy 1994: 236).

Given that civil society represents a particular form of political participation and engagement with the state, a widening of the analytical lenses beyond that of the civil society and state dichotomy may allow for richer and more sensitive understandings of the complexities of political phenomena in Nepal.<sup>49</sup>

#### **Appendix<sup>50</sup>**

Understand Nepal better, will you?

The section on “Citizen’s Role” in Ohashi’s article “Ask for a better budget, will you?” (TKP 5 July 2002) is quite brilliant. Brilliant, that is, in its ignorance of Nepal. There is no hint of the complex manner in which state and society relations have historically been structured, and the underlying structures which continue to inform current relations. Neither does there appear to be any thought about the role played by organizations like the World Bank in facilitating, or more correctly, inhibiting the growth of accountability in state structures. And finally, there seems to be no need to situate any of his suggestions in the lived realities of Nepali people.

That is why we have such breath-taking recommendations that people’s expectations be “managed” (the managerial approach to democracy, I presume) because it has been the expectations of the people which have so affected the “involvement and energies of the political leaders and

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49 To insist on using “civil society” in Nepal - arguing that “civil society” takes certain different but yet legitimate forms in Nepal - is to partake in conceptual stretching and yields little if any explanatory power. It also prevents the use of the normative discourse invoked by the ‘pure’ model of civil society, which can “continue to energize and shape the evolving forms of social institutions in the non-Western world” (Chatterjee 2001:172).

50 Reprinted below is the letter referred to in footnote 35 that the Kathmandu Post had refused to publish.

political parties.” I’m really quite tempted to ask if Ohashi lives in a parallel universe, in a different Nepal to the one that I live in. Because, I’m pretty sure that in the Nepal in which I live, the expectations and wants of the people are the least of politician’s priorities. In the Nepal in which I live, the political “pandering” is, if anything, to the demands of international organizations, and not to the needs of the people.

And even if I were to accept Ohashi’s Nepal as being the “real Nepal,” I still find myself facing some issues. For while not wanting “a lazy government”, I’m really not sure how to stop being a lazy citizen and demand “more sensible budget decisions and more responsible budget implementation”, without being afraid of further encouraging the “pandering” of politicians to my needs. Or am I to understand that the “lazy government” would not be “pandering” to my/ the people’s needs, if I/the people would demand that which the World Bank wants us to demand?

Oh yes, that would make us much better Nepali citizens.

Seira Tamang  
Kumaripati

#### **Acknowledgements**

I thank Pratyoush Onta, Thomas Matthew, Mark Liechty, Tatsuro Fujikura, Jagannath Adhikari, Manjushree Thapa, Anil Bhattarai and John Bevan for reading and providing helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. Remaining errors and shortcomings are mine.

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