'Civil society can provide a valuable framework for understanding and changing the world' Michael Edwards, 2009. Discuss this statement with reference to examples.

Civil society, in the Hegelian sense, refers to the sphere of social action separate from government and outside the immediate influence of the state wherein 'social contracts and bargains are [produced], negotiated and mediated' (Kaldor, 2003). Tracing an ancestry of thought in civil society, the fall of the Berlin wall (1989) emerges as a critical, political juncture: 'scholars [began] to reflect on the role of civil society (NGOs; the Third Sector) in nurturing democracy in post soviet states [and] of civic associations [acting] as a bulwark - the protector of pluralism - against a return to Leninism' (Corbridge et. al, 2013). Civil society thus emerged as an analytical framework and a policy tool, characterised by multiple, fluid definition and collective contestation and struggle over its praxis. Fundamentally, this essay explores how civil society - as a self-reflexive process rather than an end in itself - might provide the 'valuable framework' that Edwards writes of, by (i) pluralising the debate to involve multiple perspectives and (non-western) contexts and (ii) observing 'actually existing civil society' (Mamdani, 1996) to develop more nuanced theories of the ways in which states, markets and civil societies interact. For instance, there are several orthodoxies of Hegelian civil society which struggle to hold within modern, non-western contexts, such as: the Indian caste system and civil society as gesellschaft (impersonal social relations) and the alter-activist global network and civil society as local resistance.

Throughout, this essay frames the ideal, or 'utopian horizon' (Kaldor, 2009) of civil society as an 'inclusive, associational ecosystem matched by a strong and democratic state, in which a multiplicity of independent public spheres enable equal participation in setting the rules of the game.' I suggest that civil society gains from courting this ideal; that, by being able to critically contrast its past and present materialities to those of an imagined future, a valuable framework of, and for, progress is created. Here, I explore much of the anti-neoliberal 'backlash' (Hemment, 2004; Mohan, 2002) against 'civil society' practices (NGOs and The Third Sector) within "developing" non-western spaces. These critiques - or, contrasts to the ideal - borrow heavily from Marx and the idea that civil society is not an objective category, but a normative or 'imagined' process of the bourgeoisie. To progress, both materially and intellectually however, I suggest that civil society must deconstruct and evolve away from Marx's state-society duality and the caricatures of a marauding (active, non-civil) state and a resisting (passive, civil) society. Instead, practices of civil society should be further developed that engage in, and recognise the political agency, of both.

Recognising these dialectics, I explore Keane et. al's (2009) new vision of civil society wherein 'non-violent engagement [is promoted] 'from above' (Lockean regime school) - through state authority embedded in national constitutions and international law - and 'from below' (Toquevillean associational school) - by channelling violent tendencies into non-violent associational life and through the public sphere. Finally, I show how this vision is already unfolding and organically unfurling in the 'soil and water' of existing democracies: (i) India and the channeling of violent tendencies of political society into the non-violent, deliberative action of civil society and (ii) alter-activism and the bursting of the local and its carceral spaces - by diffuse, flexible networks of negotiation and bargain. Pluralising the discourse of civil society to involve multiple contexts and ethnography provides a valuable framework for challenging the status quo of 'conditionality' in foreign aid-giving. Much criticism of the civil society agenda has been levelled at NGOs within the developing world. Mohan (2004) writes, state actors are: '[content] to promote [civil society] programmes that seek to build upon local energies because this absolves them of responsibility for welfare provision,

earns political capital by being sensitive and dialogic, and disaggregates society into a series of unconnected, both spatially and politically, 'issues'. Potential alliances and solidarity against the structural forces generating poverty are undermined as civil society actors literally scrabble for the pickings of the aid regime' (Mohan, 2004).

Hemment (2002) reiterates the sentiment, suggesting that the "civil" spaces of the Third Sector in post-soviet Russia retain old hierarchies and dependencies wherein a small circle of old-party "philanthropic" elites flourish. However, deviating from Marx, her ethnography explores the signifying possibilities of the Third Sector. Rather than seeing the post-soviet space as claustrophobic, with a passive polity demoted to violent and uncivil self-expression, Hemment recognises how locals reinterpret non-violently the forms and logic of political activism by 'imaginatively deploy[ing] the third sector.' She terms these local negotiations 'subaltern counterpublics' and propositions that the only way civil society organisations (NGOs) are to succeed in creating sustainable, effective and inclusive democracy is by recognising these various counterpublics and creating diverse, meritocratic (non-preemptive) modes of distribution - pipelines that are independent and transparent. Edwards (2009) goes further, positing the need for greater diversity in the the types of NGO (i.e what they provide). He likens civil society to a real, biological ecosystem that gains strength from its diversity and organic growth, and thus sees peril in a move towards greater homogeneity. For instance, Corbridge et. al. (2013) note how the proliferation of micro-credit schemes in India - often with weak roots in society - has drawn poor women 'more tightly into patronage networks' rather than to questioning and negotiating their release from them.

Whaites (1998) recognises this paradox of Civil society in that by focusing on localism and grassroots initiative, NGOs often marginalise and delegitimise the political claims addressing the very root structures of poverty. He thus proposes the 'scaling up' of local interventions   to involve wider, and more difficult, processes of democratisation, anti-imperialism and feminism. Aligning this 'scaling up' with late modernity and the instability of place within the era of globalisation, he writes: 'places rather than [static] sites of resistance are continually produced and reproduced' by people who are 'active and knowing agents in their own well-being.' Alter-activism - the emerging cultures of participation among young global justice activists - adopts this mantra, forming protest camps as 'interstitial experimental spaces' wherein hierarchies are temporarily suspended and expressions of civil desires provoked: 'in the evenings, the camps were transformed into lively spaces for discussing politics, singing songs around small fires, presenting independent films, and dancing during all-night techno raves' (Juris et. al, 2009).

Cavalli links alter-activism to the period of 'extended youth', he writes 'social changes over the past two decades, including the extension of education, precarious job markets, and extended dependency on parents, have postponed the transition to adulthood and profoundly modified social relations in the West.' This definition extends to much of the 'South' (a true 'globalisation of disaffection' (Edwards, 2009)) with the 'Arab Spring' of the Maghreb, civil youth movements in India (Jeffrey, 2004), student protests in Chile and China as some among the several organic manifestations of alter-activism, unfurling throughout the globe. As Jeffrey (2013) posits, the Arab spring did not emerge linearly out of organised institutional activity but frenetically and muddledly in the humdrum of informal (youth) networks; new technologies (ICTs) facilitating the cross-flow of ideas and tactics across national boundaries. Civil society's flexibility and openness as a concept - its skin of struggle over ontology and praxis - is prised open by these new forms of collective protest and state bargain. Firstly, it questions whether civil society must rely on the

sociability of gesselschaft (impersonal social relations) to function. Much of the televised protests revealed how principles of gesselschaft and gemeinschaft (religious affiliation, kinship) were mobilised together in forms of associational action.Spectacles of immolation, of riotous violence to the self and others, illuminates the thin and 'porous' border between (non-violent) 'civil society' and (violent) 'uncivil society'.

Observing post-colonial India, Chatterjee traces the emergence of two distinct forms of politics, mapped into the class position of Indian subjects. These distinct forms were socially constructed after independence by an upper-middle class to consolidate power and sate the desires of the downtrodden classes (for progress and 'development') by granting them false rights and positions of authority (a Gramscian 'passive revolution'). The rich thus occupy civil society, that realm of 'modern associational life and deliberative decision-making' based on Hegelian ideas of equality, autonomy and openness'. In contrast, the poor occupy political society, wherein they 'make their claims on government, and in turn are governed, not within the framework of stable, constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct [often illegal and unruly] political negotiations.' Ironically much 'uncivil' behaviour is practiced by India's upper-class civil society: the violent land seizures of urban revanchism in Dharavi.

The Arab Spring might be conceived of as a manifestation of (violent, short-term) political society, yet also a part of (non-violent, longterm) civil society, effecting change, as was in Egypt, through deliberative procedure and law. Corbridge et. al suggest that 'civil society' in its present guise within India is evolving and organically unfurling towards the ideal: an 'associational ecosystem matched by a strong and democratic state, in which a multiplicity of independent public spheres enable equal participation in setting the rules of the game.' They write: 'poor people increasingly imagine themselves as citizens capable of critiquing the state, and much of their mobilisation occurs via legal channels and with reference to abstract notions of rights which they understand and embrace.' Their research as such situates at the front-line of Mamdani's clamour to observe 'actually existing civil society' and develop more nuanced theories of the ways in which states, markets and civil societies interact. Civil society offers endless possibilities as an analytical framework and policy tool in 'changing the world'. Rather than an end in itself, civil society is an organically unfurling and reflexive process, an 'arena for contestation' (Gramsci) through which we interpret and improve towards the ideal. Kaldor (2004) strings the historical present between the barbarism of past utopias (fascism and communism) and the barbarism of an absence of utopias - a descent into incivility. Civil society as a framework thus usurps barbarism, offering 'a future direction, which is not dictated.'

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