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BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE:
A CASE STUDY OF THE BELLVILLE SOUTH CIVIC, 1980-1993

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"BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE: A CASE STUDY OF THE BELLVILLE SOUTH CIVIC, 1980-1993"

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1. INTRODUCTION

There has emerged in recent years the pre-dominance of distinct political principles. Since the fall of soviet-type regimes in the late 1980's the political features of liberal democracy such as constitutionalism, parliamentary democracy and a competitive multi-party system have come to embody the meaning of democracy internationally. With the collapse of Soviet-style communism even socialists now find it difficult not to proclaim the liberal democratic doctrine of representative democracy as the most adequate form of democracy. The rush to endorse liberal democracy is based, at least in part, on the widely shared view that non-liberal political theories such as marxism are insufficiently grounded in democratic theory. It is charged that the classical marxist conceptions of the state and society ignore the crucial contemporary problem of political differentiation.

Nevertheless, many today would insist that the traditional liberal-democratic resources of theoretical reflection on the problem of democracy are provincial and inadequate in the face of the political realities of our time. The size and complexities of multi-cultural modern societies, the development of new forms of social stratification, the emergence of new social movements: these and other features of the contemporary world call for new categories of thinking on the problem of democracy. The liberal democratic model provides the researcher with a thoroughly

abstract conception of democracy which is usually no more than an idealized version of the functioning of democratic institutions in the West. Research on democracy often takes the form of a simple listing of the social conditions in different historical settings which have led to a detachment of those settings from the classical liberal-democratic experience of the Western countries. As Laclau observes, this has led to a conceptualisation of democracy in non-Western contexts in terms of "insufficient development" or "deformations". (Laclau 1993: 2) As a result the Western experience operates as a logically consistent and unchallenged paradigm without internal ambiguities and different logical possibilities.

One example of the way in which the Western experience operates as a logically dominant horizon can be found if we examine the category of "representation". As Laclau points out, in classical liberal-democratic theory representation is a one-way process. A good representation is a transparent relation in which the representative fully transmits the will of the represented. However, in many third world societies there is a high degree of marginalisation and people's identities are fragmented at the level of civil society. In those conditions it is not really a question of transmitting a will to the representatives, but of how to constitute that will in the first place. In such circumstances, populist leaders frequently assume the role of giving to people, at the level of national politics, a language and an image of themselves which allows them to have a higher participation and to be able to represent themselves as historical actors. (Laclau 1993: 4-5)

A second example of the way in which the liberal democratic horizon limits research on the problem of democracy can be found if we consider the problem of "civil society". In the last decade or so people have begun to talk a lot again about civil society. As Taylor observes, they are invoking largely, not the age-old term used for centuries as synonymous with political society, but rather the contrastive notion which figures in the philosophy of

Hegel. (See Taylor 1990) Civil society in this sense exists over against the state, in partial independence from it. It includes those dimensions of social life which cannot be confounded with, or swallowed up by the state. The term in recent times has come from several sources: In societies suffering from totalitarian tyranny, it embodies the struggles of those fighting to open spaces for independent action. The notion of civil society expresses a programme of building independent forms of social life free from state tutelage. In the West for centuries "civil society" has existed as part of the history and practice of Western democracies. The question arises: in how far are the categories of state and civil society true categories of universal democracy? Recently Partha Chatterjee has argued that there exist a number of logical ambiguities with the category of "civil society" in European thought. There exist two extreme positions in European thought. On the one hand, there are those who abolish "community" altogether and think of rights as grounded solely in the self-determining individual will, and on the other hand there are those who attribute to "community" a single determinate form (one tied to the history of capital and the modern state). All other forms of community are delimited and negated. Despite such negation, however, there can be seen to exist within European thought an independent (and suppressed) narrative of the category of a non-universal "community". In Hegel, for example, the family is viewed as an "ethical" moment (as opposed to a contractual one) and in this sense represents a natural community. However, the family represents a suppressed narrative of community, a narrative not recognised by those who celebrate the absolute and natural sovereignty of the individual. This narrative might be suppressed, but is, nonetheless, ever-present. According to Chatterjee the family in Hegel can be interpreted as embodying a subjective community within the single community of civil society, thereby undercutting the universality of the "civil society" community. (See Chatterjee 1990) Thus, it could be argued that the category of civil society contains within it at least one logical ambiguity: it divides the world into two neatly opposed spaces, state and civil society, each

pictured as the only universal community, denying other lines of fragmentation in society, while at the same time invoking images of other, more hidden communities, both within and between civil society and the state. At the very least this ambiguity puts into question the privileged status of civil society (and the state) as the only categories in and through which to understand the spatial and political ordering of society (and democracy). The contemporary scene (mainly in Third World countries but not only) confronts us with many situations in which the term "civil society" does not adequately describe the variety of different spaces or worlds in which democratic practice occurs. Often the practice of democracy does not take as its horizon the modern state (and its practices), but rather non-state social practices and the specific boundaries drawn around non-state cultural, political or ethnic communities. As Chatterjee pointedly asks:

> "What then are the true categories of universal history? State and civil society? public and private? social regulation and individual rights? Or the narrative of community - untheorised, relegated to the primordial zone of the natural, denied any subjectivity that is not domesticated to the requirements of the modern state.." (Chatterjee 1990: 132)

Are there then any true categories of universal democracy? In our view (and following Laclau 1993), it is essential to avoid a simple normative endeavour in any historical analysis of the democratic identities. Democracy cannot be treated as a closed theoretical space with pre-determined dimensions. Instead, research must involve an ongoing search for a wider, richer and more complex conception of democracy under historically contingent conditions. The task of such research is to begin to identify a plurality of dimensions (associated with democracy) in and through which to understand the meaning of democracy in specific historical contexts and with specific historical actors. This paper is concerned with one particular civic organisation and its place within the wider development of civil society in South Africa. Civic organisations played a prominent role in political protest and change in South Africa in the 1980's.

Although they were primarily concerned with protests against rent increases and issues of housing, their actions impacted significantly on the wider political organisation of civil society. Civics, alongside other types of popular organisations, shaped the overall political and democratic form of civil society. Although the specific story of the Bellville South civic can by no stretch of the imagination be seen to exhaust the national civic movement's wider story (and its plurality of dimensions), I believe that its history raises numerous pertinent issues with regard to the wider strategic thinking on "democracy" and "civil society" within opposition movements during the 1980's. In what follows I will argue that the political strategies adopted by the civic's leadership reflected significant differences with regard to the political contest over the democratic form of civil society. The political ideology of the civic's leadership was made up of two contrasting "logics" vis-a-vis democracy. The one, which I characterise as "simple polarisation", viewed the objective of the civic's struggles primarily in terms of a competition for political dominance which involved a simple dichotomy between the apartheid state and a unified, undifferentiated opposition movement. Political opposition to the state was conceived of as a homogenous collective subject, unified in its common assault on the state. This first conception of democracy divided the social world into two halves, conceiving of the state and civil society as free-standing objects, located outside of society. The specific narrative of this particular conception of democracy, nonetheless, challenges the traditional liberal-democratic categories of "representation" in one respect: The civic was successful in providing a previously acquiescent and "imageless" community with an image of itself as a political community with civic demands. Whilst some of its democratic practices were not representative in the classical liberal-democratic sense, as a catalyst of historical identity, the civic can be seen to have played a crucial role in building a political world in which relations of representation (and democracy) became possible in the first place. The second political tradition within the

leadership of the civic viewed the organisation of opposition primarily in pluralist institutional terms. This tradition emphasised the building of civic independence outside the aegis of specific sections of the liberation movement. Underlying this tradition was a pluralist conception of democracy as disassociated from the fate of any distinct social actor. This current of thought avoided an essentialist conception of civil society and the state. Instead of dividing the world into two neatly opposed spheres, the civic located its struggles between civil society and the state. Instead of accepting that the world is divided into only two universal communities (civil society and state), the civic asserted its very own "community" narrative, an autonomous story which undercuts the categories of "civil society" and the "state".

Popular organisations in the 1980's: The Historical and Political Context

If the aim of research on democracy is to reach a more complex conception of democracy, then the latter cannot be presupposed as a starting point. It then becomes necessary to try to determine a plurality of areas in which there are difficulties in adapting an ill-defined notion of democracy to a particular historical period. Following Laclau, we believe that we need to begin by considering the political dimension, i.e. the listing of areas of friction between an initial notion of democracy (in this case the dominant liberal-democratic conception of democracy) and the attempts at its implementation in a particular historical period. (See Laclau 1993)

The specific wider historical context during the 1980's was characterised by imbalances in the relation of forces between groups and an adequate division of powers between groups as a result of the apartheid's political structure. It is our contention that the system of apartheid represented a "post-totalitarian" type of regime. Western political science of the fifties defined totalitarianism by a set of criteria such as the presence of a charismatic leader, mass terror, the permanent

"purge", and ideological mobilisation. Classical theorists of totalitarianism such as Friedrich and Brzezinski, for example, argued for five features of totalitarian dictatorship: an official ideology, a single mass party under a dictatorial leader, terroristic authority of the secret police, centralised control of the entire economy and a monopoly of arms. (See, for example, Friedrich and Brzezinski 1964) These criteria were superseded in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union by the advent of Krushchevian reformism according to which the violence of the Stalinist era was replaced with less overt forms of totalitarian control - "post-totalitarian" forms of control. In the wake of the events surrounding the revolutions of Budapest 1956, the 1968 Prague Spring and the struggles of the Polish trade union movement Solidarity in 1980, a new approach to the Communist system was pursued. "Post-totalitarian" states recognised that the Stalinist methods of state domination and control , resulting in the homogenisation of society were no longer tenable in conditions of national diversity and modernisation. Whereas totalitarian regimes of the Stalinist variant emphasised centralised mobilisation for party-directed fulfilment of ideological and social goals, post-totalitarian Communist regimes "granted" increased autonomy for select groups. New techniques of control included attempts by the regimes to bind the populace to the party-state through a so-called social contract. Citizens adapted themselves to the system by giving up their individual rights (civil liberties and collective rights) and in exchange received job security.

According to Rupnik, at the end of the day the debate about whether or not a political system deserved the "totalitarian" label hinges on the status of ideology. Under totalitarianism the ultimate consequence of governance is the instrumentalisation (under the party-state) of all components of society and, as a consequence, society's loss of autonomy. Interpreting this limitation of autonomy solely in terms of legal or penal constraints is not enough. Autonomy can be limited in many other, more "hidden", ideological ways. It can be limited by the fact

that those in power tend to control all sources of circuits of information and ideological discourse. This often amounts to, what Rupnik calls, the "erosion of memory". In post-totalitarian regimes ideology, then, becomes the chief means of homogenising and integrating the ruling apparat. Often in post-totalitarian regimes there is a dichotomy in the system: a ruling party-state which clings to an ideological legitimacy, and society outside of the state where there is a mere ideological ritual. (See Rupnik 1988)

In our view apartheid rule involved a type of post-totalitarian social contract in which society had no option but to participate. The political order which the Nationalist Party constructed after 1948 was aimed at enhancing Afrikaner nationalism by entrenching white political control in South Africa. Afrikaners governed not only themselves, but also all other groups in society. The Nationalist Party saw itself as the "grantor" of political life in South Africa. The Afrikaners' mission as the mature volk was viewed as the ultimate rescue of other demoralised volke.

The Nationalist Party's proclamation of its own status as the "grantor" or "donor" of the entire form of South African society translated itself into different forms of social control. On the one hand the Nationalist Party did not conceal the jackboot. Heavy penalties, including bannings and housearrests were imposed even for non-violent, passive resistance to apartheid. On the other hand there were also a range of "hidden" controls which were post-totalitarian in character. One of the hallmarks of Nationalist Party rule was the vast network of bureaucratic controls (e.g. the pass laws and influx control laws) which intimidated and de-moralised people and acted as a deterrent from stepping out of line. Indirect coercion remained the major control mechanism throughout different phases of apartheid rule from 1948 to 1990. Throughout Nationalist Party rule the post-totalitarian dichotomy remained in place: on the one hand, the ruling party constructing and re-constructing its identity as

the sole "grantor" of freedom and clinging to artificial constructions of ideological legitimacy, and on the other hand, a disbelieving and protest-ready society bound to the ruling party through a set of overt and hidden controls.

A central theme of South Africa protest-ready society has always been the struggle against the exclusion of black South Africans from any meaningful participation in the institutions of representative democracy in South Africa. When the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910, its Constitution excluded all blacks from parliament and denied most of them the right to vote. Since then the struggle for the extension of the franchise has played a pivotal role in the development of "civil society" in South Africa. Excluded from the institutions of political democracy that were reserved only for whites (and from 1983 onwards for coloureds and indians), black opposition movements grounded themselves in a world separate from and in opposition to the state - civil society.

While the complex social development of South Africa's civil society defies strict categorisation, it is possible, in our view (and following Weigle and Butterfield 1992), to identify four stages in its ongoing development. Firstly, a "defensive" stage, in which private individuals and independent groups actively or passively defended their autonomy vis-a-vis the apartheid regime. This phase lasted until the early 1970's. During the 1940's and 1950's opponents of the apartheid regime had utilised the limited opportunities of opposition tolerated by the state to defend their autonomy. By the mid-1960's opposition turned to underground activity and state repression had succeeded in removing from civil society any visible and apparent oppositional movement. (See Lodge 1983: 231-255) During the second "emergent" phase of "civil society" opposition during the 1970's, an attempt was made to re-build the foundations of an independent civil society by carving out a realm of autonomy recognised as legitimate and legal by the apartheid regime. During the 1970's the emergence of both the Black Consciousness movement and the

independent trade union movement marked the beginning of a new cycle in the development of civil society in South Africa. While most of black society remained excluded from any formal political process (and quiescent in the face of the threat of state repression), both these movements became a visible reminder of the apartheid regime's tenuous claims to represent a hegemonic political project.

During the 1970's the Nationalist Party began to sanction a wider public sphere which opened up new possibilities for opposition. Growing black militancy, foreign pressure, changes in the Afrikaner class composition and the fiscal crisis of the South African state propelled the government away from classic apartheid during this period. The dominant groups in South African society began to realise that if their interests were to be secured in the long term, the existing structures of social control and political representation would have to be modified to cater for at least some sectors of the black population. In the space provided by new state reforms such as the Wiehahn regulations and the tri-cameral parliament, national opposition leaders formed the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983. The formation of the UDF initiated the third phase in the ongoing development of civil society. During this phase the emphasis was on political mobilisation aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the apartheid regime by offering alternative forms of governance to a disenfranchised black political community. New tactics of political opposition emerged: Student, consumer and voter boycotts, mass demonstrations, national stayaways from work and trade union opposition. During this phase civil society began to represent a more stable democratic challenge. Prior to the formation of the UDF the boundaries between the state and civil society had been determined by the state, during the 1980's opposition movement begun to build concrete and independent oppositional centres that fundamentally challenged the centrality of the Nationalist Party as the sole organiser of South African society. Even in the face of harsh state repression, opposition movements persisted in organising to articulate and attain

independent goals. As the opposition became more and more adept at publicising its aims and reaching a wider audience, its goals became increasingly far-reaching. It began associate its goals with the eradication of the entire apartheid system, including the apartheid state. Slogans such as "dual power" and "people's power" became part of the opposition movement's political language. A central feature of civil society opposition during this period was a belief on the part of opposition movements that the basic contradiction of the apartheid system consisted in the opposing interests of the ruling elite and society at large. Consolidation against the apartheid system and its ruling elite became a key objective of the opposition. The politics of the struggle against racial domination cemented the opposition and often transformed an atomized opposition into a collective subject. This specific logic of political opposition quickly became a source of both weakness and strength.

Many of the weaknesses were typical of a large internally differentiated opposition whose partially artificial unity was forced on it by the logic of confrontation with a powerful adversary. By opening up the public sphere and raising hopes that social groups could influence their own fate, umbrella bodies such as the UDF created the impression that they were capable of crystallising the pluralism of opinions and interest that were present within the wider opposition movement. However, the fact that the UDF took the form of one powerful mono-organisation attempting to represent the oppressed masses as a whole (despite enjoying enormous support) affected this process adversely. The inadequate expression of real interest differentiation among its constituency at times undermined its democratic impulse. In 1987, for example, the UDF adopted the Freedom Charter, which gave credence to a specifically charterist political programme. In doing so, the UDF gave credence to the assumption that all political (and otherwise) relevant knowledge is in possession of a particularist political entity, the charterist strand of political opposition to the apartheid state.

Nonetheless, during the 1980's the opposition's success in expanding the "public sphere" was significant. During this period the public sphere became increasingly divided into two parts, the oppositional and official varieties. The former became increasingly free, while the latter underwent substantial changes while its monopoly was broken. Towards the end of the 1980's the fourth phase of civil society was ushered in. While for the large parts of the 1980's the dominant political conflict was between two monolithic forces (state and society), there existed nonetheless throughout this period a subtle movement away from a logic of "simple polarisation" towards a logic which stressed the institutionalisation of conflict within civil society itself. Since 1990 both civil society and the state have undergone significant changes and the result has been the slow growth of a new political centre composed of more entities than simply the apartheid regime and its opposition.

Thus, the specific historical environment of the Bellville South civic organisation during the 1980's was a complex one: it was characterised by imbalances in the relation of forces between groups which made impossible an adequate division of powers, putting obstacles to the processes of representation and short-circuiting the liberal-democratic (i.e. pluralist) functioning of popular organisations, both nationally and locally. In State control under apartheid continuously re-invented imbalances in the relation of forces between groups by restricting the functioning of popular organisations (and most other forms of opposition to apartheid rule) in and through their continuous exclusion from institutional (and often also non-institutional) political arenas. Popular identities were continuously fragmented on the plane of civil society and it was only with the formation of the popular umbrella organisations such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) that a systematic and sustained construction of popular oppositional identity emerged. In order to construct this identity popular organisations often had to occupy (forcefully) and re-organise entire political arenas in civil society in order to transform these into spaces for the

expression of political wills. The result was a often complex interplay (on the part of popular organisations) between democratic and undemocratic political tactics and strategies.

Ceilings and Houses: The Bellville South Housing Action Committee from 1979 -1982

The Bellville South Civic Organisation, originally named the Bellville South Housing Action Committee, was launched in 1979. Bellville South is one of several pre-dominantly coloured areas adjacent to white Bellville, a separate municipality in the northern parts of metropolitan Cape Town. Bellville South was one of several suburbs created to receive Cape Town's coloured population during the apartheid era of "forced removal". A large proportion of the inhabitants of these areas come from previously racially integrated poor working class communities in nearby Goodwood and Parow. During the late 1970's the Labour Party campaigned around rent, housing issues and, in particular, around the expropriation of land from the coloured community by the National Party government.

Bellville South consists of Glenhaven, a middle class, mostly professional community made up of academics, teachers, doctors, lawyers and dentists, and the poorer working class areas which are situated on the border of Bellville's industrial factoryland. Many of the women now work in Cape Town's textile industry and many of the men in the building industry. High levels of unemployment and gangsterism are common in many of these suburbs. Although men are usually the main bread-winners in the households, many of the women work. Many of the residents of the working class areas are factory-workers, municipal workers and railway workers who come from the rural areas of the Western Cape. It is in these working class areas that the civic was launched.

The civic was launched in 1979 at the initiative of CAYCO (Cape Town Youth Congress) activists who established contact with

selected residents on the poorer working class areas of Bellville South. During the first three years of its existence the civic focused its campaigns on bread-and-butter issues. The major campaigns were for the electrification of houses and the installation of ceilings. These early campaigns were concerned with seeking incremental gains in material conditions, rather than with attaining explicitly political goals. As one of the founding activists commented:

> "In the beginning we did not think of politics. We had no ceilings and no doors. Die dae was hard. Daar was net kerse en lampolie." (Interview with author, November 1993)

And also:

> "None of us were politically motivated. in the beginning this thing was not a political thing." (Interview with author, November 1993)

Early methods of mobilisation included the organisation of yard- and street meetings in order to increase popular support. As one activist pointed out

> "We used people's yards for meetings, because our houses were too small." (Interview with author, November 1993)

Many petitions and delegations were sent to the Management Committee and the Bellville Council with demands for improvement to ceilings and the installation of electricity. On occasion the Housing Action Committee managed to organise small marches in which up to 300 residents participated. These marches were seen as important tactics in and through which to put the message across that "the people can gain power".

During the first three years of the civic's life its strategies and tactics remained largely self-limiting. Its main aim was to defend its autonomy vis-a-vis municipal authority intervention and to secure short-term victories around specific material issues. This modest aim can be seen to have involved profound

implications for the development of civil society opposition. In a minimal sense, civil society exists where there are free associations, not under the tutelage of state power. In a stronger sense, civil society exists where society as a whole can structure itself and co-ordinate its actions through such associations which are free of state tutelage. As an alternative or supplement in the second sense, we can speak of civil society wherever the ensemble of associations can significantly determine or inflect the course of state policy. (See Taylor 1993) During the early history of the civic, civil society in the "minimal" sense was established. The civic's early struggles were not always successful, but nonetheless constituted an important moment in the freeing of associational life from the overwhelming presence of the state in Bellville South. As such the mere formation of the civic and its attempt to forge a unified support base can be viewed to have constituted an important democratic moment in the construction of "civil society". The civic acted as a catalyst for the formation of political identity-formation which, in turn, made possible the emergence of a new political space for relations of representation.

The Bellville Residents' Association and a Wider Political Strategy: 1982-1988

In 1982 the Bellville South Housing Action Committee affiliated to CAHAC (Cape Housing Action Committee) which, in turn, affiliated to the UDF in 1983. In the words of one of the executive committee members of the civic at the time,

> "leading CAYCO activists convinced us that we would benefit from affiliating to CAHAC. CAHAC made the political link for us".

The Housing Action Committee's affiliation to CAHAC, a regional charterist civic umbrella initiative, ushered in a new phase for the local civic organisation. While maintaining its focus on material gains, the organisation became increasingly involved in wider political campaigns which were aimed at strengthening the political struggle against the apartheid state. Most of the civic's executive members became deeply involved in the UDF's

Northern Areas committee.

From 1983 onwards the civic organisation began to organise overtly political campaigns which focused on the release of political prisoners and the unbanning of political organisations. With this change in strategy came severe state repression and many leading activists were detained. Repression affected not only the older civic leadership, but also and often more brutally, youth members.

During this phase the civic began to construct a more stable and coherent political challenge to the apartheid municipal system. Whereas before the 1980's the boundaries between the state's municipal councils and the civic organisation had often been dictated by the state as the Housing Action Committee persisted in hopeful, but often fruitless attempts to persuade the council to upgrade residents' houses, from 1982 onwards the civic organisation began to build concrete oppositional political centres in Bellville South. From 1985 onwards the civic organisation attempted to widen its popular support by establishing an advice office in order to deal with popular grievances. The advice office was situated in the centre of Bellville South and quickly became a popular alternative to the local management committee's attempts to reach out to the residents. Initially the advice office had been set up in order to monitor repression in the area, but it later expanded its activities to include the monitoring of evictions in rent arrear cases. The advice office quickly became an alternative pocket of local governance and the centre of an autonomous "community" story.

As the civic attempted to deepen its influence in the public sphere of Bellville South, it increasingly was confronted with challenges to its attempt to consolidate a unified oppositional subject in the area. In 1982 the civic organisation had become involved in the establishment of a health project in the area. From 1985 onwards the clinic (which had been built in 1983)

became a site of political contestation between the charterist aligned civic and a group of individuals affiliated to the Marxist Workers' Tendency. At the same time the New Unity Movement launched a rival civic organisation called the "Burgerlike Vereeniging". The establishment of an alternative civic organisation posed new challenges for the charterist aligned civic.

For many of the civic activists the oppositional unity in the civic organisation had to be extended to other parts of the community as well. It was seen as important by the civic leadership to imprint the charterist identity of the civic onto other community structures and when attempts were made by rival political organisations to politically contest these community facilities, the civic leadership felt it necessary to oppose such attempts. Civic leaders attempted to construct a community that was politically homogenous and unified in its opposition to the state and in its allegiance to the charterist cause. In our view this centralising tendency can be seen to have had its roots in the changes informing the UDF's political identity during this period. In 1987 the UDF had adopted the Freedom Charter which gave credence (however indirect) to orthodox notions of socialist transition and the accompanying assumption that all political (and otherwise) relevant knowledge is in possession of a single-celled political entity. Initially the UDF had been intended as a vehicle to bring together different strands of opposition to the constitutional reforms and it had not identified its ideology precisely. It had professed a "catchall" character and its loose structure had provided promise of considerable political diversity. The initial statements of the UDF were usually limited to a few key principles intended to unite a broad social spectrum, "from workers to students, from priests to businessmen, Nyanga to Chatsworth, from SOWETO to Elsie's River". (See Lodge and Nasson 1988: 129)

In the beginning, then, the strategic aim of the UDF was to achieve wide-spread consolidation against the system and its

ruling elite in and through a non-specific popular alliance against the apartheid system. In time though, the politics of the struggle against racial domination became geared towards the establishment of a unified and collective subject under the ideological leadership of a specific strand of opposition politics. This tendency was hastened by the specific way in which the form of the state/civil society structure evolved during this period. As we indicated earlier a central feature of "civil society" opposition during the 1980's was the logic of confrontation with the centrally organised state apparatus, and an awareness on the part of oppositional movements that the basic contradiction of the apartheid system consisted in the opposing interests of the ruling elite and society at large. Consolidation against the apartheid system and its ruling elite became a key objective of the tactics and strategies of political protest. A logic of "simple polarisation" began to characterise the political ideology of the opposition. This logic did not remain simply at the level of national mono-organisations such as the UDF or COSATU, but it also imprinted itself on charterist civic organisations at a local level.

The logic of "simple polarisation" also became apparent in the choice of tactics by the Bellville South civic. In many of the working class coloured areas in Cape Town the choice of the boycott as a tactics for mobilisation proved to be effective in mobilising large section of the community into a unified oppositional subject against the state. According to a UDF regional organiser who convened the UDF area committee in the Northern Areas in 1985,

> "the boycott was our weapon of struggle. There was an overwhelming response by the people as they were struggling to pay their accounts. It was the tool that built the civics in these areas. We organised the boycotts of services in a low-key manner, through pamphlets for example, in order to avoid state repression. Whole communities could participate without the fear of state repression. We kept in regular contact with people. The boycotts helped us to engage in

> a dialogue with the people in our communities. The boycotts gave people the opportunity to express themselves and to vent their anger and frustration." (Interview with author, November 1993)

The tactic of the boycott became a nodal point for a variety of different strategic projects: firstly, as a mechanism for mobilisation; secondly, as a mechanism for the fostering of community unity and oneness; and thirdly (and perhaps as an unintended consequence) a mechanism for the increasing freeing of community associations from state tutelage. As such it represented a complex interplay of democratic and undemocratic features, ranging from an anti-pluralist emphasis on community homogeneity to a democratic intent associated with the re-construction of a specific and subjective community within the larger body of civil society.

The Bellville South Civic Organisation from 1989-1993: Laying the Seeds of Institutional Struggle

From 1989 onwards the civic began to emphasise more overtly the issue of institutionalised bargaining. During this period the civic (and with it civil society) emerged in a stronger sense, i.e. it began in a significant way to determine or inflect the course of state policy. Institutionalised bargaining emerged forcefully from the early 1990 onwards when the civic involved itself in the so-called "Morgan" campaign. The campaign started when 300 families faced eviction from a farm owned by a Mr. Morgan. Originally the farm had been a prison before it had been bought by the Morgan family who changed it into a chicken farm. After the purchase Mr. Morgan began to rent out the stables to homeless families. A year later Morgan issued an eviction notice to all the tenants. The civic was then approached by the families to represent their cause. The civic began negotiating with the local all-white municipality and gradually managed to strengthen its position through a careful combination of legal (institutionalised bargaining) and non-legal (mass activity) strategies. The civic eventually won the case in the Regional Court, but lost it in the Supreme Court. But while the legal

battles were still being waged, the civic influenced the overall political identity of the council. Responding to the Morgan campaign the council agreed to develop new sites to house families of the marginalised communities in Bellville South. It also agreed to start local-level negotiations on a non-racial municipality.

Underlying each wave of negotiation by the civic from 1989 onwards was a conception of the state as "contestable". The strategy of negotiations made room for relations of mutual interaction between the state and civil society. It contained an implicit recognition that struggles within civil society play a major role in shaping the nature of the state and that state projects, in turn, directly impact on civil society. It represented an acknowledgement of the mutually determining and symbiotic relationship between state and civil society.

Presently the civic leadership seems to acknowledge that the idea of institutionalised procedural bargaining can, under certain circumstances, become an important democratic means for the empowerment of marginalised communities. Such a bargaining strategy acknowledges the complexities of an advanced industrial economy, and the sorts of problems associated with its management. The bargaining alternative is based on the idea that corporatist relations between different interest groups and associations can provide a mechanism through which these groups can participate in a pluralist negotiation of the common good. Institutionalised pluralism in this sense supplements representative democracy with alternative opportunities for participation. In Bellville South civic leaders are arguing that if they want a more democratic society they need to make room, alongside the institutions of representative democracy, for a multiplicity of democratically managed associations and organisations which exercise effective control over the public agenda. Such a plurality of independent organisations is seen as important for the democratisation of the state. Institutionalised bargaining is seen to provide a mechanism though which to

organise a mutually determining relationship between the state and civil society. This kind of institutionalised bargaining would allow less powerful and resourceful interests to bargain for a more equal distribution of the common good. Less powerful interests would then not merely exist alongside or under more powerful ones, but enter into a relationship with these. Such bargaining describes a political structure and a system of social relations intended to facilitate the pluralist negotiation of social priorities. The process is one in which social priorities are negotiated by independent interests interacting in pluralist, but inclusive structures and forums. It is based on the pluralist principle of power differentiation, but represents a more democratic pluralism by emphasising more forcefully the question of co-operation between different pockets of interests.

Amongst civic leaders in Bellville South the emergence of negotiation strategies has come with a celebration of the term "civil society" and with a renewed assertion of political pluralism in the community of Bellville South. Activists now acknowledge diversity in the community and some pass critical judgements on the civic's tendencies to homogenise the community it situated itself in during the 1980's. Civic leaders who defend "civil society" have highlighted institutional concerns regarding the forestalment of a concentration of power. This has involved a rejuvenated concern with political pluralism and the dispersion of power beyond the state. Concerns are expressed, however, about the problem of implementing a pluralist politics in marginalised communities where there still remains the need to carve out political spaces in which political wills can be formed , i.e. the need to build coherent political communities in which it becomes possible to re-construct a democratic politics in the wake of apartheid rule. Civic leaders in Bellville South are presently confronted with the tensions between the need for a political community (and its assumptions of political unity) and the implementation of a pluralist democratic politics. This tension is central to the implementation of a democratic politics in post-apartheid South Africa. In conclusion, I want to present

a few theoretical reflections on the problem of pluralism under conditions of political marginalisation. It is with regard to this problematic that the struggles of the civics during the 1980's left behind crucial questions for a future democratic politics.

The history of pluralism is, of course, long and complex. Anglo-American pluralism initially arose around the turn of the century and peaked over the decade following the first World War. It found its voices in the works of such Anglophone writers as Harold Laski and Arthur Bently. It countered those theoretical perspectives that affirmed the sovereign state as the centre of political life. The second generation of pluralism found expression in the 1950's and 1960's in the work of Robert Dahl, amongst others. Unlike the first generation of pluralists, whose connections to political struggle generated a critical perspective on the state, the second generation was concerned with the location of power in society. This, in their account operated through a diffuse concatenation of autonomous and competing groups, rather than through the socio-economic sovereignty of a dominant elite whose interests determined the policy outcomes of political institutions and processes. Kirstie McClure identifies a set of features common to both these generations of pluralism. Both pluralisms have been articulated in opposition to unitary, monolithic or totalizing conceptions of the political domain, particularly in so far as these presume some singulary sovereign or unique agency overseeing or determining political processes and/or social relations. Both pluralisms insisted upon the irreducible plurality or multiplicity of social groups. For both pluralist generations, however, the political valence of such groups is understood to have no necessary ontological grounding. They are not, in other words, a political expression of essences, but appear, rather as contingently constituted political entities, i.e. they emerge through the dynamics of particular struggles arising within the realm of the social, and are elaborated as political through a process of articulation. Both view the social subject as a site

of multiple and intersecting group memberships or identities within that social plurality. Both of these generations begin with a conception of the "political" which does not view different groups as essences of any deeper identity or social relation, but rather as self-defining and independent, in particular of the state. They are understood to have no necessary relation to state power in so far as they articulate such a relationship.

At present we are in the midst of a third generation of pluralism which includes a range of perspectives These include current arguments for cultural pluralism and the recent theoretical work of Chantal Mouffe. (See, for example, Mouffe 1992) The latter's understanding of the nature of pluralism requires a vision of the political as a discursively constructed ensemble of social relations. Mouffe's conception of the political carries the same meaning as the democratic revolution as analysed by Claude lefort. Lefort identifies democracy with the disappearance of landmarks of certainty. According to Lefort modern democratic society is a society in which power has become an "empty place". In such a society it is no longer possible to provide an irrevocable guarantee because power is no longer incorporated into a transcendental moment. As a result Lefort prioritises the politics of rights over a politics concerned with an inherent or a priori-interest. (See Lefort 1986)

Mouffe constructs her conception of pluralism in and through the prism of the concept of citizenship. The search for a more active conception of citizenship is a response to the limitations of the statist conception of politics in many of the so-called existing socialist countries. The so-called "citizenship" school has its roots in a revival of the civic republican view of politics that put a strong emphasis on the notion of a public good. The "citizenship" school is based on the idea that politics is the realm in which individuals recognise themselves as participants in a wider political community. Proponents of this school call for a greater role for active citizens participating equally in

politics to determine the common good. All citizens should be entitled to an active and equal part in the political governance of their society and should have the citizenship rights and the resources to make this possible. The emphasis on civil society as a bed for participative citizenship depends heavily on the generalisation of a sense of "civil virtue" in society, a culture of commitment to public affairs and political activity. The emphasis is on a plurality of associations encouraging the democratic involvement of citizens. It is argued that this pluralism of autonomous organisations broadens our view of citizenship by not limiting it to membership of the state. The citizen is educated into citizenship through voluntary participation in a variety of roles in a variety of associations. (See, for example Sandel 1982, Skinner 1984)

Defining the political community in this way, i.e. in terms of a common commitment to a "common good" becomes all the more important if we consider the limits of pluralism. The need for a consensus on the framework within which pluralism is to function becomes all the more important once we consider the implications of a radically particularist interpretation of pluralism. As Mouffe points out

> "we would have made no advance at all if we were simply going to replace the notion of a unified and homogenous subject with a multiplicity and fragmentation in which each of the fragments retains a closed and fully constituted identity". (Mouffe 1992: 10)

The dangers of an excessive fragmentation of the political sphere through an overly particularist conception of pluralism are severe. Such an extreme form of pluralism according to which all interests, all opinions, all differences are seen as legitimate, could never provide the framework for a political community. Society could easily degenerate into a fragmented asociality which prevents any kind of social project. And this is precisely where the limits of pluralism lie. Pluralism can never be total in the sense of representing simply a collection of particularised identities. Pluralism requires some measure of

consensus amongst its different entities as to the necessity of a pluralist framework in the first place. Thus, while it is important to defend the widest possible pluralism in many areas - culture, religion, morality - it is also necessary to acknowledge that citizenship as a form of political identification presupposes an allegiance to a set of political principles. Those who conceive the pluralism of modern democracy as being total and as having as its only restriction an agreement on procedural rules, do not realize that there can never be pure, neutral procedures without reference to normative concerns. It is not enough to endorse a liberal problematic which simply defines democracy as the absence of state interference in the lives of its subjects, and which reduces the tasks of government to the maximisation of negative freedoms. Democracy is far more complex than that - it involves an ongoing search for deeper historical and political dimensions.

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