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Civil Society and Development

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter explores the notion of “civil society.” In the 1990s the term “civil society” was incorporated into development discourse as it sought to alleviate poverty and to effect social change and “development” in the societies of the Global South on the periphery of the world capitalist system. In this discourse, “civil society,” a complex of non-governmental organizations, appears as a fundamental agency of social change, replacing the state in this regard. The NGOs, which make up part of “civil society” and work within it, have become a major object of debate. Some see them as agencies of democracy and participatory development in the struggle for progressive social change. Others, however, see them as agents of the World Bank and other international organizations (as well as of governments in the Global North), engaged in the project of “international co-operation” for the purpose of economic and social development as defined by these major proponents of globalization. At the same time, grassroots social movements in the Global South, such as the MST in Brazil, have entered the discourse to work for a different, and more equitable, world.

VIDEO RESOURCES

Civil Protests in Israel

<http://english.aljazeera.net/video/middleeast/2011/08/201189192013805138.html>

Time 2:29

In the summer of 2011, major social protests erupted in Israel against rising prices and the lack of housing. Protests in Israel have extended into their third week and the tent city continues to sprawl through one of Tel Aviv’s main boulevards. Israel’s younger generations are voicing their frustration over their socio-economic future.

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The *Indignados* in Spain

<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/peopleandpower/2011/06/201162282514394230.html>

Time 9:45

Demonstrations, marches, rallies. In 2011, hundreds of thousands of Europeans were expressing their anger at government-imposed austerity measures. Those voices were especially loud in Greece, where the administration was trying to implement a savage programme of spending cuts to avoid the country defaulting on its loans. But it was in Spain that the protest movement gained most traction. The “indignants” as they called themselves, dismantled their last camp in Madrid on 12 June 2011, but their commitment showed no sign of waning. What is driving them? And what do they hope to achieve?

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Egypt: Seeds of Change

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2011/02/201128145549829916.html>

Time 25:13

It is widely accepted that the spark for the recent dramatic events in Egypt came from last month’s uprising in Tunisia. If people power could bring down one regime, perhaps it could do the same elsewhere. Many of the necessary conditions were already in place: public fury at years of political repression, an economy that rewarded a corrupt elite and kept a majority in poverty, and widespread loathing for a leader clinging to office. Could Egyptians be persuaded to overcome 30 years of fear and apathy and take to the streets? It is no accident that this question has been answered, emphatically. Over the course of a remarkable fortnight, *People & Power* filmed exclusively behind the scenes with a core group of young activists from the April 6th opposition movement. As Elizabeth Jones reveals, they spent a long time planning and organizing for these momentous days, taking lessons from other revolutions about how to mobilize popular support.

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Ecuador: Water or gold?

<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/peopleandpower/2010/08/201082585310769297.html>

Time 23:54

Like many South American countries, Ecuador has long been an exporter of raw materials—from agricultural produce such as cocoa and bananas, to oil, which alone accounts for more than half of its annual earnings. Rafael Correa, the country’s socialist president, believes much additional revenue could be gained by aggressively exploiting other natural resources, particularly gold and other precious metals with which Ecuador is endowed. However, many Ecuadorians think the cost of this glittering prize could be far too high. Farmers, indigenous groups, and environmentalists are campaigning furiously against large scale mining projects and provisions in a new water law backed by Correa’s government. They say the changes will open up pristine rural areas to extraction, pollute critical water supplies, and deny local communities control over precious resources.

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Financing Urban Shelter: Global Report on Human Settlements 2005 E-Book

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uz8ZhPiYin0>

Time 2:31

Achieving the goals set by world leaders in the United Nations Millennium Declaration will be difficult without a significant improvement in the lives of slum dwellers, and the lives of slum dwellers cannot be improved without the sound and sustainable economic development that is conducive to the establishment of a strong shelter sector. As *Financing Urban Shelter: Global Report on Human Settlements 2005* emphasizes, one of the key challenges in meeting the Millennium Declaration Goal on slums is mobilization of the financial resources necessary for both slum upgrading and slum prevention by supplying new housing affordable to lower income groups on a large scale.

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Ayotzinapa: Enforced Disappearance of Rural Students in Guerrero, Mexico

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmEsSH4tVHs>

Time 1:03:49

In University College London's seminar "The Struggle for a Better Life: A Context for Understanding the Enforced Disappearance of Rural Students in Guerrero, Mexico," specialists discussed several key topics: the social and political character of the Normal Rural Teachers Trainer Schools established since its articulation as part of a socialist program for education and social organization in the 1920s, and the repression against its students as a constant element by post-Lázaro Cárdenas Governments; the historical development of enforced disappearances in Mexico since late 1960s until now as the exercise of violence by the Mexican Government against social movements, framed in a context of impunity. They also address another question: What guarantees the continuity of repression over time and allows the spectrum of victims to expand to other sector of civil society?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the concerns about the current emphasis on "social capital" in development discourse?
2. Discuss the context that shaped the reinvention of the concept of development in 1948.
3. Discuss the five contextual trends informing the emergence, growth, and strengthening of civil society in the 1980s.
4. Compare and contrast anti-globalization movements in the North with those in the South.
5. What are the two major theoretical perspectives on NGOs' roles in development?
6. Provide a brief, but clear explanation of the conception of civil society.
7. What is decentralization?

ANSWER KEY: REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Introduced into the development discourse by Robert Chambers and Robert Putnam, “social capital” has, since the 1990s, become a contentious topic of debate. Strongly supported by the World Bank as the “missing link” in analysis of the development process, social capital is difficult to define. Its ambiguity suggests it is more a metaphor or heuristic device than backed by empirical fact. Supporters of this approach suggest that the accumulation of social capital based on norms of trust and reciprocal exchange can produce public goods and empower the poor to act on their own behalf. Critics point out that this framework doesn’t concern itself with the structure of economic and political power, and the dynamic workings of the capitalist system. Within this framework empowerment is understood as changing oneself rather than changing the system. Finally social capital is too convenient a concept for the powerful to use to politically demobilize efforts towards radical change. (pp. 230–231)
2. The concept of “development” was reinvented in 1948 evolving beyond its origins in Enlightenment ideas of progress. The new development paradigm emerged in the context of (1) the post-War institutions, including the IMF, the World Bank, and the GATT, (2) the developing Cold War, and (3) national independence movements seeking freedom from colonialism. In light of these realities international cooperation became the dominant paradigm for development, based on foreign aid, nation-building, capitalist industrialization and modernization. Development was seen as a tool to ensure that post-colonial countries were not enticed by the promises of communism. Development became a technical process where the state was the central actor. The state strove to increase the rate of savings and productive investment, invest the savings in new technologies and industrialization (modernization), redistribute market-generated income, and offer financial and technical assistance for countries in the South. This model of development was widely successful during the “golden age of capitalism” until the early 1970s. (p. 226)
3. The emergence, growth, and strengthening of civil society in the 1980s can be understood by analysis of five variable but persistent trends. Globalization had an ambiguous impact as it allowed both invasive pressure of global markets into previously protected societies, but also the emergence of interest-based “transnational communities.” Democratization has, in some instances, supported participatory or “democratic” forms of political organization, while in others civil society has suffered from citizen’s withdrawal from active engagement in politics. Privatization allowed a growth in multinational corporations’ involvement in the provision of public goods, strengthening private actor civil society, but challenging grass roots civil society organizations influence. Decentralization of development called for a partnership approach with civil society which increased civil society influence, but also undermined is the ability to support radical political critique. Finally, economic liberalization allowed special interest groups greater influence on decision-makers in some circumstances and catalyzed the formation of many grassroots self-help groups to mitigate the negative impacts of the retreating welfare state. (p. 224)
4. Anti-globalization movements have taken markedly different forms in the Global North and South. In the Global South leadership of the anti-globalization movement has fallen mostly to the landless and peasant workers and indigenous communities. Their resistance is to the neo-liberal policies of economic liberalization being implemented by their governments, often under pressure from international lending organizations such as the World Bank and IMF. In the Global North the resistance is centred in urban middle-class communities and is highly critical of the agenda of corporate capital. Major international summits including the G8 and the WTO ministerial meetings have been flashpoints in Northern countries of the anti-globalization movements. What both the North and South share is a desire for “another world” where global-

ization is ethical and based on building solidarity rather than economic liberalization. (pp. 228–229)

5. There are two major conflicting theoretical perspectives on NGOs' role in development. The first sees NGOs as an alternative platform for development that is participatory, empowering to marginalized populations, and can support sustainable environments and livelihoods. The second sees NGOs as a Trojan horse for global capitalism, with NGOs acting as unwitting agents of US imperialism. Scholars more critical of NGOs involvement in development see them as agents that, while limited distributing resources to alleviate poverty, also attempt to instil respect for capitalism and democracy in rural communities that might otherwise join social movements engaging in confrontational politics and direct action against governments. The poor are encouraged by NGOs to empower themselves rather than attempt to change the power structures in which they are constrained. (pp. 232–233)
6. We can break the concept down into three sectors: (1) A complex of associational-type organizations (associations formed for a common purpose, such as environmental protection, to advance the status of women, or to promote development or respect for human rights). The anti-globalization movement in the North is an amalgam of such organizations. For the most part, they are located in the cities and are middle-class-based. (2) Community or grassroots organizations, making up the “popular sector” of civil society. The Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil is an example of this type of civil society organization (CSO). (3) Private-sector interest groups or profit-oriented organizations. This sector includes the capitalist economic enterprises and multinational corporations that until the 1990s were excluded because they were seen as a large part of the problem. (p. 234)
7. Decentralization. Until 1980 or so, many political scientists (and economists, for that matter) in both liberal and conservative traditions subscribed to the notion that democracy was not necessarily conducive to economic development—that authoritarianism provided a better agency. In the 1980s, however, there was a sea change in this idea, leading to widespread calls for democracy and good governance in the form of a more participatory form of politics and development. To establish an appropriate institutional framework for these developments (also to reduce fiscal pressures on governments), the World Bank argued for the need for a policy of administrative decentralization, with a partnership approach to both local governments and civil society (p. 225)