I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing academic and intellectual interest in South African civil society. Part of the reason for this is the perceived success of South Africa’s democratic transition and the role of civil society organs therein. Part of it has to do with the fact that South Africa is a very useful laboratory for the investigation and understanding of social phenomena because of its transient nature, which ensures its hybrid character where the old and new co-exist. Part of it has to do with the more general universal interest in civil society and the Third Sector prompted by the demoralization with the State and Market. And part of it has to do with the fact that civil society has become the hope for all across the ideological spectrum. For those on the right, it is a support and service-delivery mechanism, while for those on the left, it is an agency to usher in a new social order.

This new interest in South African civil society in is reflected in the conclusion of two multi-million rand research projects on the size and shape, and impact of the sector. The first, part of the Johns Hopkins multi-country comparative project, and undertaken by the School of Public and Development Management at the University of Witwatersrand, is the most comprehensive assessment of the size and shape of civil society in South Africa. It is a study that has some serious flaws, the least of which is that its theoretical and empirical sections are entirely divorced from each other. This is largely the result of a methodological flaw in the design of the project. But both sections of the final report make interesting observations and are thus useful in their own right. Moreover, despite the small sample size, the study does provide the most serious attempt to estimate the size and shape of civil society in South Africa.

The second study, undertaken by Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) and the Co-operative for Research and Education (CORE), is part of the Civicus multi-national comparative research project on impact. Again there is a serious flaw in the design of the project. The study investigates impact on the basis of questionnaires, workshops and in-depth interviews with NGO practitioners. It is useful for getting a general impressionistic picture of the sector. But it is problematic from an analytical viewpoint since the findings are based on NGO’s own perceptions of their roles, relationships, performance and impact. There is thus no independent attempt within the methodology to verify NGO practitioners’ assumptions about themselves.

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1 Swilling, M & Russell, B., 2002, “The Size and Scope of the Non-Profit Sector in South Africa”, Published by the Centre for Civil Society, University of Natal and the School of Public & Development Management, University of the Witwatersrand.

2 IDASA/CORE, 2001, “Two Commas and a Full Stop, Civicus Index on Civil Society, South African Country Report”.
In any case, the research reports of both projects identify a series of issues, which require further in-depth investigation. This includes impact assessment studies. The principal lesson, however, that needs to be learnt from both projects is the necessity of good research design and methodology for without this, scholars and practitioners are simply in no position to make generalizations about the sector. This study does not do this.

Although grounded in empirical information, informed largely by the ‘Johns Hopkins’ and ‘Civicus’ studies, it is essentially a broad reflective analysis (some may even say impressionistic) of the emergence and evolution of civil society in post-apartheid South Africa. It explores how globalisation and the transition to democracy influenced and shaped civil society and its relations with the state.

One of the major problems of studies of civil society is that its authors have a direct stake in advancing the case for or presenting a positive image of the sector. This in part may account for the popularity of organizational and institutional methodologies, which focus inward and tend to be descriptive and provide greatly exaggerated assessments of the sector and its impact. Some recent studies, however, have corrected this and undertaken a more systemic analysis of civil society, its emergence and evolution. One example of this is Lester Solomon and Helmut Anheier’s *Social Origins of Civil Society*, which explains the Third Sector as a product of regime types, itself a result of the configuration of social forces within society. Similarly, Terje Tvedt’s *Angels of Mercy or Development Diplomats*, focuses on the International Aid system and investigates how it conditions the evolution of NGOs, their behavior and operations.

This study follows in the footsteps of these pioneering works by explaining civil society from a systemic perspective. It investigates structural variables like the socio-economic environment, the political system and the prevailing flow of resources to explain the evolution of civil society in South Africa. The report is structured in five parts. Part two focuses on definitional issues, describing the international context, and how it informs the evolution of civil society across the globe. Part three focuses on the export of neo-liberalism to South Africa and the evolution of the post-apartheid political economy. Part four reflects on how the post-apartheid socio-economic and political environment informs the evolution of civil society and impacts on its diverse components. Finally, part five, which serves as the conclusion, effectively tries to summarize the argument and learn the political lessons thereof.

### II. Definition and International Background

For more than a decade, the notion of *civil society* has held central sway in official, academic and popular discourses about development, democracy and governance in the

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3 The IDASA/CORE study, is the most recent example of this (ibid).
world. The last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the democratisation of several authoritarian regimes, most notably in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. In almost all of these instances, a wide array of non-state actors played an important role in these democratization experiments. Analysts thus revived the concept of “civil society” to explain these developments and the term moved rapidly from academic discourse to widespread popular use across the entire ideological spectrum. The power and importance of civil society was lauded by everybody from the World Bank to small radical grassroots groupings and movements in the South.

This ‘rhetorical consensus’ led to an oversimplification of the concept which manifested itself in definitions that reduced civil society to an amorphous and homogeneous entity, generally assumed to be broadly progressive in nature and often almost exclusively associated with NGOs and CBOs. The oversimplification and depoliticisation of the concept facilitated what Jenny Pearce refers to as the “collective collusion in the myth that a consensus on development exists, or even that some clear conclusions have been reached about how to deal with global poverty.” Increasingly, however, it is being recognized that there is a need to deconstruct this myth and to locate development discourse and practice in the complex reality of conflicting interests and opposing agendas in the world.

Nowhere is this more necessary than in South Africa. The role of associational groups in bringing an end to apartheid has promoted an overly romanticized view of the sector among both scholars and activists. Almost all definitions of civil society in South Africa are afflicted with this malady and treat the sector as a homogenous entity ascribed with a progressive political agenda. This, however, is clearly not academically, nor politically sustainable. Ideological and political heterogeneity must be a defining element of the concept of civil society. In addition, civil society must be conceptualized as distinct from both the market and state. Of course, traditional Hegelian definitions of civil society, include the market. Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato’s comprehensive and defining work on the subject, however, makes a coherent case for why the market should be excluded from definitions of civil society. In line with their recommendation, then, this study takes its working definition of civil society as the organized expression of various interests and values operating in the triangular space between the family, state, and the market.

The configuration and evolution of this civic space is of course determined by the political socio-economic milieu within which it is located. And, this milieu is primarily defined by the Third Wave of democratization that so dramatically culminated in the

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7 For a comprehensive history of the concept and its evolution, see Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, 1992, “Civil Society and Political Theory”, Boston MIT Press.
8 Pearce, J, 2000, Development, NGO’s, and Civil Society. Selected Essays from Development in Practice, Oxfam, United Kingdom, p. 32.
9 Pearce, J., op cit., p.18. Oxfam
10 For a review of various definitions of civil society, see Swilling, M., & Russel, B., op cit., pp 15-18
11 See Cohen and Arato, op cit.
12 The term was coined by Samuel Huntington in his The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century, 1991, University of Oaklahoma Press, Oaklahoma
collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Although it is clearly impossible to construct a precise chronology of developments in the aftermath of the complex confluence of historical events that had propelled the Third Wave of democracies, the net effect of these was the coupling of democracy with neo-liberal economic prescriptions. This vision was not only advanced by Western powers and international financial institutions, but also by the mainstream academy in both the developed and developing world. It was implemented through the standard mechanism of conditional ‘governance’ packages that Western governments, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank attached to foreign aid and loan programmes in the newly democratising societies. Thus in a few short years countries across the developing world were characterized by a shrinking state, a deregulated labour market, the lowering of trade and financial barriers, the streamlining of social expenditure, and above all, the establishment of an environment where the supremacy of the market went unquestioned.

In line with this vision, ‘civil society’ in developing countries was allocated the task of promoting democracy and engaging with the shrinking state. This was partly unavoidable since civil society had been significantly legitimized as a result of the strong influence of people’s power in the third wave of democracies! But it was also encouraged because CSO involvement implied “a diffusion of power both in state institutions and between the state and non-state actors,” that fitted in neatly with neo-liberal thinking on the role and power of nation-states.

One significant element of civil society’s new responsibilities was stepping into the social services delivery domain, partially vacated by the state in terms of the standard neo-liberal budgetary and fiscal directives. Basically, the official neo-liberal logic started with the ‘efficiency’ argument, that NGOs, unhindered by large bureaucracies and having closer links with beneficiary communities, would deliver a better, more efficient and cost-effective service than government departments. In order to do this, they were either contracted by government departments or funded directly by foreign donors to implement certain programmes on the state’s behalf. The question that immediately arose was to whom were these NGOs accountable? The answer, generally, is that they became directly accountable to their donors and the government that had contracted them, thus becoming mere implementing agencies for the agendas and policies of other institutional actors.

Apart from the cost-cutting concerns though, there was also a strong element of social containment implicit in this project. It is well recognised, even by the architects and technocrats of this economic order that the prescribed cuts in governments’ social expenditure and the job losses resulting from privatisation and the removal of trade barriers had a high social and human cost. If this cost rose too high, it would have led to political instability, which would have derailed the neo-liberal project. To avoid this consequence, NGOs were expected to pick up the social costs of neo-liberal programmes: to help take the edge off increased poverty, inequality, unemployment and worsening basic living conditions.

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13 In this context, civil society is equated mainly with medium to large professionalised NGOs.
The appeal was of course made in more technical and persuasive terms though, otherwise not even the most deluded NGO would have taken on this impossible task. Clearly not all the NGO’s in the world, even if there were thousands more, could possibly address the underlying causes of global poverty and inequality. Their involvement, then, could at best be of a palliative nature, providing social band-aid to the victims of the very system that employ their services. Rather like doctors in a war hospital. Or to put it in the more graphic description of Stephen Commins, NGO’s role in the present order can only but be seen as ‘useful fig leaves to cover government inaction or indifference to human suffering.’

Thus NGOs took on a task, each in their own way and context, which simply could not be won. In doing so, they took risks and made compromises that are already starting to turn against them, not only in increasing cynicism from community constituencies and smaller more radical grassroots groupings, but also in growing scepticism from official donors. Pearce states that,

“Perhaps what has encouraged the beginnings of an anti-NGO shift is that, unsurprisingly, NGOs were unable to offer the solution to the social cost of economic restructuring. Criticisms of NGOs have focused on their technical deficiency, their lack of accountability, and their excessively politicised and critical character. This ‘failure’ has undermined their credibility among the technocrats within donor institutions, who demanded rapid and measurable outputs from investments in the NGO sector. And it weakened the influence of the pro-NGO social development advocates within those institutions.”

In any case, if the bigger, more formalised NGOs, became mere implementers of donor and government ‘development’ agendas, who was then responsible for developing the alternative development agenda? This responsibility appears to increasingly fall to the smaller, more radical grassroots organisations and movements, whose members and supporters experience the negative effects of neo-liberalism first-hand.

These moral dilemmas and choices, largely emanating from neo-liberal technocrats’ desire to contain the state and transfer its responsibilities to non-state actors, have caused fragmentation and tension in the civil society sector. Civil society, of course, has never exactly been a model of harmony and homogeneity and neither is it expected to be thus. The new plans and funding preferences of technocrats, however, led to more finger pointing and fiercer competition between NGOs and have opened up a growing divide between the formal structures and their smaller grassroots-based counterparts.

This divide appeared quite early on in Latin America, where harsh distinctions were being drawn between what were termed ‘neo-liberal’ and ‘progressive NGOs’.  

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15 Commins, in Pearce, op cit., p. 20
16 Pearce, ibid., p.20
Increasingly, this divide, which [incidentally] often seems to reflect the wider inequalities and divisions in societies, has manifested itself across the developing world. In recent years, there has been a tendency in developing countries for the smaller CBOs, which are truly closer to ordinary people’s lives, to start organising around the human fall-out of neo-liberal programmes. They tend to organise around quite specific issues and identities, broadly related to issues of economic and social exclusion and exploitation. Social observers and analysts are always speculating about the significance of these developments and whether they have the potential to be harnessed into broader-based social movements with real potential to challenge the status quo.

The position of churches and trade unions on the effects of neo-liberalism and globalisation obviously vary among countries, but is in most cases, also located among ordinary people. They have generally tended to be critical of the status quo. In South Africa, for example, the churches have in recent years become more vocal in campaigns to cancel international debt and have publicly urged the government to address the growing poverty and inequality in the country. COSATU, the biggest trade union federation, has also been extremely vocal in its anti-neo-liberal sentiments, but remains in an uneasy alliance with the ruling party.

In the end, it is impossible to generalise too much. Moreover, it is unfair to apportion blame to this or that section of civil society. The issues and dilemmas raised here are complex and multi-layered and often not even clear in the minds of the individuals and organisations confronting the choices imposed upon them by the ‘new world order’. Although many NGO’s presumably became service delivery agents by choice, the majority probably ended up in that role either through considerations of survival and lack of a proper grasp of the neo-liberal discourse and its practical implications.

Civil society is neither a homogeneous nor a static entity though, so hopefully the growing international challenge to the neo-liberal paradigm would lead to radical self-analysis and a new commitment to pursue fairer alternatives in local and ‘world development’. An early positive indication is the fact that the World Bank is irritated not only with the technical deficiencies of CSOs, but also with ‘their excessively politicised and critical character’. It is just possible, that in spite of all the forced conformism, something about the essential nature of CSOs remained intact, and can form the basis for the rethinking that is urgently required. What is necessary now, is peer pressure on CSOs to disentangle themselves for the ‘thought vacuum’ they have tended to inhabit these last years and move forward with more critical clarity and a new clearer purpose.

Reflection and repositioning, however, is not only required on the side of civil society. Increasingly, the notion and practices of neo-liberalism and globalisation are being fundamentally challenged across the world. No longer is there only a confused retreat in the face of the ‘no alternative’ mantra. Instead there is a well-coordinated and increasingly vocal and visible insistence on an alternative. Ironically, a large part of the growing success of the anti-globalisation movement is attributable to extensive use of

Society, in Maharaj, G (ed), Between Unity and Diversity, Essays on Nation-building in Post-Apartheid South Africa, IDASA, David Philip.
new forms of electronic communication (the Internet and cell phone technology) that paradoxically contributed to enlarging corporate power in the first place.\textsuperscript{18}

In any case, the core of this new social movement is constituted by a variety of diverse organisations, located across the developed and developing world, which question the ideological parameters of the existing world order. This has prompted a chorus of voices in international officiodom that is now making consistent demands for more and better regulation of the world economy\textsuperscript{19}. But it is also important for these CSOs critical of the world order to make a concerted effort at improving analysis and strategy, as well as develop real alternatives to the present economic orthodoxy.

\textbf{III. South Africa: the end of exceptionalism?}

The question then is, are the same processes at play in South Africa? Are we bound to follow the same route, face the same dilemmas and choices or can we persist with our long-held delusion of being different? Do we even have a solid grasp of the dilemmas and choices confronting us? These are some of the questions and issues that will be addressed in this section.

South Africans have always had a tendency to see themselves and their country as different, exceptional even. The origins of this acute sense of exceptionalism, usually expressed as a blend of pride and defensiveness, can probably, at least partially, be found in the country’s colonial history and distant geographical location at the southern-most part of the African continent, far from Europe and North-America but also strangely out of touch with [what is generally referred to as] ‘the rest of Africa’. For a very long time thus, there was South Africa, then ‘the rest of Africa’, and finally, the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{20}

This mentality became near pathological during the isolation of the apartheid years, particularly in the case of many white South Africans, who responded to all challenges and criticism of the system with the lament that [other] people simply didn’t understand. Africans\textsuperscript{21} were not entirely exempt from the exceptionalism tendency either, in that for many decades they had to daily face and fight apartheid, which in itself required a degree of single-mindedness. South Africans thus, each in their own way and for different reasons, became a dangerously inward-looking nation. We believe that what happened here had no parallel in the rest of the world (true in some ways) and we were all in our own ways different from everybody else.

The tendency peaked, in a more positive way, in the immediate aftermath of the successful and relatively peaceful general election in 1994. Millions of South Africans, including many who previously opposed majority rule, basked in the glory of the political


\textsuperscript{20} Mahmood Mamdani, in his 1996 book, \textit{Citizen and Subject – Contemporary Africa and The Legacy of Late Colonialism}, also refers to the notion of South African exceptionalism, see pp 27-32

\textsuperscript{21} Used here as an all-inclusive terms for black, indian & socalled ‘coloured’ people, i.e all those that were discriminated against under apartheid.
miracle and the general sense of being at the centre of the world’s attention. ‘Madiba magic’, the short-reigning notion of the rainbow nation, major international sport achievements and the general opening up of South Africa to the world and visa versa, were just some of the many new factors that contributed to a new sense of being special.

i) The developmental phase

On the political front there was also euphoria enough to, at least temporarily, sustain the belief that we can and will do ‘our own thing’, and on a grand scale, regardless of prevailing trends in the rest of the world. After 46 years of apartheid, the majority of South Africans were left poor, inadequately educated, badly housed, living far from their places of employment or job opportunities, with little or no access to basic services like electricity, clean piped water and accessible health facilities. Any government serious about socio-economic justice and the consolidation of democracy, needed a comprehensive development programme to address this multitude of needs and restore dignity and decency to the lives of the millions of ordinary South Africans who were the victims of apartheid. This was even more true for the ANC government that came to power on a broad base of popular support that embodied the hopes and expectations for a better life of millions of people.

In response, the ANC and its allies developed the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which served as their electoral manifesto. The programme was premised on state-led development, informed by neo-Keynesian assumptions and policy prescriptions, which had lost favour in the World Bank and IMF. For a while there, we were going to be different: we had a large and legitimate task to address the ills and backlogs of the past and had clearly earned the moral right to do it in our way.

The ruling party had strong social-democratic underpinnings, which at that time had already begun eroding, in the face of subtle pressures and persuasion from local and international business. Thus whilst the RDP was on everybody’s lips, popular expectations sky-high and government officials struggling to gear up for massive delivery, the balance of power turned out decidedly against such a programme. It should not be surprising to note that, already in December 1993, the ANC gave support to a small IMF Compensatory Financing Facility, to which the standard, neo-liberal, draft Letter of Intent was accepted by the ANC without any changes, and quite contrary to the advice of their own economic advisors at the time.22

Nonetheless, and maybe indicative of the compromises, concessions and contradictions of the time, the RDP was adopted and, for some time, had the full support of politicians, ordinary South Africans and even some business people. Although there were subtle signs, even in the RDP document, of economic moderation23, the programme was, and is still, better known for its more popular social-democratic vision. For the two years that the RDP was official policy, the government completely seized the ‘development initiative’ that, under apartheid, had been the almost exclusive preserve of development

22 Habib & Padayachee, op cit., p.10
23 ibid., p.11
CSOs. The latter were almost completely crowded out of even the policy-making circles that they had participated in since the early nineties. Moreover, many of the development projects, initiated over many years, experienced serious problems, as a result of confusion over direction, issues of scale of projects and problems over funding. The state claimed total control over the development agenda, a task it was often woefully unprepared for, but would not share with anyone, even old allies and erstwhile colleagues in CSOs.

Despite all the centralised activity (endless workshops, strategic planning, hiring of consultants, meetings and business plans) it was clear quite early on that there were serious problems of capacity in state institutions. In retrospect, it was almost impossible to implement a programme of that magnitude, from scratch, and in such a short space of time, particularly given the massive restructuring and reorientation of the public service that had to take place. Government officials, particularly those attached to RDP units across the country, quite contrary to the public commitment to inclusiveness, turned inward [and to private consultants] to figure out ways of mastering the mammoth task. In the process they generally became totally inaccessible to the very people they were supposed to help.

The government’s public commitment to ‘people-centred’ development and to working closely with CSOs generally turned out to have been largely rhetorical. Early on, with all the people-centred rhetoric still officially around, there was already a discernible shift in the development discourse towards a more technical interpretation of development, commonly referred to as the ‘bricks and mortar approach’. The more complex and circumspect human / social processes generally associated with development projects in the “NGO world” worldwide, started falling by the wayside. When questioned about this, senior government officials often responded with irritation, stating that they need not consult with people about their needs, since they already knew their needs.

Moreover, instead of drawing on the experience and expertise of thousands of CSOs and actively involving them in policy-making and [where appropriate] implementation of projects, the government tried to handle it on their own [or assisted by consultants]. Ironically, given its generally anti-capitalist policies in the past, the new ANC government preferred a working relationship with the private rather than with the ‘third sector’. In 1996 Thabo Mbeki, then Deputy President of South Africa, expressed this in his “The State and Social Transformation” document, where he argued for, ‘a dialectical relationship with private capital as a social partner for development and social

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25 ibid., p. 176

26 See RDP document, 1994

27 For example, then Minister of Public Works in the Eastern Cape, Mr Mhlahlo, in interview with H.Kotze, 1996.

28 As a result ‘development consultancy’ became an extremely lucrative field and suddenly just about everybody was a development expert/ consultant, quite independent of prior development experience. The local branches of major international accounting firms, almost overnight, had development/ rural development divisions in place.
progress.\textsuperscript{29} In retrospect, however, it is clear that the growing courtship between big business and government had begun much earlier, probably even prior to the formal onset of constitutional negotiations in the 1990’s.

In any case, whether the tendency to exclude other development players was caused by sheer panic at the enormity of the task or by the inherent centralist tendencies of the ruling party\textsuperscript{30} or even the early dabbling with the ‘efficiency discourse’ [or a complex combination of these and other factors], the net effect was a major alienation between some CSOs and the state. In other cases, most notably in rural areas, development NGOs were left to play a kind of intermediary role between government and communities, namely assisting in the preparation of business plans and other technical requirements imposed by the RDP Office and/or undertaking service delivery through sub-contracting arrangements with the state agencies. The result was a growing schism within civil society on precisely how to relate to government and its developmental agenda.

\textbf{ii) The official arrival of neo-liberalism}

In the end though, South Africa was ‘allowed’ just over two years to indulge in this illusion of economic exceptionalism. Bigger pressures were beginning to exert themselves: the World Bank, IMF and South African and multi-national corporations were increasingly visible at government events. Even in the heyday of the RDP, World Bank staffers routinely attended national RDP workshops, officially as observers, but often giving presentations and certainly mingling with the crowds\textsuperscript{31}. The heads of the World Bank and IMF started paying official courtesy visits, but the official government response to criticism and concern raised in this regard remained dismissive: \textit{we are doing our own thing}!

By mid-1996 the illusion of exceptionalism was finally over, when the government announced their contentious new Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy\textsuperscript{32}. Referred to by Patrick Bond as ‘home grown structural adjustment’\textsuperscript{33}, this economic plan was drawn up by the Department of Finance, drawing on technical advice from economists from the World Bank, the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch, as well as other public institutions and research agencies. Although ongoing commitment to the RDP was stated, critics have commented that Gear’s “emphasis on containing government expenditure, lower fiscal deficits, lower inflation, deregulation, privatisation, the priority accorded to attracting foreign investment, and minimalist state intervention are in fundamental opposition to the basic policies and developmental thrust of MERG and the RDP.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{29} Thabo Mbeki, “The State and Social Transformation”, 1996, p.22, quoted in Habib & Padayachee, 2000, op cit., p. 17
\textsuperscript{30} See, for example, Shubane, op cit., pp 6-14
\textsuperscript{31} Authors’ [participant] observations during 1995/96.
\textsuperscript{32} For a more detailed discussion of the policy processes, choices, trade-off, as well as policy prescriptions of GEAR, see Habib & Padayachee, 2000, op cit.
In practice the RDP Office was closed, and the country and ordinary people who pinned their hopes on this programme, lost all sense of a coherent developmental vision. Carter & May state that, “during Mandela’s presidency, the South African government’s orientation towards addressing the problems of poverty and inequality underwent some marked shifts, in language and emphasis, if not in substance. The 1996 closure of the Office of the RDP signaled to some an at least symbolic reduction in the priority given to improving the access of the majority of South Africans to adequate shelter, sanitation and education.”\(^{35}\)

The ‘no alternative’ mantra had thus arrived on our shores and, like elsewhere, was wielded like a weapon by its adherents, dismissing alternative discussion. South Africa had thus, in a few short years, been brought on a par with the rest of the world, the end of our illusion of economic exceptionalism. Michael Blake commented at the time, “now it seems that South Africa was not a pioneer after all but was just catching up.”\(^{36}\) The grand experiment was over and we joined the new world economic order, on its own standardised terms.

### iii) Reaping the benefits or counting the cost?

In retrospect, it is clear that the classic neo-liberal scenario had already fully unfolded in South Africa, not only in terms of the standard set of policies adopted, but, more importantly, in terms of the typical social and economic effects of these policies. The irony is that, with few exceptions, GEAR has not done well even by its own objectives and targets. It has, for example, not come near its projected economic and export growth rates and “[in general] sustained inflows of direct foreign investment, which many predicted or hoped would follow democratic change, have not materialised.”\(^ {37}\) Moreover, prospects for increased flows of foreign investment have been further eroded by factors like the rampant tide of violent crime, the exceptionally high HIV/AIDS infection rates, not to mention the government’s atrocious handling of the HIV/AIDS and Zimbabwe crises in recent years.

Indeed, the relaxation of exchange controls and special concessions to South African companies have actually led to substantial capital outflows from the country. The national currency has been in a downward spiral for a number of years and interest rates, already high by international standards, have recently again been upwardly adjusted, the fourth time since the beginning of 2002. There has not been a lot of progress in realising Gear’s targets for privatisation of state assets and, most importantly, instead of the projected employment creation targets, there have been massive job losses in almost all sectors of the economy.

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\(^{36}\) Blake, M., in Barberton, Blake & Kotze (eds), 1998, op cit., p.47

\(^{37}\) Habib & Padayachee, op cit., p. 20
Tighter fiscal constraints have generally led to slower delivery of social and physical infrastructure to disadvantaged communities. Although considerable gains were initially made in the fields of electricity, water and housing provision, this record has been steadily eroded in recent years by the crises around cost recovery and affordability of services. David MacDonald estimates that, “close to 10 million people have had their water cut off for non-payment of service bills, with the same number having experienced an electricity cut off. More than two million people have been evicted from their homes for the same reason. [And although] it is low-income African households that bear the brunt of these service cutoffs, lower middle income families are also being affected…”

Apart from the few who have benefited from economic liberalisation [mainly the upper classes of all racial groups, and in particular, the black political, economic and professional elite who are the primary beneficiaries of affirmative action policies and black economic empowerment deals], GEAR has had a devastating effect on the lives of millions of poor and low-income families. Habib & Padayachee state unambiguously that, “the ANC’s implementation of neo-liberal economic policies has meant disaster for the vast majority of South Africa’s poor. Increasing unemployment and economic inequalities associated with neo-liberal policies have also pushed even more of South Africa’s population into the poverty trap.” They refer to the ‘near barbaric’ existence that a part of the population has been confined to and predict that this terrible condition of economic marginalisation is likely to undermine future political stability and the consolidation of democracy.

Other recent studies have supported Habib and Padayachee’s analysis by demonstrating that poverty and inequality has increased in real and measurable ways. Carter and May, using a follow-up study of approximately 1200 black households in KwaZulu-Natal, over the period 1993 – 98 found that, ‘poverty rates have increased from 27% to 43% among this cohort, and that the distribution of scaled per capita expenditure (or well-being) has become less equal. Underlying these findings is a skewed or class-based pattern of income mobility in which initially better-off households have shown more upward mobility than initially poorer households.’ Although a regional study, one can probably quite safely surmise that there would be similar trends in other parts of the country.

A shocking scenario is thus unfolding, one of the most terrible deprivation experienced by ever growing numbers of South Africans. Ironically, these are the same South Africans who lined up jubilantly to cast their vote for the ANC in 1994 and 1999, in the hope of ‘a better life for all’. The reality is that, as long as the government doggedly adheres to its present economic policies, there is very little hope that this dismal picture will change in the foreseeable future. As a result, one can probably also expect to see crime levels rising, as an almost unavoidable expression of economic want and rising levels of frustration and desperation, particularly among the youth. Couple this with the

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38 ibid., pp 20-21
41 See Carter, M.R & May, J, op cit.
terrible devastation that HIV/AIDS is wreaking on this same marginalised and vulnerable population, and it is hard to believe that the government can be so blindly stuck to its self-delusionary course.

Apart from the natural environment maybe, there is not a great sense of specialness left in South Africa. Our national self esteem is being constantly eroded by this dehumanising spectre of desperate poverty, unemployment, violent crime, AIDS and the rising cost of living, existing alongside the most spectacular affluence. The growing inequality is also no longer confined to the classic racial divide, as there is widespread evidence of growing inequality within the black community. On a cynical note then, it seems that South Africa has indeed been ‘normalised’, certainly by neo-liberal standards, with the new political elite having formed and entrenched relationships and alliances with the old [and new] business elites. The early exploratory relationships have now largely been established and solidified. The rich are getting richer, and the poor, poorer. This is the harsh world we are now [re]inhabiting in South Africa.

IV. Civil Society in South Africa, understanding the new choices and challenges?

The situation in South Africa has changed vastly in recent years. There have been a great many complex and multi-layered societal changes, resulting from both the political and economic transitions of the 1990s. During the last decade we have witnessed the most spectacular political and economic realignments and shifting alliances, many of which are to be expected in a society undergoing rapid change. With racial discrimination removed from the statute books and thus no more formal barriers to economic advancement, new social hierarchies and trajectories rapidly took shape. The speed of upward and downward social mobility and the rapid assimilation of new class attributes by a section of the historically disadvantaged have been most astonishing. All part of the ‘normalisation’ of post-apartheid society, of course, but some of it sad and disappointing, given the high hopes and moral principles the South African transition started out with.

In many ways South African society is still lingering in the exciting, but difficult space created by the transition to democracy, where remnants of the old society co-exists uncomfortably with the new. Although, attitudes and mindsets have generally shifted significantly, the issue of race, for example, is still present. This scourge appears not only in its old manifestations, but also in new forms. For instance, it is undeniable that the new political elite deliberately politicize race in the current environment either to advance their own interest and/or defend themselves against criticism. Similarly, the ‘poor’ is still with us and if a radical reconsideration of economic policy is not undertaken soon, it is a problem that is likely to grow even bigger. And, finally, there is the new scourge of HIV/AIDS, which has brought many new issues and challenges to the fore.

The big question, then, is how and where do South Africa’s famously vibrant CSOs feature in this changed and complex new political and socio-economic landscape? How

\[\text{ibid., p.1995}\]
has the ‘Third Sector’, that essential independent voice and critical conscience of society, responded to the new developments and challenges, including the worsening poverty and inequality and the HIV/AIDS crisis? Are organisations within this sector adhering to their old loyalties and traditional activities or have they, in their turn, adjusted to the new social and political hierarchies and demands of the new dispensation? Most importantly, now that South Africa is in the full throes of neo-liberalism, have their responses and choices echoed those of CSOs in other countries? Are they even consciously aware of the choices and dilemmas confronting them?

i) The Remoulding of Civil Society

The subject of South Africa’s vibrant civil society and its exceptional role in the anti-apartheid struggle and the transition to democracy, has been well lauded and – documented.\(^\text{43}\) The same applies to the subsequent ‘collapse’ of civil society [as then understood], as a result of changes in donor funding and political priorities.\(^\text{44}\) What was often lost in these discussions and debates was the realization that civil society in South Africa is more than just the ‘progressive forces’ that participated in the anti-apartheid struggle. In effect, like the society within which they were located, these CSOs were fundamentally divided along lines of race, class and ideology.\(^\text{45}\) Each one served their chosen interests and/or beneficiary groups in a specific sector and area of activity. This is an important point, often overlooked in the ‘rhetorical consensus’ around civil society.

In the harsh climate of apartheid, there were not a great many political sides to choose from and, as a result, CSOs tended to fall into at least two main categories, those that broadly supported the liberation movement and those that tacitly or actively supported the apartheid status quo.\(^\text{46}\) In these extreme circumstances though, both ‘camps’ generally adhered quite closely to their chosen orthodoxies, and did not encourage much internal dissent or debate. Shubane stated that, “as with all orthodoxies, debate on these ideas among adherents is limited to showing enthusiastic support or, at best, discussing the most effective means of implementation.”\(^\text{47}\) This, of course, raises interesting questions as to how independent a voice CSOs really represent, then and now.

Some of these political divisions, mistrust, diversity and conflicting and competing interests were carried over into the new era, and like elsewhere, often got lost in the new

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\(^\text{44}\) See all above, plus Swilling and Russell, op cit.


\(^\text{46}\) One could add a third category, the liberal establishment and the CSOs faithful to it, but these tended to implicitly fall into one of the other two camps.

\(^\text{47}\) Shubane, op cit., p.12
blurred discourse about civil society. But the collapse of apartheid did bring an end to the binary divide (apartheid versus anti-apartheid) within civil society. Moreover, the transition to democracy delegitimized segregatory forms of organization. And although the full package of neo-liberal policies, and its implications, came to South Africa relatively late, it was unrolled rapidly and the full consequences materialized very quickly. As a result, CSOs were forced to change while simultaneously being confronted with similar choices and dilemmas faced by their counterparts elsewhere in the developing world. The post-1994 existential crisis, then, caused many CSOs to turn their focus and organisational energies inward, in a search for survival and new direction. With apartheid removed, the subsequent internal transformation processes within civil society were often characterised by terrible conflict and near organisational paralysis. In the end, and which is only being discernable now, civil society was significantly remoulded in South Africa.

Three distinct blocs now comprise contemporary civil society. The first is the formal NGOs, who went into their well-documented crisis in the mid-1990s and, a few years later, re-emerged more streamlined and in much reduced numbers. Although it is widely acknowledged that streamlining was necessary, there were clear winners and losers in the process. And, the winners were essentially those bigger, more sophisticated and well-resourced NGOs who developed collaborative relationships with the state and became involved in policy development and service delivery. Evidence for this emerged in the IDASA/CORE study, which demonstrated a notable rise in self-generated income among the more formalized NGOs who have come to rely substantially on government and other contracts.\(^{48}\) Indeed, the ‘Johns Hopkins’ study categorically indicated that government is by far the largest financial donor to civil society, accounting for 42 percent of contribution to the sector.\(^{49}\) This, as Adam Habib and Rupert Taylor argue, has to inevitably impact negatively on the lines of accountability between the formal NGOs and the poor and marginalized communities they claim to service.\(^{50}\)

Nowhere is this more evident than in the language of neo-liberalism that has rapidly penetrated the organizations rhetoric. The process appeared to have taken place so ‘naturally’ that few people actually seem to have noticed that it involved a massive paradigm shift. The essentially technical nature of this jargon, which lends itself ideally to an easy pretence of ‘neutrality’, probably helped to effect this smooth transition. Also the fact that the government adopted the technicist terminology quite early on facilitated its transmission to this section of civil society, in particular because of the ANC’s historical alliance with some of those NGOs and/or the latter’s desire and need to partner with the post-apartheid government. As a result very few NGOs have attempted even a peek at the ideology behind the technical jargon. And, so it has become entrenched, now part of a kind of hybrid terminology, still speckled with some of the older notions and values that refuse to make way.

\(^{48}\) See IDASA/ CORE study, op cit.
\(^{49}\) Swilling, M., & Russell, B., op cit., p. 34.
The second bloc within South African civil society is the group of informal, community-based associations, which have emerged within marginalized communities to enable its residents to simply survive the ravages of poverty brought on by neo-liberalism. The survivalist structures, which, according to Swilling and Russel, constitute 53 percent of an estimated total of 98,920 CSOs,\textsuperscript{51} are on the rise particularly as a result of the government’s failure to address the HIV/AIDS and unemployment crises. There are obviously various ways to interpret this finding, one of which is to regard it, as the authors of this study do, as positive new forms and manifestations of the old vibrant energies of South African civil society. And, it may well be that. But it is hard to dispute the more darker interpretation of this finding, which stresses the survivalist character of these organizations and networks. Is it not true that as a result of government’s policy choices, poor people have had no alternative but to return to small survivalist self-help networks? Are these organizations not a sad indictment of the retreat of the state and people’s consequent realisation that they are on their own again, with little or no immediate help to be expected from the government.

Moreover, serious questions need to be raised about the importance the authors of the ‘John Hopkins’ study attach to their finding regarding the growth of voluntarism in civil society in South Africa\textsuperscript{52}. Although Swilling and Russell acknowledge that their sample and methodology had been weighted in favour of CBOs, they nevertheless make much of the finding that a high number of volunteers are engaged in the sector, even calculating the monetary cost of this contribution to the economy.\textsuperscript{53} This is without doubt a complex area, and does require a more in-depth follow-up study. But the unqualified positive interpretation given to this finding by Swilling and Russell must at the very least be questioned.

Voluntary work has traditionally been the preserve of middle and upper class women, who usually have the financial freedom and a significant amount of leisure time at their disposal. Does volunteering in poor, resource starved communities therefore not, of necessity, mean something different? Although agrarian societies in the past, had various forms of voluntary work, for example, around the harvests, the question is, how can one understand voluntarism in the here and now of fragmented and poor communities in this country? Is it not tied to the unemployment and HIV/AIDS crisis in South African society? Is it not just another manifestation of the failure of the state to meet its obligations to the citizenry.

It needs to be noted that the use of volunteers in development projects is not always the most satisfactory situation, as people tend to, in most cases, do this kind of work as a substitute for paid employment that is not available to them at that point. They often receive training, which in some cases enables them to gain paid employment, a gain for them, but a loss for the organisation that invested in them. Volunteers tend to be highly mobile and understandably lack the commitment and perseverance of full-time staff. In practice, they are therefore mostly utilised in smaller organisations and networks that

\textsuperscript{51} Swilling, M., & Russell, B., op. cit., p. 20
\textsuperscript{52} Swilling, M., & Russell, B., op. cit., p. 27
\textsuperscript{53} the authors of the report give a figure of R5.1 billion in this regard. ibid. p.27
cannot afford to employ full-time staff. In these cases, they are most often motivated by religion or personal identification with the problem at hand.

The third and final bloc within civil society is a group of more formal organizations and networks (some use the term social movements) that starting to engage more critically with neo-liberal policies and their effects on the lives of ordinary people. These critical voices are coming primarily from the one extreme end of an increasingly clear ideological and class divide that has recently become more apparent in civil society. Although the trade unions and some churches have traditionally formed the core of this critical space, it is interesting to note that they no longer exclusively inhabit this arena and that new forms of organisation and mobilisation are taking shape around the marginalisation of the poor and vulnerable.

Much of this organisation and mobilisation revolves around the politics of consumption. Located within communities, these organisations are largely preoccupied with protesting against neo-liberal social policies and preventing their implementation in South Africa. In Chatsworth community organisations are challenging the local state and preventing it from evicting poor residents who are unable to pay their rates. In Soweto, local structures have emerged to protest against and prevent official and private agencies from cutting residents access to electricity. Similar examples abound across the county. Issues like land, rates and rent, water, and electricity are areas around which CBOs are beginning mobilise. As a result they implicitly launch a fundamental challenge to the neo-liberal framework that conditions the behaviour and policies of the South African state.

In many ways, the ‘civil society’ that emerged from the crisis of the mid-nineties, is characterised by the same patterns and divisions observed in the rest of the developing world, namely, a clear and growing divide between the bigger, professionalised NGOs, involved in service delivery, and smaller grassroots groupings and social movements generally opposed to the neo-liberal agenda. The former have generally managed to maintain high levels of funding and appear to have moved smoothly into the service delivery domain, while the latter tend to organise around specific and localised issues relating to the increasing levels of poverty, unemployment, inequality and HIV/AIDS, to name but a few. ‘Bread and butter’, or a more appropriate description in the new South African environment, maybe ‘life and death’ issues.

**ii) State and Donor Influences**

One further question that needs to be addressed is how did the repositioning and reconstitution of civil society occur so fast, literally in the span of a few years? At one level, the answer is quite simple. The reconstitution and repositioning of civil society was

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largely the product of two factors, its transformed relationship with the state as a result of the transition to democracy, and the changing funding priorities of the donor community. The broad relationship between civil society and the state has undergone several transformations in the last two decades. In the 1980s progressive civil society made its debut as a result of the state’s reform program and the dramatic increase of funds made available in particular by the foreign donor community. But its relationship with the state remained tense especially since the latter continually placed obstacles in the path of and even actively repressed CSOs.

The post-apartheid era was supposed to have been civil society’s ‘wonder years’, the period in which it was to have flourished and thrived. But the relationship with the state was not entirely positive. In fact, for a short period during the RDP relationship between the state and civil society became quite acrimonious. After that, there was a kind of selective return on the part of the state to some NGO’s, sometimes for advice on policy matters, but more often to assist in implementing selected projects and programs. As soon as NGOs got the general hang of it, they started to tender for government contracts to deliver various services, thereby moving into the difficult terrain of trade offs, choices and compromises described earlier.

After the crisis and chaos of the initial period, NGOs across the country, gradually became organised under the umbrella of the South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO). Although the formation of SANGOCO was initially in response to the then Minister responsible for the RDP, Jay Naidoo’s challenge to CSOs that they ‘speak with one voice’56, it did gradually develop an identity and began taking up important issues and initiatives on behalf of its members. One of its more important undertakings, was its and the Non-Profit Sector Partnerships (NPPs) engagement with government, which ultimately carved out a new legal and fiscal space for CSOs to operate in. This included issues of registration of CSOs, tax exemptions, as well as the establishment of the National Development Agency (NDA) that would act as a conduit for development funding to CSOs.

This process has not been entirely without problems or delays. But these initiatives did eventually culminate in a new political-legal environment that is best described by Swilling and Russell:

“In conclusion, the state and the non-profit sector have negotiated an impressive and sophisticated public space that serves their respective interests: the state is able to harness resources (financial and institutional) to realise its development goals, and NPOs are able to access financial resources and shape delivery processes in a way that helps sustain them in the new democratic order. We must emphasize, however, that like so much else at the policy and legislative level in South Africa since 1994, it is only really the potential that has been created. There are already complications with the implementation of the framework, most of which have to do with a dearth of managerial and institutional capacity in the NDA, the Department of Welfare, and the South African Revenue Services. Much will depend on how the new mechanisms are put to use. And, more

56 a clearly impossible demand, and based on a complete misreading of the basic ‘nature’ of civil society.
importantly, whether they are sustainable in a neo-liberal macro-economic environment. Will they simply become mechanisms for co-opting NPOs?”

Clearly, where government’s funds and contracts are concerned, the playing field is likely to remain highly unequal, and the winners in this game will be those with the capacity to engage and access resources. Swilling and Russell argue that, ‘if these continue to be the large, formalised NPOs in the social services and health sectors, and if the terms of the funding do not force them to serve the poorer segments of society, then state funds may not end up eliminating poverty.” Indeed, they express concern about the future of the many CBOs that are unlikely to develop the capacity to access the resources available through this framework and pose the following pertinent questions:

“Will their exclusion make any difference to them? Or will they become the intermediaries between the NPOs who take delivery of the funds and the communities who are the targets of the funds? And will some community-based CBOs become the organisational facilitators of new social movements that mobilise those who stand to benefit least from a conservative macro-economic regime and from social spending priorities that will take time to meet all needs?”

The schism between service-oriented NGOs and mobilisational CBOs, fostered in large part by the post-apartheid regime’s socio-economic policies and its initiatives to engage civil society, was also reinforced by the changing funding priorities of the donor community. This process was set in motion by foreign donors who, at short notice in 1994, changed their funding priorities and redirected the bulk of their funding to the new democratically elected government. Although this new direction was understandable, given that the ‘special status’ conferred to South Africa by donors during the apartheid years no longer applied, it nevertheless had an enormous effect on civil society.

The reality is that donors wield enormous power over the political and economic development and direction of recipient organisations and countries. They also regularly change their funding priorities and, in many instances, these decisions are made by wealthy and influential board members, in faraway boardrooms, in rich countries. Donors can, in essence, decide which CSOs are to live and which are to die, and, in the process, consciously or unconsciously, transplant their own values and worldviews on the recipients of aid. Given that neo-liberal policies have been in place in the rich industrialised countries for over two decades, it is probably safe to surmise that donors from these countries tend to regard neo-liberalism and globalisation as little more than everyday realities. It goes without saying, then, that their decisions about which organisations to support will be heavily influenced by these beliefs.

Given CSOs general dependency on external funding, donors tend to have undue influence on the shape of civil society in a country. For example, by supporting big professionalised NGOs, with the capacity to meet complicated funding requirements and to ably deliver services, donors make a value-laden choice in favour of one section of

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57 Swilling & Russell, op cit., p. 79, own emphasis.
58 Ibid, p.79
59 ibid, p.80
civil society to the direct detriment of others. There is no doubt at all that many NGOs in South Africa, for the sake of survival, tailor their funding proposals to the known priority areas of particular funders. Compromises and trade-offs thus become the order of the day and development becomes unavoidably donor-driven. The primary line of accountability is most often to donors. And, generally, in this unequal playing field, it is the more organised, more articulate, urban-based players that walk away with the prize.

Despite all the rhetoric, small groups and organisations that are desperately trying to make a difference to the lives of poor and vulnerable people, inevitably end up as the losers in this ‘game’. Organisations involved in the prevention of violence against women, victim support, the needs of the disabled in poor communities, community-based AIDS support groups, often continue their work with little more than sheer determination. In the present political and economic climate, the issues and interests of ‘the rural poor’ have also seemingly fallen off the bandwagon altogether. The classic ‘rural biases’ developed by Robert Chambers in the seventies, still prevent most government officials, donors and even researchers from paying serious attention to the everyday struggles for survival of millions of rural people. But even this, can be taken as a sign of the ‘normalisation’ of our society in the era of globalisation.

The state’s reform of the political and legal environment and the changing funding priorities and requirements of donors, both of which took effect in the post-1994 era, has thus had the net effect of fostering or at the very least reinforcing the growing schism within civil society between formal professionalised NGOs and their CBO counterparts. Like elsewhere in the world, those NGOs that have moved into the service delivery domain have largely maintained cooperative or at the very least amicable relations with government. To a large extent these agencies operate within the parameters of the existing status quo. On the other side of the divide are informal and formal grassroots CBOs who are increasingly witnessing the further marginalisation of the communities they organize within and represent. Their struggle against this marginalisation has propelled them into an adversarial stance vis-à-vis government. Increasingly these organizations question and want to transform the status quo. A schism has thus emerged between the politics of opposition and the politics of engagement.

There have of course been attempts to transcend this divide. Perhaps the most successful example of this has been the campaign of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) to provide anti-retroviral therapy to prevent mother to child transmission. Combining opposition and engagement, mobilization and advocacy, court injunctions and lobbying, the TAC forced the government to transcend its unscientific paranoia with anti-retroviral therapy and compelled it to roll out a universal program to prevent mother to child transmissions. Is this example, however, replicable to other sectors and issue areas? Is the success of the TAC not confined to the peculiar circumstances of AIDS activism in South Africa? Whatever the answers to these questions, what is without doubt required is the need to transcend the false divide that has emerged between opposition and engagement.

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61 In both the JHU and the CORE/IDASA studies, money and time constraints prevented the inclusion of anything [much] beyond peri-urban areas in the research samples.
in South Africa. For without this transcendence, civil society is going to remain divided, and perhaps incapable of developing the sophistication to deal with advancing the interests of marginalized communities in today’s neo-liberal global environment.

V. Conclusion

In sum then: the post-apartheid era has witnessed the ‘normalisation’ of South African society in a neo-liberal global environment. Poverty, inequality and the attendant problems of marginalisation and governance that the ‘Washington Consensus’ model of globalisation has wreaked on other parts of the world, are now the hallmarks of South African society. The legacy bequeathed by apartheid has not only not been addressed, but in fact, has in many ways been reinforced and even aggravated. How to respond to and address this is the primary challenge confronting South African civil society?

Civil society’s response in South Africa to these developments has been similar to that of the Third Sector in other parts of the world. Its reconstitution, informed partly by state reform and donor pressures, to differentially address the challenges spawned by globalisation has, as was indicated earlier, reinforced the schism within it, between those NGOs who operate within the system and those CBOs who challenge it. Increasingly the two agencies are being propelled onto different sides of the political divide, not realizing that each requires the other for their own success. In a lot of ways, service-related NGOs within the system need to recognize that reform cannot be realized within the parameters of the status quo. Fundamental changes are required and so long as they are oblivious to or oppose this, their engagement merely constitutes one cog in a broader systemic exploitation of South Africa’s poor and disadvantaged. Similarly, mobilisational CBOs need to recognize that shouting from the sidelines and even actively opposing the state and its agencies in their day-to-day operations is not sustainable in the long term unless reforms are consistently forthcoming through their actions.

Each thus needs the other. NGO’s need to recognize that they only have a seat at the systemic table because rulers and elites fear the CBOs that threaten or have the potential to ultimately undermine the system. CBOs need NGOs seat at the systemic table to facilitate the reforms that they so need to sustain their mobilization in the long term. A lesson needs to be drawn from the practice of social activism at the dawn of the last century, and in particular from that great German social revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg, whose pamphlet on the problematique of reform and revolution inspired not only philosophical reflection but also practical engagement for decades thereafter. Its primary lesson can perhaps be summarized in that simple paragraph that opens the preface to the pamphlet:

Can the social democracy be against reforms? Can we counter-pose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing social order, our final goal, to social reforms? Certainly not. The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the social democracy the only means of … working in the direction of the
final goal …. Between social reforms and revolution there exists for the social democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim.  

Or for those at the systemic table who would prefer a more mainstream voice, there can be no better one than that of Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel laureate for economics and former vice-president of the World Bank:

Left with no alternatives, no way to express their concern, to press for change, people riot. The streets, of course, are not the place where issues are discussed, policies formulated, or compromises forged. But the protests have made government officials and economists around the told think about alternatives to these Washington Consensus policies as the one and true way for growth and development. 

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