

Journal of Asian and African Studies

<http://jas.sagepub.com>

Democratic Deepening in India and South Africa

Patrick Heller

Journal of Asian and African Studies 2009; 44; 123

DOI: 10.1177/0021909608098679

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://jas.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/44/1/123>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Journal of Asian and African Studies* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://jas.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://jas.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations <http://jas.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/44/1/123>

Democratic Deepening in India and South Africa

Patrick Heller

Brown University, USA

Journal of Asian and African Studies

Copyright © 2009

SAGE Publications

www.sagepublications.com

(Los Angeles, London, New Delhi,

Singapore and Washington DC)

Vol 44(1): 123–149

DOI: 10.1177/0021909608098679



Abstract

This article examines the trajectories of democratization in India and South Africa. Both democracies are exemplary cases of democratic consolidation but face critical challenges in deepening democracy. Focusing on the notion of ‘effective democracy’, the article argues that subordinate groups have limited opportunities for meaningful engagement with the State. This problem is explored through an examination of social movements and local government. The article shows that the current crisis of citizenship that both countries face results from the subordination of civil society to political society.

Keywords citizenship • civil society • democratic deepening • democratization
• India • South Africa

Introduction

India and South Africa are arguably the most successful cases of democratic consolidation in the developing world. With the exception of a brief authoritarian interlude – the Emergency of 1975–7 in India – neither country has experienced a serious challenge to democratic rule since transition, and the likelihood of democratic reversal or even destabilization, especially when compared to Latin America, East Asia and the rest of Africa, is remote. Democracy, as in Linz and Stepan’s (1996) famous definition of democratic consolidation, has become the only game in town. Moreover, democracy has made a real difference. In India it has helped forge a nation from the most heterogeneous social fabric in the world. In South Africa, democratic politics and constitutional rule have managed a transition from white minority to black majority rule with minimal conflict. That this has been achieved against a social backdrop of extreme social exclusions (the caste system in India) and the worst maldistribution of wealth in the world (South Africa) only underscores the achievements at hand.

But if both have fared well in consolidating democratic institutions, including the rule of law, democratic deepening has proven much more elusive. Thus, even as formal constitutional democracy has been consolidated, there is little evidence of an increased capacity of subordinate groups to have an effective role in shaping public policy. More specifically, both the depth of social actors who enjoy effective political power and the scope of issues over which democratic power extends have not expanded, despite both countries' formal commitments to promoting social rights. In many respects, of course, this simply reflects the classic dilemma of capitalist democracy: most investment decisions are made by private property holders and the power of the market simply trumps the power of the ballot box. But this argument is too facile, and in any event fails to account for another, and in many ways more fundamental problem, namely deficits in the democratic process itself. As many democratic theorists have argued, the quality of a democracy is not just about its formal institutions (as the consolidation literature argues), but also has to do with the capacity of its citizens (and especially the most subordinate) to engage in public life. I argue that in both South Africa and India this problem can be grasped only by examining the relationship between political and civil society.

Following recent debates in sociological theory (Cohen and Arato, 1992; Habermas, 1996), I distinguish political and civil society by their distinct modes of social action. Political society is governed by instrumental-strategic action and specifically refers to the set of actors that compete for, and the institutions that regulate (in a democratic system) the right to exercise legitimate political authority. Civil society refers to non-state and non-market forms of voluntary association that are governed by communicative practices. If the telos of politics is power and its logic the aggregation of interests, the telos of civil society is reaching new understanding through the public use of reason. This distinction perfectly maps the divide in the democracy literature between aggregative and deliberative theorists. As Shapiro (2003: 3) argues, aggregative theorists regard 'preferences as given and concern themselves with how best to tot them up' and hence focus on formal institutions and the rules of the game, while deliberative (normative) theorists 'are more Aristotelian in taking a transformative view of human beings ... [and] concern themselves with the ways in which deliberation can be used to alter preferences so as to facilitate the search for a common good'. For reasons I elaborate below, democratic deepening requires striking a balance between the aggregative logic of political society and the deliberative logic of civil society.

Working within this frame, the historical argument I develop in this article is that in South Africa and India civil society is increasingly being subordinated to political society and that deliberation is being displaced by power. This is consequential because a weakened civil society cannot perform three critical democratic functions: (1) provide a space in which citizens can meaningfully practise democracy on a day-to-day basis; (2) anchor the legitimacy of political

practices and institutions in vigorous public debate; and (3) serve as a countervailing force to the power-driven logic of political society. Viewed historically, this weakening of civil society is paradoxical given that the democratic transition in both countries was driven to a significant degree by civil society, including the moral force of arguments based on inclusive and modern claims to democratic citizenship. This paradox alerts us to the fact that civil and political society, though frequently assumed to be in a mutually reinforcing relationship, are often in tension, and that how this tension plays out has significant repercussions for the possibility of democratic deepening. Indeed, when one juxtaposes the robustness of representative democracy in South Africa and India to the ineffectiveness of civil society, it becomes clear that consolidation may well have come at the expense of democratic deepening.

Why Civil Society Matters for Democratic Deepening

The literature on the deficits of representative democracy is now very large and need not be rehashed here. In the context of developing world countries the core deficit is what I would refer to simply as 'effective citizenship'. Classical and contemporary theories of democracy all take for granted the decisional autonomy of individuals as the foundation of democratic life. All citizens are presumed to have the basic rights and the *capacity* to exercise free will, associate as they choose and vote for what they prefer. This capacity of rights-bearing citizens to associate, deliberate and form preferences in turn produces the norms that underwrite the legitimacy of democratic political authority. But as Somers (1993) has argued, this view conflates the *status* of citizenship (a bundle of rights) with the *practice* of citizenship. Given the highly uneven rates of political participation and influence across social categories that persist in advanced democracies (and especially the United States), the notion of citizenship should always be viewed as contested. But in the context of developing democracies, where inequalities remain high and access to rights is often circumscribed by social position or compromised by institutional weaknesses (including the legacies of colonial rule), the problem of associational autonomy is so acute that it brings the very notion of citizenship into question (Fox, 1994; Mamdani, 1996; Mahajan, 1999). A high degree of consolidated representative democracy as we find in India and South Africa should as such not be confused with a high degree of effective citizenship. As Chipkin (2007) has argued, a democratic system is not the same thing as a democratic society. Closing this gap between formal legal rights in the civil and political arena, and the actual capability (in Sen's (1999) use of the term) to practise those rights meaningfully is what I mean by democratic deepening. In contrast to the consolidation literature's focus on electoral institutions, the

problematic of democratic deepening calls for closer examination of actually existing civil society.

But how do we evaluate the actual character of civil society? I draw on the relational perspective (Somers, 1993) which views civil society as a contested historical terrain that exists in dynamic tension with political society and the economy. To make sense of the extent to which civil society is actually constitutive of citizens (that is, nurtures associational capabilities) and is differentiated from the political society and the market, we have to examine it along a horizontal and vertical dimension. The horizontal dimension refers to the Tocquevillian view of democracy, which focuses on the internal qualities of associational life. Tocqueville argued that democracies function well when citizens make use of their associational capacities and recognize one another as rights-bearing citizens. This then leads us to the sociological question of the extent to which pervasive inequalities within society in effect distort the associational playing field and produce a wide range of political exclusions.

The vertical dimension is essentially a Weberian problem: many new democracies suffer from poor institutionalization and, in particular, weak forms of integration between state and citizens. The problem is twofold. On the one hand, there is the problem of how citizens engage with the State. State–society relations tend to be dominated by patronage and populism, with citizens having either no effective means of holding government accountable (other than periodic elections) or being reduced to dependent clients. In the absence of clear and rule-bound procedures of engagement, citizens cannot engage the national or, just as importantly, the local state *qua* citizens, that is, as autonomous bearers of civic and political rights. On the other hand, there is the problem of where citizens engage with the State, that is, the problem of the relatively narrow institutional surface area of the State. Given that local government is often absent or just extraordinarily weak in much of the developing world, there are in fact very few points of contact with the State for ordinary citizens. Taken together, the vertical problem of state–society relations and the horizontal problem of perverse social inequalities undermine the associational autonomy of citizens, the *sine qua non* of any effective democracy (Fox, 1994). Citizens can vote, but can they participate consequentially?

Democratic Consolidation

The striking point of comparison between India and South Africa is that their respective transitions were driven by broad-based, encompassing, secular, pan-racial/pan-ethnic movements deeply rooted in civil society. Because political society was the domain of European elites, the liberation struggle in both countries evolved and mobilized through structures of civil society (unions, schools, communities, peasant associations, religious organizations) and relied heavily on rich, domestic narratives of resistance to unjust rule to make their

normative and political cases for democratic self-rule. Both movements unified immensely diverse populations to forge a single, more or less cohesive nationalist block that in the name of democracy, but even more specifically in the name of an inclusive, rights-based citizenship, made peaceful transitions to democracy. There are other characteristics of the transition to democracy and subsequent period of consolidation that need to be highlighted, especially to draw the contrast with the much more troubled trajectories of democratic deepening that both countries have travelled.

The political elites that came to power in India in 1947 enjoyed enormous personal and institutional legitimacy and widespread popular support. From 1951, when India held its first national elections, until 1967, the Indian National Congress (INC) was dominant. In the first three national elections, Congress won commanding majorities in parliament (over 75% of seats) and 45 per cent of the vote (India's majority rule, first-past-the-post electoral system amplifies the seats to votes ratio) and ruled every state except Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala and the tiny state of Nagaland. What came to be described as the 'Congress System' exerted deep and wide control over political life, creating a degree of stability and order that was famously celebrated by Samuel Huntington (1968) as an example of successful political modernization in the developing world. Though the Congress System would soon unravel, it did undeniably consolidate democratic institutions and forge a nation from what was the most diverse, centripetal and noisy society in the world.

The institutional achievements of the Congress in the first decade of democracy are remarkable. First, the leadership of the INC presided over the writing of a constitution that has been a bulwark of Indian democracy, enshrining not only fundamental rights of citizenship but also effectively balancing powers. Second, in the first decade of democratic rule, the INC very rapidly consolidated the territorial and political integrity of the nation. Over 500 independent princely states were incorporated into the nation, and the Congress System itself spread deep into the territories of this vast subcontinent, establishing an organized political presence throughout the nation. Moreover, the Indian Administrative Service were strengthened and expanded, creating a national cadre of highly competent and professional elite bureaucrats. Third, the INC, and Nehru in particular, adroitly dealt with a range of secessionist and insurrectionist movements. Though the Centre did at times resort to repression (e.g. its armed response to a communist-led insurrection in Telengana) or to high-handed tactics (dismissing the communist government of Kerala in 1959), for the most part demands for greater regional autonomy were accommodated within India's federalist structures by redrawing state boundaries along linguistic lines and giving local political elites – including Congress bosses – significant leeway in managing provincial affairs.

After 1967, Indian democracy was increasingly weakened by what Kohli and others have described as deinstitutionalization.

Organizational weakness in the Congress party, in conjunction with its failure to provide for systematic incorporation of the bottom half of the population into the political process, has put a high premium on personal appeal, populism, and mobilization of 'primordial' loyalties as strategies for gaining and maintaining power. (Kohli, 1990: 386)

The decline of the Congress was met with the multiplication of small, often highly personalistic regional parties, the rise of Hindu nationalism and the BJP, and most recently the formation of new lower-caste-based parties, most notably the BSP in Uttar Pradesh. But even as the Indian state has largely failed in its developmental project and the party system has become increasingly fragmented, even inchoate, the foundations of democratic rule and governance remain robust. First, elections in India have resulted in alternations in power and, indeed, the recent trend at the national and state levels has been for incumbents to be routinely voted out of power. The Indian polity has moreover not only survived the rise to power of an illiberal party – the BJP – but has also successfully accommodated a range of ethnic parties that, despite fierce competition, have tended towards moderation once in power (Chandra, 2005). Second, the secular and inclusionary principles of the Indian constitution have been assiduously safeguarded. The rise of Hindu nationalism and the Congress party's own well-documented flirtation with sectarian politics (or 'communalism' in India) notwithstanding, Indian law and politics have proactively preserved the rights of minorities and even during the period of BJP rule have upheld the principles – if not always the norms – of secularism. Third, despite the serious weaknesses of the State, including a widespread failure to impose its rational-legal authority, the Supreme Court has seen its powers increase. The court has safeguarded the integrity of the electoral processes and kept in check some of the more perverse effects of a fragmented party system. Even more dramatically, it 'has managed over the years to apply a more substantive conception of equality that justices have used to uphold rights to health, education, and shelter, among others' (Mehta, 2007: 71).

The most important measure of institutional robustness of democracy in India is the degree of legitimacy that democracy and the nation enjoy in public opinion. Survey after survey confirms that overwhelming majorities of Indians favour democracy over all other political systems (in contrast to declining support for democracy in Latin America), and that large majorities identify strongly with the nation, that is, with a sense of being 'Indian' (Linz et al., 2006). These views moreover hold steady across all major religious groups and even in border regions where secessionist movements have been active. The most telling evidence of how deeply rooted democracy has become comes from voting itself. As Yogendra Yadav (1999) has famously documented, Indian democracy over the last two decades has witnessed a 'second democratic upsurge'. As Yadav shows, not only have rates of electoral participation climbed, but the social composition of participation has shifted decisively in

favour of women and lower caste groups. The rise of new parties making direct appeals to lower castes and Muslims is further confirmation that the masses, as it were, have entered politics.

The ANC has played a similarly commanding role in the first 13 years of South African democracy. It has won every national election with overwhelming majorities (66% on average), and has ruled continuously in every province except the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Given the circumstances of internal colonialism that characterized apartheid, the transition to democracy was a necessarily complicated process that required elaborate negotiations. This, in turn, produced a new democratic nation that was built on sophisticated, nuanced and carefully designed democratic institutions, including a constitution that is widely acclaimed as state of the art and highly progressive. The ANC moreover moved quickly to expand this institutional base by passing comprehensive legislation that across a range of sectors (e.g. local government, administration, public housing, social services) prescribed careful and balanced processes for achieving transformative goals, most notably the deracialization of state institutions. The judiciary in South Africa is highly autonomous and has played a proactive role in supporting the constitution (in particular its social rights clauses) and disciplining and monitoring government, including a number of cases in which high-profile liberation struggle figures have been successfully prosecuted for abuses of power. The bureaucracy, from the national level to the local level, has been strengthened and diversified, and in comparative terms is highly professional and effective (Heller, 2008). Most notably, the South African state has been able to increase significantly a historically high rate of tax compliance and what is moreover a comparatively progressive tax structure with most of the tax burden falling on the wealthy white community (Lieberman, 2003). And as in the case of India, the nation-building project has been highly successful. Regionalist challengers to the ANC, most importantly the KwaZulu-based ethnic Inkatha party, have lost much of their traction, and politics in post-apartheid South Africa have for the most part been spared the territorial or ethnic contestation that bedevils so many democracies in the region. Though the ANC, and Mbeki in particular, have on occasion played the card of African nationalism, for the most part the Party and the State have maintained their commitment to non-racialism. Politically, the ANC's position has been so dominant and encompassing that it has even successfully absorbed its erstwhile enemy, the Nationalist Party. And despite significant tensions, and repeated predictions of imminent demise, the ANC has been able to maintain the support of the labour federation COSATU and the South African Communist Party (SACP), the partners of its ruling 'triple alliance'.

In summarizing the state of democratic consolidation in both South Africa and India, three points can be emphasized. First, the basic institutions and procedures of electoral democracy have been firmly entrenched. There are no

significant social or political forces in India or South Africa that do not accept the basic legitimacy of parliamentary democracy, including in each case well-organized and ideologically committed communist parties, both of which, as it so happens, are aligned with the current (January 2008) ruling majority. Second, the basic principles and institutions for the rule of law, including a forceful constitution and a sovereign judiciary, are solidly grounded and have acted as effective and significant counterweights to excesses of political power. Third, the general rule of law environment has safeguarded and in some cases expanded the role of civil society. In both countries, overt state repression is rare (and when it occurs vociferously denounced), associational life has largely been free of state interference, the media are diverse and noisy, social movements are tolerated (though begrudgingly in the case of South Africa) and there are clear indications of a dramatic expansion of NGO activity. I will substantially qualify this point about civil society below, but the point remains that by all the standard metrics of democratic consolidation, both countries have fared well.

In explaining the relative success of democratic consolidation in India and South Africa, some shared factors come to the surface. Most obviously, the transition to democracy and the initial period of consolidation was managed by an ideologically cohesive, unified and highly effective political elite that enjoyed enormous political legitimacy. Some have argued that both transitions were in effect hijacked by elites (Bond, 2000; Chibber, 2005), but even if elites did indeed play the central role in managing transitions and ultimately answered to narrow interests, their efficacy was in large part based on the fact that they led and represented broad-based movements, enjoyed enormous moral standing and for a significant period received periodic electoral affirmation. This historically conferred legitimacy gave the two congresses – the INC and the ANC – and their leadership enormous leeway not only in laying the institutional foundations of democracy but, just as importantly, in forging a nation from disparate ethnic, racial and regional identities. One has but to glance at their respective neighbours (Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Zimbabwe) to appreciate the significance of India and South Africa's inclusive, democratic nationalism.

Arrested Democracies?

For all their successes in consolidating democracy, the problem of *effective* democracy, that is, the degree to which citizens can actually and effectively exercise their civil and political rights, remains acute in both countries. As argued above, this is first and foremost a problem of civil society, because even where political society is well established as in India and South Africa, it is still in civil society that opinions are formed and solidarities are generated and that the ethical dimension of a *democratic society* is cultivated. It is, in other words,

in civil society that modern citizens make themselves by directly and freely engaging in political life in a meaningful manner. I argue that civil society in India and South Africa remains highly constricted, leaving little room for the practice of citizenship. The problem here can be traced along both the horizontal and vertical axes of democratic deepening.

Any discussion of civil society in India and South Africa has to begin with the simple observation that associational capabilities are highly uneven across social categories and that they have their roots in specific histories of inequality: the caste system in India and apartheid in South Africa. These have produced what Evelina Dagnino (1998) in the Brazilian context has called 'social authoritarianisms', deep-seated inequalities of not only income and property, but cultural and social capital as well that permeate social practices and govern social interactions. So deep are these fundamental inequalities that many would question whether such societies can be fertile grounds for a vibrant civil society, predicated as it is on a degree of civic equality. Indeed, this is precisely why Gurpreet Mahajan (1999) and Partha Chatterjee (2001) have questioned the very relevance of the notion of civil society in India, and why Mahmood Mamdani (1996) has so famously shown that the legacies of colonial rule pose significant obstacles to advancing citizenship in South Africa.

But even as we keep in mind the serious challenges that deep and durable inequalities pose to democratic deepening, we also have to acknowledge that associational inequalities in both countries have hardly been intractable. The nationalist movement in both countries produced rights-based discourses that were direct attacks on caste and race. The associational ties that both national-democratic movements created cut across class, race and caste, negating inequalities in practice and declaring that the new subject of the new nation was not a Hindu or a black, but a citizen. With the transition to formal democracy, both nations declared the fundamental equality in politics, law and society of all citizens. And both supported an array of affirmative state interventions that would correct historical injustices: the 'reservations' of government jobs and university positions for 'untouchables' (now Dalits) and 'tribals' (now Adivasis) in India, and an array of affirmative action and black empowerment schemes in South Africa. This moreover was not just a short-lived historical moment when national fervour created a sense of solidarity that aligned with ideas of democratic citizenship. These norms of democratic equality have also been sustained by a range of social movements and even sub-regional politics. As Gail Omvedt (1998: 137) has argued, in contrast to the reformism of the Congress leadership, the many anti-caste movements in India, both before and after independence, 'fought for access to "public" spaces of work, consumption and citizen's life'. These movements, in other words, sought to expand democratic civil society by actively removing barriers to participation. In the South, these movements fundamentally transformed caste relations, and Varshney (2000) even credits these movements with the better

government performance and better social development indicators observed in southern states. Also, as I have argued elsewhere (Heller, 2000), the extensive social rights and equity-promoting public policies that have been secured in the state of Kerala can be tied directly to its historical pattern of civil society formation. In this state of 32 million, successive waves of social movements, a rich and competitive sector of civic organizations and citizens who know and use their rights have kept political parties and the State accountable, producing India's most competitive party system and its most efficacious state. Similarly, in South Africa, despite the perverse inequalities inherited from apartheid, large segments of the black population are well organized, most notably the labour movement, and have been able to secure significant redress such as labour protection and the deracialization of formal labour markets. Moreover, a wide array of movements from local civics (Heller, 2003; Chipkin, 2007) to single-issue campaigns and HIV/AIDS movements have deployed a range of 'in-system' and 'extra-institutional' tactics to press both rights-based demands (HIV treatment) and more counterhegemonic challenges (opposition to neoliberalism) on the State (Ballard et al., 2006).

The general point here is that although social inequalities are deeply entrenched, and must be foregrounded in any discussion of democratic deepening, they have not, under the conditions of formal democracy and associational rights, precluded political practices and discourses that explicitly challenge these inequalities. In other words, despite pervasive social exclusions, subordinate groups have used the political space created by democratic institutions to make claims. Thus it is possible to argue that democratic power in India continues to be concentrated in the hands of elites and intermediaries, while at the same time recognizing that contentious politics played out in civil society have deepened India's democratic culture (Jayal, 2007). Similarly, despite the direct subordination of much of civil society to the Party/State in South Africa, local grass-roots politics and social movements continue to press for the vision of participatory democracy that originally informed the anti-apartheid struggle (Heller and Ntlokonkulu, 2001; Greenstein, 2003; Chipkin, 2007).

The democratic deficit in India and South Africa lies neither in civil society per se nor in the formal character of the State. The State in both cases is a democratic one, and although social inequalities have proven resilient, they have not precluded even the most excluded groups from invoking their rights. The more intractable problem has been the vertical dimension of democracy. Despite the conditions of highly consolidated democracies, with legally guaranteed rights, citizens from subordinate groups find it difficult to engage with the State effectively. There are two interrelated problems here. First of all, as we will see in a moment, the surface area of the State remains quite limited, especially when it comes to local government. Second, in both democracies, political parties not only monopolize the channels of influence but also exert considerable power in setting the agenda, that is, determining which issues,

claims and even identities enter the political domain. As a result, the public sphere is shaped largely by forms of influence that flow directly from political or economic power (parties, lobbies, powerful brokers) rather than from the deliberation of reason-bearing citizens. It is in this sense that I argue that the problem of democratization lies less in the institutions of democracy or the party system (which is dramatically different in the two countries) than in the political practices and channels that link civil society to the State.

There are many angles through which this problem of state–civil society relations could be explored, but I want to make the argument by focusing on local democratic government and social movements. The first is significant because it is in local arenas that citizens are made and that the surface area of democratic government needs to be expanded. The second is important because social movements in any democratic society are not only a critical countervailing force to the oligarchical tendencies of political parties, but can also raise, define and politicize issues that political society is often insensitive to.

The institutional space for the exercise of local citizenship in India is highly circumscribed. The average population of India's 28 states is roughly 37 million. Indian states enjoy significant powers and play a central role in development. But local elected governments – that is, municipalities and Panchayats (rural governments) – have few resources and very limited authority. The first Chief Minister of Kerala, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, made this point succinctly when he noted that 'if at the level of centre–state relations the constitution gave us democracy, at the level of state–panchayat relations the constitution gave us bureaucracy'.¹ Until the passage of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment in 1993, most states did not even hold local government elections on a regular basis. The development functions of local governments were limited to acting as implementation agencies for line department schemes and ordinary citizens were afforded few opportunities to engage directly in or influence decision making about public allocations. The insignificance of local government in India is readily summarized: annual per capita expenditure at the local level in 1990–95 was a paltry 45 rupees, about one dollar (Chaudhuri, 2006). The actual presence of local government has been so thin, both institutionally and financially, that it has not provided a usable platform for public deliberation or action. To the extent that local citizens interact with local government, they generally do so through the mediations of various brokers and fixers, often leaders of caste associations or landed elites. And when the State is present in a more robust form, it often becomes little more than an instrument of dominant interests as in the case of local police forces that actively harass and prey upon lower castes (Brass, 1997: 274). In sum, the form of the local state and the mode of its interface is so institutionally weak and so thoroughly permeated by social power and extra-legal authority as to vacate the actual practice of citizenship.²

The South African picture here is more nuanced. In rural areas, given the legacy of customary rule and the still formidable powers enjoyed by chiefs, Mamdani's (1996) characterization of local government as a form of decentralized despotism is still probably apt. Recent legislative reforms have in fact buttressed the power of 'traditional authorities' and, as Lungisile Ntsebeza (2005) has carefully documented, reversed many of the democratic gains of the post-apartheid period. Institutional weaknesses moreover make most local and district governments largely dependent on provincial line departments. But the picture in urban areas is quite different. Here, South Africa is quite unique, having inherited municipal structures that, in comparative terms, enjoy significant governance capacities and fiscal autonomy, especially in the three megacities of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. It is even possible to talk of a local developmental state (van Donk et al., 2008). The democratic character of that state is another matter.

At the time of transition, South Africa's foundational development document, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), reserved a central role for community participation in promoting local development. Subsequent legislation mandated a series of participatory processes in local governance. But with the shift in 1996 to a more market-driven vision of development (GEAR), the Government came to see the local state more as an instrument of delivery than a forum for participation. As many commentators have noted, over the past decade local government has become increasingly insulated and centralized (van Donk et al., 2008). In the name of efficiency and more rapid delivery, the ANC has managerialized decision-making processes and reduced the quality and scope of participatory processes created under the RDP. A wide range of participatory institutions such as community development forums have been dismantled or hollowed out, and municipal governance has been centralized into unicity structures that have entrenched a bureaucratic and corporatist vision of urban governance (Beall et al., 2002). The privatization or outsourcing of many government functions and increased reliance on consultants have virtually crowded out community structures. At the ward level, elected councillors and their hand-picked ward committees have been given a new role and new resources for co-ordinating local development. Because of the electoral dominance of the ANC and the very tight control it exerts over the selection of councillors, the new ward committee system feeds into ANC patronage. In interviews and focus groups I conducted in 2001, township residents complained bitterly that their ward councillors were more interested in advancing their political careers than in serving their communities. More broadly, as Oldfield (2008: 488) remarks, this 'focus on development as a delivery process has framed the substantiation of democracy as a procedural policy rather than political challenge'. In sum, the local spaces in which citizens can practise democracy and exert some influence over South Africa's very ambitious project of local government transformation (that is, deracializing the apartheid city and closing the service gap) have narrowed.

A second critical space of state–civil society engagement is the political opportunity structure for social movements. In both countries, the broad institutional space is favourable to social movement formation, and generally quite permissive of contentious action, yet at the same time largely immune to social movement influence.

In India, there is a long and rich post-independence history of social mobilization, but, with the possible exception of the farmer movement that peaked in the 1980s, few social movements have been able to scale up and impact the political arena. The farmer movement successfully mobilized relatively well-off farmers to secure significant rents from the State. But its agenda has been a narrow corporatist one, more lobby than movement, and certainly not interested in expanding social rights. Though landless labourers constitute by far the single biggest constituency in India, and are overwhelmingly Dalit and lower caste, nothing even resembling a sustained movement has ever emerged, except in the state of Kerala. If anything, movements of the agrarian poor have taken place largely outside the democratic arena in the form of various Maoist-inspired local insurrections, which are now active in a number of states. India's industrial labour movement has been especially weak.

From the very beginning of independence, India's labour federations were dominated by the State and, as Chibber (2005) has shown, were outmaneuvered into accepting an industrial relations regime that subordinated labour's interests to the imperatives of promoting capital investment. Operating in a highly bureaucratic and quasi-corporatist environment, the federations have for the most part become instruments of political parties and it is telling that they have never expanded their presence beyond the confines of the protected organized sector, which accounts for less than 9 per cent of the workforce.³ Other movements, including those of Dalits, Adivasis, women and environmentalists, have developed innovative and effective forms of contention and built strategic ties with transnational advocacy networks, so it is difficult to downplay the richness and the vibrancy of the social movement sector. Yet none of these movements have developed effective and sustainable ties to political society, and indeed many have taken an anarcho-communitarian turn, embracing communities and rejecting the State (Bardhan, 1999; Corbridge and Harriss, 2000). This reflects the degree to which civil society formations have come to distrust a political society increasingly characterized by corruption, personalism, short-term calculations and concentrated and insulated power.

Mary Katzenstein and Raka Ray (2005) point to a decisive shift in how the political opportunity structure shapes the character of social movements in India by delineating two distinct periods. In the Nehruvian period, the State, political parties and movements were aligned around a left frame of democratic socialism, but since the 1980s these progressive movements have had to reinvent themselves with the 'ascendance of its [the Nehruvian period] institutional mirror image on the right, the similarly synergistic nexus of state,

party, and movement now organized, however, around religious nationalism and the market' (2005: 3). Indeed, movement activity over the past two decades has been increasingly dominated by forces tied to the rise of Hindu nationalism, including various 'elite revolts' (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000) against the new electoral power of the lower castes. Insofar as these movements seek to affirm traditional privileges of caste, male authority and the Hindu majority, they are in effect deeply illiberal. And though they have not proven a threat to formal democracy – as evidenced by the BJP's tenure and departure from power – they have arguably had a deeply perverse effect on civil society by stoking intercommunity violence, legitimizing old and new exclusions, communalizing schools, unions and associations and in general reinforcing the involutory logic of exclusionary identity politics.

In South Africa, social movements played such a critical role in the anti-apartheid struggle that they entered the democratic period with significant organizational capacity, enormous popular support and a lot of momentum. Following a well-established pattern (Hipsler, 1998), a certain degree of demobilization was inevitable with the transition to democracy, especially considering the formal representation through various corporatist structures that the labour and civics movement were given. But the degree to which movements have been almost completely neutralized or sidelined requires some comment. First, one needs to address the most complicated case, organized labour. COSATU's strength and cohesiveness stands in sharp contrast to India's fragmented and marginalized labour movement, and is a testament to the depth and breadth of labour organizing that took place under apartheid. And despite its alliance with the ANC, COSATU has retained its autonomy, often voicing criticism of the State and staging broad-based and well-organized strikes across sectors to leverage labour's bargaining capacity (Habib and Valodia, 2006). COSATU has moreover shown itself to be a powerful kingmaker, having played a critical role in Jacob Zuma's defeat of President Mbeki for control of the ANC at the Party's December 2007 Polokwane conference. Yet most assessments of labour's role in South Africa's corporatist structures, and specifically NEDLAC, are critical, arguing that the ANC has largely set the agenda. Most notably, COSATU failed to block or even modify the ANC's shift from the redistributive RDP to the quite orthodox neoliberal GEAR. COSATU itself recognizes its political marginality. In a policy document the federation complains that the ANC National Executive Committee has no active trade unionists or social movement activists and goes on to say that 'once elections are over we go back into the painful reality of being sidelined for another five years' (cited in Webster and Buhlungu, 2004: 241).

For other social movements in South Africa, one can paint a much simpler picture. The national civics movement – the South African National Civic Organization (SANCO), which was next to labour the most important component of the anti-apartheid movement – has become little more than a

compliant ANC mouthpiece. As I have argued elsewhere (Heller, 2000), local civics remain very active, extremely critical of the ANC's policies, and often engage in contentious action. They also serve as vital and vibrant local public spaces. But with the dismantling of local participatory structures and the co-optation of SANCO, civics have very little influence over the public sphere, much less over government policy. Focus groups I conducted in Johannesburg with residents from townships and informal settlements consistently painted a picture of a distant and insulated ANC and a pronounced distrust of ward councillors who are more beholden to the Party than to communities (Heller, 2003). In recent years, the extent of dissatisfaction over the quality of local government and persistent unemployment has fuelled the rise of new social movements in urban areas, including anti-eviction campaigns and various forms of resistance to the commodification of public services. In 2005, the Minister for Provincial and Local Government reported that 90 per cent of the poorest municipalities experienced protests. The Minister for Safety and Security put the number of protests in 2004/5 at almost 6000 (Atkinson, 2007: 58). These movements remain largely local and inchoate, and have had little choice but to resort to contentious actions, many directed specifically at ward councillors. They have largely been met with silence or outright hostility by the Government.

A third movement of note has been the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), which has received international recognition for its resistance to the Government's disastrous neglect of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This movement, which enjoys a very high level of professional capacity and some very innovative leadership, has scored a number of legal and moral victories over the Government, including a new commitment to roll out ARVs. But what is most telling in this case are the extraordinary challenges the TAC has faced in engaging the Government. For years, the movement was subjected to thinly veiled claims of racism, routinely denounced by government officials as beholden to foreign interests and often actively harassed, including prosecution of grass-roots activists for providing anti-HIV transmission treatment to rape victims. That the TAC persevered and ultimately helped change government policy is a testament to its tenacity and efficacy as a movement. But it needs to be underscored that this is a tragic triumph. After years of claiming HIV did not cause AIDS and completely ignoring TAC and other HIV/AIDS organizations, not to mention international pressure and COSATU's protests, South Africa has the highest per capita infection rates in the world.

Towards a Crisis of Citizenship?

As I have shown, the space for both local democratic practices and encompassing social movements has contracted in South Africa and India. While there is still plenty of room for vibrant associational forms and even contentious action, the nature of civil society's relationship to political society

has severely restricted the impact that civil society can have on public decision making. This then leads to a critical question: if citizens can't practise democracy, what happens to citizenship?

Local democratic government in India is very weak, even non-existent in many states. For the urban and rural poor, sightings of the State (to borrow from Corbridge et al., 2005) are intermittent at best, and when they can or must engage with the local state, citizens work through intermediaries or powerful political brokers. The political party system has become highly fragmented, increasingly organized around regional and ethnically defined votebanks. On a day-to-day basis, the Indian citizen engages with the State either as a client or as a member of a group, but not as a rights-bearing citizen. Engagement is predicated on exchanges, not rights. Demands on the State are made through bribes, by appeals to caste or communal solidarities or through the influence of powerful interest groups. The logic of these exchanges is democratically perverse because it either privileges – and in the process reifies – primary identities or powerful lobbies, or is predicated on clientelistic exchanges that compromise political autonomy, as when labour federations become appendages of political parties. It is hardly novel to remark that the Indian state, including and especially the local state, is fraught with corruption and clientelism. But what is more often treated as a problem of institutions (e.g. the literature on good governance) must in fact be viewed as a problem of how *politics is transacted*. Politics in India has been increasingly instrumentalized, shorn of its normative and deliberative qualities, and reduced to little more than a competitive, mutually exclusive scramble for scarce resources. This marks a significant transformation of political society. In the Nehruvian period, all classes, castes and regions in India, with the exception of the religious right, embraced the Nehruvian normative frame of secularism and promoting equality. The concept of the national was clearly and powerfully inscribed with the ideal of the democratic citizen, and underscored by a social contract in which an affirmative state would promote equality and inclusion. This democratic vision did not, as we have seen, bridge the enormous gap between the liberal urban middle classes and the more community-oriented rural masses. But it did allow for an inclusive, secular and democracy-enhancing definition of the nation and political life. Today, that definition is under threat, both from the revival of identity politics and market liberalization.

By equating the nation with 'Hinduness', the Hindutva movement (which includes the BJP, the VHP and the RSS) has directly challenged the norm (if not the rules) of Indian secularism, and by stoking the politics of sectarianism and demonization it has subverted the ideal of citizenship. This involutory logic in which civil society is folded back into society and its myriad fragmented solidarities is not confined to Hindutva. As Jayal (2007: 13) notes

Hindu nationalism and OBC politics ... are curiously similar in their strategy of deploying the political to entrench or transcend the social. The politics of

Hindutva seek out the political domain to consolidate Hindu identity (BJP), while the backward caste assertions have been chiefly preoccupied with providing the people with *samman* [respect] and *izzat* [honour] through representation in governance institutions. Another important similarity between them is that they both reject the idea of a civic community that is not inflected by particularistic identities. The idea of universal citizenship enjoys little purchase within these political arguments, as cultural citizenship has acquired pre-eminence, and social citizenship is compromised.

If the reassertion of caste politics threatens civil society, so does the desolidarizing logic of marketization. Market liberalization has empowered a new middle class (Fernandes and Heller, 2006) and opened room for a much more assertive and aggressive bourgeoisie (Chatterjee, 2007; Kohli, 2007). If the Congress System allowed for class accommodation, liberalization has polarized class positions. The dominant classes, which benefited the most from developmental investments of the Nehruvian state (especially in state employment and support for higher education), now actively reject the very notion of the affirmative, equity-enhancing state. Kaviraj (2000: 114) summarizes the resulting democratic conundrum:

The more education and health are prised away from the control of the state in the process of liberalization, the more unequal their distribution is likely to become. The political equality of democracy would then lose its capacity to exert pressure towards social equality.

South Africa's democracy is, of course, much younger, yet there are already troubling signs of a slide from civic to ethnic nationalism (Chipkin, 2007; Mangcu, 2008). Subaltern civil society in South Africa has also become estranged from political society, but through a different process. Civil society has become deeply bifurcated between an organized civil society that effectively engages with the State and a subaltern civil society that is institutionally disconnected from the State and political society. Business groups, professionalized NGOs and organized labour continue to be well positioned to engage with the State. But subaltern civil society, and especially the urban poor, has more or less been sidelined from the political process in South Africa. This containerization has taken place through a complex set of institutional, political and discursive practices.

In institutional terms, the surface area of the State in South Africa has dramatically shrunk over the past decade. As noted above, participatory spaces in local government have been dismantled, and state–society relations increasingly bureaucratized and politicized. At the national level, corporatist structures are all but defunct. The State still transacts significantly with civil society, but does so in a highly selective and controlled manner. Across a wide range of sectors, the preferred mode of intermediation has become ‘partnerships’ with professionalized NGOs that carry out contracted services.

Conditions for engagement with the State are increasingly set by complex standards for meeting performance targets and accounting practices that all but rule out community-based organizations. Highly paid consultants, often working for 'non-profits', now occupy much of the terrain between the State and society. Katzenstein and Ray's (2005: 9) characterization of the shifting nature of state-civil society relations in India might well have been written of South Africa: 'Economic liberalization has been accompanied by the massive NGO-ification of civil society arguably crowding out some of the more protest-oriented forms of organizing within the social movement sector.'

The political terms of engagement for civil society have eroded as a result of the ANC's increasingly centralized and dirigist style of politics. After the ANC was unbanned in 1990, it moved quickly to assert its dominant role in the transition negotiations. The United Democratic Front – the umbrella organization that had co-ordinated anti-apartheid struggles during the ANC's exile – was pressured to disband. Once in power, the ANC moved quickly to consolidate its hegemonic position, asserting its right, as the agent of the 'National Democratic Revolution', to demand political subordination of mass organizations. Both ideologically and organizationally, the ANC has sought to assert control over civil society, and especially black civil society. As early as 1991 the ANC demanded that township civics recognize its role as the leader of the liberation movement and asserted its primacy in all political matters. At the 1997 national conference of the ANC, President Nelson Mandela delivered a speech (widely reported to have been written by then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki) in which he openly rebuked NGOs which assert 'that the distinguishing feature of a genuine organisation of civil society is to be a critical "watchdog" over our movement, both inside and outside of our government' (ANC, 1997). Mandela called on official aid donors to shift their funding from civil society to government. The ANC's view of civil society was made even more explicit in 1999 when on the eve of local government elections a key party theorist deplored the 'dichotomy between political and civic matters' that the very existence of SANCO represented, and called for ANC branch committees to supplant SANCO by engaging directly in civic activities (Makura, 1999: 17). Direct political control over civil society has been exerted through a range of mechanisms. Much of the leadership of the civics movement was recruited into ANC positions or government jobs. Control over ANC list nominations has been streamlined and centralized, with provincial committees closely vetting lists of local ANC candidates. In some cases, local civil society organizations have been taken over by the ANC. Others that have questioned or protested government policy have simply been frozen out, or even subjected to harassment. At the grass-roots level, ANC ward councillors are often locked into very contentious conflicts with local community leaders, and in some cases have even resorted to violence (Heller and Ntlokonkulu, 2001).

Finally, the ANC's relationship to civil society has shifted frames, moving from a democratic conception of the citizen to a nationalist conception anchored in an essentialized African identity. The conception of the nation championed by the anti-apartheid struggle and popularized in the Freedom Charter was one populated by democratic citizens united by their opposition to apartheid. But during Mbeki's presidency, there has been a marked drift towards a conception of the nation rooted in 'racial nativism' (Mangcu, 2008). Not only does this mark a shift from what Habermas and Pinsky (2001) call patriotism of the constitution (solidarity is constructed through shared ethical commitments to the rights of citizens) to a patriotism of the flag (solidarity rooted in an essentialized identity), but it has also been clearly inflected with a political content. During the anti-apartheid movement, the term 'black' was a political term referring to those excluded and oppressed by the State. But as Chipkin (2007) and Mangcu (2008) argue, being authentically 'African' has increasingly become associated with being loyal to the ANC. In this logic, the ANC is the sole carrier of the 'National Democratic Revolution' and any attack on its policies is construed as an attack on the NDR's transformative goals. The ANC thus routinely denounces critics, including contentious social movements, as 'ultra-leftist' and 'counter-revolutionary' and in one notorious case denounced its alliance partners COSATU as being racist for opposing the Government's economic policies (Mangcu, 2008: 5).

Conclusion: Explaining the Subordination of Civil Society

In this article, I have tried to show that we need to understand democratic consolidation and democratic deepening as two conceptually distinct but historically intertwined processes. First, the success of democratic transitions against all odds in both countries was the result of broad-based encompassing independence movements, operating in the interstices of civil society that cultivated mass support for democracy. The subsequent process of democratic consolidation was underwritten by a cohesive political elite that enjoyed mass legitimacy. Yet despite these successes, which include national integration and the institutionalization of the rule of law, the challenges of democratic deepening, and specifically of promoting effective democracy, have been hampered by the subordination of civil society to political society. But how do we explain the difficulty that subaltern civil society has had in engaging the political arena in the context of two robust, consolidated democracies? I want to point to two shared historical-structural factors.

The first is that the transition in both South Africa and India was marked by an imbalance of political and civil society. In the standard, evolutionary narrative of the development of western democracy, civil society gave birth to modern democratic society. It was most notably the relative autonomy and increasing power of an ascendant bourgeoisie that gave birth to parliamentary

reforms (if not universal suffrage). If, as Habermas (1989) has famously argued, the bourgeois public sphere played a critical role in promoting democracy, his critics have noted that subaltern publics were already quite active well before parliamentary regimes were introduced (Eley, 1992). The advent of democracy in Europe was thus predicated on what were already well-formed publics. The contrast with post-colonial societies is clear. The Indian independence movement did, as Chatterjee (1993) has shown, develop in civil society and produced a quite active and vociferous public. But it was largely limited to elites and, as Chatterjee argues, focused for the most part on claiming the spiritual and the private as the domains of the Indian nation. Moreover, as has often been remarked, there was a clear disjuncture between the Indian constitution's assertions of universal rights and individual autonomy and the segmented structures and community orientations of most Indians (Kaviraj, 2000). This disjuncture was, if anything, amplified in the Nehruvian period by the relative weakness of the urban faction of the dominant class that ruled the State. Because they could not extend their hegemony to rural areas where landed interests still prevailed, the Congress state adopted a strategy of accommodation, working through local power structures and, in particular, aligning with local dominant landed castes. This, to borrow Mamdani's (1996) phrase, created a form of decentralized despotism, reinforcing traditional caste hierarchies and leaving little room for the expansion of civil society.

A similar imbalance marked the transition in South Africa. Black civil society had certainly developed significant organizational presence at the time of transition. But it had emerged and developed in a context of extreme repression and absolute exclusion, and had as such little experience of transacting with the State. The transition to majority rule thus represented both a political and institutional rupture. The vacuum of authority was quickly filled by the ANC. As an organization in exile that was constantly threatened by the apartheid state, the ANC had developed extremely disciplined organizational structures, including clear lines of command that proved far more effective in establishing its power in the transition period than the decentralized and flat organizational structures of civil society. Thus, when the ANC asserted itself as the exclusive representative of the black majority, it also, by the same token, became the only institutional conduit to the State. From the outset then, South African democracy was marked by an asymmetry of power between political society and civil society. It should be emphasized that in both India and South Africa, this general imbalance of power between political and civil society, though marked by specific national configurations, has its origins in the overdeveloped nature of the colonial state.

A second shared feature of the trajectory of democratization in both countries is that this initial imbalance of power between political and civil society had a double-edged effect. On the one hand, it allowed for the relative dominance of a cohesive political elite that could go about the task of managing

the transition and unifying the nation with little effective opposition. This provided political stability and time for institution building, and explains the comparative success of democratic consolidation in both countries. On the other hand, the very same process allowed a dominant class coalition to secure both its political and economic position. In both cases, this has been marked specifically by the rise of a large, rentier middle class that is closely aligned with the bourgeoisie. In India, the primary beneficiaries of the developmental activities of the State were the urban, English-speaking, mostly upper-caste professional classes who benefited the most from the expansion of state activities and a small industrial elite that was directly supported by subsidies and extensive protection. Similarly, in South Africa, the primary beneficiary of the State's various transformative projects, most notably affirmative action and black economic empowerment (BEE), has been a new black middle class occupying positions within the state bureaucracies and a new black bourgeoisie that has translated its political connections to the ANC into significant rent-generating alliances with white capital. In class terms, the significance of these configurations of state power in both cases is that they locked in dominant class coalitions that precluded more redistributive developmental trajectories (with the exception of some subnational configurations in India) and short-circuited the social incorporation of the masses. In political terms, the dominance of the INC and the ANC neutralized the electoral power of the poor majority. The combination of this balance of class power and political dominance in turn had the effect of bifurcating civil society. The term is apt, because it recognizes that civil society is deeply divided, and that although subaltern civil society is quite vibrant, it finds itself unable to impact political society.

In India, the rise of the BJP and Hindutva marks the involution of civil society. The BJP is in every respect a social-movement party having risen from the trenches of civil society through the activities of the VHP and the RSS to achieve electoral power. It is a direct response to the failures of the Nehruvian modernization project. The resurgence of communalism and casteism in India is not as such the resurgence of deep, primordial loyalties but rather a failure of political society to link up with the more democratic impulses of civil society. It is precisely this failure that has opened the space for the politicization of identities with parties constantly seeking the electoral edge through the formation of new, but inherently unstable ethnic alignments.⁴ The process is involutory because it pre-empts the formation of the type of stable, lower-class-caste programmatic coalitions that have been associated with the more successful redistributive regimes in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000).

To date, the dominant-party status of the ANC has pre-empted any such process of involution. Yet the problems of having containerized civil society are becoming increasingly evident. As discontent over increasing social and

economic exclusion increases, new forms of resistance have emerged. On the positive side, new social movements that have inherited South Africa's powerful tradition of civic contention have emerged both to challenge the ANC's political dominance and to champion more participatory visions of democracy. More alarmingly, excluded and disenfranchised segments of the population have forgone 'voice' for either loyalty (clientelistic ties to the ANC or local power brokers) or exit (rampant crime), a dynamic that has its own involutory logic.

What lessons can we draw from this comparison of two of the most robust cases of democratic consolidation in the developing world? First, a consolidated democracy is not necessarily conducive to democratic deepening. Though both democracies have provided the associational space for civil society, the actual pattern through which political society has consolidated has in fact impaired social movements, limited the spaces for effective citizenship, and resulted in the increased bifurcation of civil society. While one can certainly understand the value that political scientists accord to stable political orders, especially in highly diverse and unequal societies, the trajectories of India and South Africa also suggest that democratic and national consolidation can come at the expense of developing more effective forms of citizenship. Moreover, this is not simply a problem of sequencing. The problem, as O'Donnell (1993) has already pointed to in the case of Latin America, is that the failure of political society to embed itself effectively in civil society and to make itself accountable to citizens, and not just interests, can severely undermine the legitimacy of democratic rule.

Second, the analysis provided here could be read as a version of path-dependent arguments, in which an initial imbalance of political and civil society, of elite and mass interests, has locked in a highly self-limiting form of democracy. In both cases though, this lock-in should be seen more as a conjunctural balance of power than as a stable equilibrium. In India, the demise of the Congress System – once lauded as a model of democratic stability – was as rapid as its consequences have been unpredictable. The current involutory trend in the direction of politicization of identities does not bode well for democratic civil society, but is one that is almost by definition incapable of becoming hegemonic given the very malleability of the identities being mobilized. Subnational trends (e.g. Kerala) and new social movements (e.g. the Self-Employed Women's Association) suggest moreover that other, more inclusive and citizen-centred solidarities are possible. In South Africa, the political dominance of the ANC appears absolute. But the very source of its ideological hegemony – its claim to represent the National Democratic Revolution – sets a very high standard. For large numbers of South Africans, the promise of a more just and inclusive society continues to inflect the meaning of politics with a transformative thrust that by definition leaves much to be redeemed. In both cases, it is worth heeding Habermas and Pinsky's (2001: 112) reminder that 'social movements crystallize

around normatively liberating perspectives for resolving conflicts that had previously appeared insoluble’.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Michelle Williams and Amrita Basu for extensive comments, as well as to the anonymous reviewers for JAAS.

Notes

1. As cited by V.K. Ramachandran at the International Conference on Democratic Decentralization, Trivandrum, 27 May 2000.
2. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution in 1993 significantly strengthened the formal democratic character of local government. In some states, significant progress has been made, but by all accounts the problems of local democracy remain acute.
3. The exception here is Kerala, where CITU (the CPM-affiliated federation) has made significant inroads into the informal sector (Heller, 2000). In a very different pattern, new non-aligned movements have emerged in the informal sector, most notably SEWA (Self-Employed Women’s Association) and small but significant organizing efforts in the construction and bidi (hand-rolled Indian cigarette) industries (Agarwala, 2006).
4. One of the more telling examples of this process came in the 1990s when in response to the BJP’s mobilization of upper caste Hindus, the Janata Dal recalibrated caste identity by creating the OBC (Other Backward Caste) category (Chandra, 2005: 245).

List of abbreviations

ANC – African National Congress.
 ARV – Anti-Retro Virals.
 BEE – Black Economic Empowerment.
 BJP – Bharatiya Jananta Party.
 BSP – Bahujan Samaj Party.
 CITU – Congress of Industrial Trade Unions (CPM affiliated).
 COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions.
 CPM – Communist Party of India (Marxist).
 GEAR – Growth Employment and Redistribution.
 INC – Indian National Congress.
 NEDLAC – National Economic Development and Labour Council.
 RDP – Reconstruction and Development Programme.
 RSS – Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.
 SACP – South African Communist Party.
 SANCO – South African National Civics Organization.
 SEWA – Self-Employed Women’s Association.
 TAC – Treatment Action Campaign.
 VHP – Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

References

- Agarwala, R. (2006) 'From Work to Welfare', *Critical Asian Studies* 38(4): 419–44.
- ANC (1997) Report by the president of the ANC, Nelson Mandela, to the 50th National Conference of the African National Congress, Mafikeng, 16 December.
- Atkinson, D. (2007) 'Taking to the Streets: Has Developmental Local Government Failed in South Africa?', in S. Buhlungu, J. Daniel, R. Southall and J. Lutchman (eds) *State of the Nation: South Africa 2007*, pp. 53–77. Cape Town: Human Social Science Research Council.
- Ballard, R., A. Habib and I. Valodia (eds) (2006) *Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Bardhan, P. (1999) 'The State against Society: The Great Divide in Indian Social Science Discourse', in S. Bose and A. Jalal (eds) *Nationalism, Democracy and Development*, pp. 184–95. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Beall, J., O. Crankshaw and S. Parnell (2002) *Uniting a Divided City: Governance and Social Exclusion in Johannesburg*. London: Earthscan.
- Bond, P. (2000) *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa*. London: Pluto Press.
- Brass, P.R. (1997) *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chandra, K. (2005) 'The Transformation of Ethnic Politics in India: The Decline of Congress and the Rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Hoshiarpur', *Journal of Asian Studies* 59(1): 26–61.
- Chatterjee, P. (1993) *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chatterjee, P. (2001) 'Democracy and the Violence of the State: A Political Negotiation of Death', *Inter-Asian Cultural Studies* 2(1): 7–21.
- Chatterjee, P. (2007) 'Democracy and the Current Economic Transformation', conference paper presented at 'The Great Transformation? India's New Political Economy', Columbia University, 14–16 September.
- Chaudhuri, S. (2006) 'What Difference Does a Constitutional Amendment Make? The 1994 Panchayati Raj Act and the Attempt to Revitalize Rural Local Government in India', in P. Bardhan and D. Mookherjee (eds) *Decentralization and Local Governance in Developing Countries*, pp. 153–202. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Chibber, V. (2005) 'From Class Compromise to Class Accommodation: Labor's Incorporation into the Indian Political Economy', in R. Ray and M. Katzenstein (eds) *Social Movements in India: Poverty, Power and Politics*, pp. 32–61. New York: Roman & Littlefield.
- Chipkin, I. (2007) *Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of 'the People'*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Cohen, J.L. and A. Arato (1992) *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Corbridge, S. and J. Harriss (2000) *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

- Corbridge, S., G. Williams, M. Srivastava and R. Veron (2005) *Seeing the State: Governance and Governmentality in India*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dagnino, E. (1998) 'Culture, Citizenship, and Democracy: Changing Discourses and Practices of the Latin American Left', in S.E. Alvarez, E. Dagnino and A. Escobar (eds) *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Revisioning Latin American Social Movements*, pp. 33–63. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Eley, G. (1992) 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century', in C. Calhoun (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 289–339. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Fernandes, L. and P. Heller (2006) 'Hegemonic Aspirations', *Critical Asian Studies* 38(4): 495–522.
- Fox, J. (1994) 'The Difficult Transition from Clientalism to Citizenship', *World Politics* 46(2): 151–84.
- Greenstein, R. (2003) 'State, Civil Society and the Reconfiguration of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa', paper presented at the WISER seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 28 August.
- Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, J. (1996) *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, J. and M. Pensky (2001) *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays* (1st MIT Press edn). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habib, A. and I. Valodia (2006) 'Reconstructing a Social Movement in an Era of Globalisation: A Case Study of COSATU', in R. Ballard, A. Habib and I. Valodia (eds) *Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, pp. 225–54. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Heller, P. (2000) 'Degrees of Democracy: Some Comparative Lessons from India', *World Politics* 52(4): 484–519.
- Heller, P. (2003) 'Reclaiming Democratic Spaces: Civics and Politics in Posttransition Johannesburg', in R. Tomlinson, R. Beauregard, L. Bremner and X. Manguo (eds) *Emerging Johannesburg: Perspectives on the Postapartheid State*, pp. 155–84. New York: Routledge.
- Heller, P. (2008) 'Local Democracy and Development in Comparative Perspective', in M. van Donk, M. Swilling, E. Pieterse and S. Parnell (eds) *Consolidating Developmental Local Government: Lessons from the South African Experience*, pp. 153–74. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Heller, P. and L. Ntlokonkulu (2001) *A Civic Movement or a Movement of Civics? The South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) in the Post-apartheid Period*. Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies.
- Hipsher, P. (1998) 'Democratic Transitions as Protest Cycles: Social Movement Dynamics in Democratizing Latin America', in S. Tarrow and D. Meyer (eds) *The Social Movement Society*, pp. 152–72. New York: Roman & Littlefield.

- Huntington, S.P. and Harvard University Center for International Affairs (1968) *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Jayal, N.G. (2007) 'The Transformation of Citizenship in the 1990s', conference paper presented at 'The Great Transformation? India's New Political Economy', Columbia University, 14–16 September.
- Katzenstein, M. and R. Ray (2005) 'Introduction: In the Beginning There Was the Nehruvian State', in R. Ray and M. Katzenstein (eds) *Social Movements in India: Poverty, Power and Politics*, pp. 1–32. New York: Roman & Littlefield.
- Kaviraj, S. (2000) 'Democracy and Social Inequality', in F. Frankel, Z. Hasan, R. Bhargava and B. Arora (eds) *Transforming India*, pp. 89–119. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kohli, A. (1990) *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*. Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kohli, A. (2007) 'State and Redistributive Development in India', paper prepared for project on 'Poverty Reduction and Policy Regimes' sponsored by UN Research Institute for Social Development.
- Lieberman, E.S. (2003) *Race and Regionalism in the Politics of Taxation in Brazil and South Africa*. Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Linz, J.J. and A.C. Stepan (1996) *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Linz, J., A. Stepan and Y. Yadav (2006) "'Nation State" or "State Nation"? India in Comparative Perspective', in S. Bajpai (ed.) *Democracies and Diversity: India and the American Experience*, pp. 50–106. Delhi & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mahajan, G. (1999) 'Civil Society and Its Avatars: What Happened to Freedom and Democracy?', *Economic and Political Weekly* 34: 1188–96.
- Makura, D. (1999) 'The MDM, Civil Society and Social Transformation', *Umrabulo* 7(3).
- Mamdani, M. (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Mangu, X. (2008) *To the Brink: The State of Democracy in South Africa*. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Mehta, P.B. (2007) 'The Rise of Judicial Sovereignty', *Journal of Democracy* 18(2): 70–83.
- Ntsebeza, L. (2005) *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of Land in South Africa*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press.
- O'Donnell, G. (1993) 'On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Postcommunist Countries', *World Development* 21(8): 1355–9.
- Oldfield, S. (2008) 'Participatory Mechanisms and Community Politics: Building Consensus and Conflict', in M. van Donk, M. Swilling, E. Pieterse and S. Parnell (eds) *Consolidating Developmental Local Government: Lessons from the South African Experience*, pp. 487–500. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

- Omvedt, G. (1998) 'The Struggle for Social Justice and the Expansion of the Public Sphere', in G. Mahajan (ed.) *Democracy, Difference and Social Justice*, pp. 130–45. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Sen, A.K. (1999) *Development as Freedom* (1st edn). New York: Knopf.
- Shapiro, I. (2003) *The State of Democratic Theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Somers, M.R. (1993) 'Citizenship and the Place of the Public Sphere: Law, Community, and Political Culture in the Transition to Democracy', *American Sociological Review* 58(October): 587–620.
- Van Donk, M., M. Swilling, E. Pieterse and S. Parnell (eds) (2008) *Consolidating Developmental Local Government: Lessons from the South African Experience*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Varshney, A. (2000) 'Is India Becoming More Democratic?', *Journal of Asian Studies* 59(1): 3–25.
- Webster, E. and S. Buhlungu (2004) 'Between Marginalisation and Revitalisation? The State of the Trade Union Movement in South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy* 31(100): 229–45.
- Yadav, Y. (1999) 'Understanding the Second Democratic Upsurge', in F. Frankel, R. Bhargava and B. Arora (eds) *Transforming India*, pp. 120–45. New Delhi: Oxford.

Patrick Heller is Associate Professor of Sociology at Brown University. He is the author of *The Labor of Development: Workers and the Transformation of Capitalism in India* (Cornell University Press, 1999) and a co-author of *Social Democracy in the Global Periphery: Origins, Challenges, Prospects* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Address: Brown University, Providence, RI 02912, USA. (Patrick_Heller@brown.edu)