SCHOOL OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

MASTERS PROGRAMME IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Civil Society & Development
2008

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Seminar 1: Introducing Contemporary Struggles in South Africa
Seminar 2: The recent Evolution of Civil Society in South Africa.
Seminar 3: Social movements in South Africa.
Seminar 4: Theories and Interpretations: from societas civilis to global civil society.
Seminar 5: NGOs – great expectations?
Seminar 6: The Rise of New Social Movements – A Counterbalancing Force?
Seminar 7: New Understandings of the Site and Politics of Struggle.
Seminar 8: Globalisation and Global Civil Society.
Seminar 9: State-Civil Society Relations in Postcolonial Africa.

Background
For the last decade and a half, the notion of civil society has been holding central sway in official, academic and popular discourses about development, democracy and governance in the world. Although this notion, in various guises and interpretations, has been part of Western political and philosophical thought almost since antiquity, it has seen a spectacular revival since the end of the Cold War and the various transitions to democracy in countries in Latin-America and Eastern and Central Europe [and South Africa in the early nineties] that accompanied that event. In most instances, it was widely recognised that a broad body of non-state actors/ agencies, subsequently lumped under the term civil society, played a key role in these transitions to democracy.

Hence, in a world newly shorn of its old theoretical and ideological certainties, the old theoretical notion of civil society was revived and imbued with a range of new meanings, interpretations and expectations. It moved rapidly from academic
discourse to widespread popular use, across a wide ideological spectrum, becoming, for some time, the new panacea for promoting democracy, ‘good governance’ and development in the world. In retrospect, there were clearly deeper/underlying ideological, political and economic causes that lead to the widespread promotion of this notion – most of them tied up with a new emerging world order, based on the notion of liberal democracy and the supremacy of the market. The course will explore these and other new developments, both in international and country contexts, and look at the challenges and the increasingly stark choices facing civil society organisations (CSOs) worldwide. It will also look the newer/emerging phenomenon of global civil society, which is increasingly challenging the underlying assumptions and practices of the ‘new world order’.

Seminars
The course starts on the 4th July and ends on 18th July 2007. It consists of nine seminars of up to 2.5 hours each. It is expected that all students will read all the prescribed readings for each seminar, so as to maximize individual and mutual learning, have meaningful discussions in class and deepen debate. Please note that you will also be assessed on the basis of your seminar presentation and participation in class.

Assessment
You will be assessed on the basis of the following: (a) think pieces for each seminar and general participation in class (10%), (b) a book assignment (30%) and (c) a long essay (60%)

a. Think pieces: For each seminar you are required to prepare a 1-2 page ‘think piece’ based on the readings. This has to be submitted to the seminar organiser via email by 16:00 pm the day before the seminar. This should be a summary of the main themes emerging from the readings, along with any questions you have for discussion. Use the introductory paragraph on the seminar to guide your reading and the focus of your think piece. Identify the major points of difference and major lines of debate in relation to the seminar topic. These should not simply be summaries of the readings but some kind of overview where you reorganize the information from the readings into a new structure that helps you understand the topic. Your think pieces should be fully referenced and written like a mini-essay (rather than just notes). Assessment of these will focus on your ability to synthesise key themes from across the readings. Credit will be given for use of reading from the ‘additional reading’ list. At each of the seminars 2 names will be drawn randomly to speak to their think pieces out. This, along with other aspects of your general participation in class, will be assessed out of 10.

b. Book review: The deadline for this is 18 July 2008. A number of the pieces you have been prescribed come from classic books (e.g. Ferguson, Mamdani, Fanon, Gramsci, Gill Hart, Hart & Negri, Harvey, etc). Choose one of these books and run your choice past me before you start (please don’t choose an edited collection). Then read the book cover to cover. Write a 2000 word review in which you identify
the thesis (argument) of the book, summarise the supporting claims the author uses to make the thesis and engage critically with this argument citing other authors if necessary. If possible engage with the way in which this book has impacted on intellectual thought. For examples of book reviews have a look at the back portion of any journal in the SDS library. Try to follow this standard approach.

c. Long essay: This is the major assignment of the module. The deadline is 31 July 2008 and marks will be returned by 3 August 2007. Although this can be as long as 7000 words you probably do best to aim for a more focused 5000 words. You will develop the topic in consultation with me in relation to any of the seminar topics that you feel you would like to develop your knowledge on. Note that unless I have agreed to a topic you cannot presume that it is OK to go ahead. The deadline for finalising the topic is 13 July 2007. Please note that the main component of the assessment (the long essay) must be passed in order to pass the module. Also, that the School of Development Studies has a policy for late submissions of assignments: a 5% deduction for the first day after the due date and 3% deduction for each day thereafter.

Possible essay topics
1. Critically assess the legacy of Gramsci’s writings on the field of civil society research.
2. Although civil society is a much celebrated idea, there is little consensus over what it is and why it is a good thing. Compare and contrast the major ideological positions on civil society.
3. Civil Society has been is seen as ‘a Eurocentric concept, … not easily transposable to other contexts’ (Kaldor 38). Discuss.
4. Critically discuss the following: ‘There is no ‘correct’ view of civil society, but there is an essential point to make about the way the concept is used. The use of the term as a normative concept (i.e. what we would like civil society to be, or what we think it ought to be) is often confused with an empirical description (i.e. what it is).’ (Pearce 34).
5. ‘In reality NGOs are not “non-governmental” organizations’ (Petras & Veltmeyer 2001: 132). What do the authors mean by this and what are the implications?
6. Discuss the following in relation to changing civil society in SA: ‘NGOs’ recent relations with government call work to strain their commitment and lines of accountability to the poor. NGOs’ dependence on state funding and their newly formed ‘client’ relationships with government must lead one to question their autonomy and whether they can avoid being mere appendages of state institutions.’ (Habib & Taylor 2001)
7. Critically discuss the following: ‘Whereas alienated and degraded labour may excite a limited alternative, it does not have the universalism of the market that touches everyone in multiple ways. It is the market, therefore, that offers possible grounds for counterhegemony. We see this everywhere but especially in the amalgam of movements against the many guises of globalization.’ (Buroway 2003: 231)
8. Discuss whether Harvey is right to be skeptical of a general celebration of social movements in the following: “The danger … is of seeing all such struggles against dispossession as by definition ‘progressive’ or, even worse, of placing them under some homogenizing banner like that of Hardt and Negri’s ‘multitude’ that will magically rise up to inherit the earth. This, I think, is where the real political difficulty lies.” (Harvey 2003a: 168-9)
Seminar 1: Introducing Contemporary Struggles in South Africa

Required reading:

Additional reading:
Seminar 2: The recent Evolution of Civil Society in South Africa

The political transition in South Africa fundamentally changed the relationship between civil society and the state. Until the transition there was a well developed oppositional civil society which opposed the apartheid government. From 1994, most of these organisations restructured themselves to have a collaborative relationship with the new legitimate government. The purpose of this session is to evaluate this shift and to consider the role of civil society in post-apartheid South Africa.

Required reading:

Additional reading
Seminar 3: Social movements in South Africa.

Although much of the oppositional force of civil society of the 1980s was demobilised in the 1990s, there have been growing grassroots expressions of frustration at continued levels of poverty, the slow progress on land reform, lack of access to HIV/AIDS treatment, poor service and housing provision. These have been described by some as a possible counterweight to ANC dominance, but is it right to say that they form a kind of substitute opposition party? After all, many members of social movements are ANC members. The purpose of this session is to understand the politics of social movements in post apartheid South Africa.

Required reading:

Additional reading:
McKinley, Dale & Veriava, Ahmed Arresting Dissent Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
http://web.cortland.edu/wagadu/issue1/Miraftab.html

Also go to http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs/default.asp?5,56 for social movements research reports
Seminar 4: Theories and Interpretations: from societas civilis to global civil society.

The first purpose of session two is to map out the evolution of the idea of civil society. When you are reading, note the different positions of key thinkers in different periods. In the Classical period look out for the ideas of Aristotle and Plato. In the early modern period note the works of Hobbes, Locke, Ferguson, Kant, Hegel, De Tocqueville. Then make note of Marxist responses to the idea such as Marx himself and Gramsci. Finally, look at some of the key recent thinkers such as Habermas and Putnam. If you can write a sentence or two on each of their core ideas you will be going some way to orientating yourself in this field. The second purpose of this session is to work out why different groups have become excited about civil society. Conservative neo-liberal groups, welfarists, post-marxists, and Marxists all like civil society but they do so for different reasons. As you read, try separate out why different political positions like civil society and try to identify what kinds of civil society they like (and conversely what kinds they don’t like).

Required reading:

Additional reading:
Seminar 5: NGOs – great expectations?

Part of the reason that idea of civil society was so enthusiastically embraced recently was a hope that civil society could rescue the development project which promised so much as countries decolonized but has singularly failed to live up to that promise. Financial aid from the first world would no longer have to be transferred to what they saw as corrupt and incompetent governments but could now go to development professionals in NGO who would get the job done. NGO optimists have, however, been widely criticized for various reasons. NGOs are said to depoliticize development, to allow foreign control/represent foreign interests, and for being essentially unable to do the development job that states should be doing. The primary purpose of this session is to look at the key reasons why some people support NGOs and others criticize them. The secondary purpose is to look at how actors in NGOs understand their role in development and how they operate on a day to day basis.

Required reading:

Additional readings
Seminar 6: The Rise of New Social Movements – A Counterbalancing Force?

Whereas more mainstream civil society enthusiasts pinned their hopes for development on NGOs, left leaning supporters of civil society valorise social movements. Yet it is not clear that blind romanticism of social movements takes us much further. Social movements are an extremely heterogeneous set of political expressions which are often quite immediate in terms of their focus. There is a mismatch between the grand plans of leftist ideologues and the modest demands of grassroots uprisings or issue based campaigns. The purpose of this session is to map out some of the political projects of social movements, their role in social change, their methods and tactics, and the responses of authorities to social movements.

Required reading:

Additional/Extra Reading:
Seminar 7: New Understandings of the Site and Politics of Struggle.

There are some important interesting conceptual debates on social movements at the moment and the purpose of this session is to understand two of these debates. One key debate is about the site of struggle and we should be positive about the new forms of struggle. Classical understandings were that capitalism would be challenged from the workplace. However, Buroway draws on Polanyi to suggest that we have moved away from a time where struggles at the workplace would be the vanguard of social progress and that now struggles in the community related to the market are the key to progress. Harvey is less optimistic about this but also offers an analysis about why union struggles have become less significant, explaining this as an increasing tendency in capitalism to accumulate through dispossession.

Required reading:

Additional reading:
Seminar 8: The World Social Forum and Global Civil Society

Required reading:


Additional Reading
Seminar 9: State-Civil Society Relations in Postcolonial Africa.

Under colonialism, colonial subjects were not granted full citizenship and were not seen to be legitimate participants of ‘civil society’ in the western sense. Nevertheless, in the decades following WW2, powerful liberation movements eventually forced colonial powers to grant independence. Many of these liberation movements took power of newly independent states and struggled to transcend a history where citizenship had been denied. A common pattern was for these new states to demobilise the grassroots and to discourage an independent civil society. The purpose of this seminar is to examine the dynamics around the establishment of a civil society through and after independence.

Required reading:

Additional reading: