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Faith-Based Organisations, Local Governance and Citizenship in South Africa

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Introduction

POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA has replaced the racist oligarchy of apartheid with a liberal-democratic Constitution and political institutions at national, provincial and local levels. In addition, the government has tried to accommodate indigenous practices of participatory democracy at local level through the new structures of ward committees and processes of public consultation on development planning and the budget. Unfortunately, these spaces were implemented belatedly in response to public protest and remain mostly ineffective. Furthermore, civil society tends to be either disengaged from the local state, or sufficiently enraged to protest against it. This emergent estrangement of the local state from society is fostering forms of citizenship that are either indifferent or ambivalent towards the state.

In response to this scenario, this chapter argues that democracy and development require more constructive state-society relations, something like Andrea Cornwall and Vera Schattan Coelho's 'participatory sphere' (2007), and that this implies more engaged and active forms of citizenship in local governance. Moreover, it holds that faith-based organisations could make a significant contribution to realising these democratic ends because of both the quantity and quality of religious identification and

organisation. Not only are most South Africans religious, indeed Christian, but there are multiple faith-based organisations, many of which have significant social power. This makes the faith-based sector potentially one of the most powerful components of civil society in South Africa, as well as in Africa and other postcolonial regions.

Although there is widespread recognition of the separation of church and state in South Africa, as reflected in the Constitution, this is not a barrier to faith-based support for human rights, democracy and development. This is because the dominant distinction embraced in the political theology of the major religions is one that distinguishes support for community or social objectives, such as democracy and development, from politics, largely understood as party competition for power. What this means is that although there is a tradition of liberation theology in South Africa, it is not necessary to appeal to this tradition to justify faith-based advocacy for an active, democratic citizenship.

Lastly, this mainstream political theology is important precisely because it is rooted in a religious normative scheme embraced by ordinary people in their political attitudes and alternative to the tremendous political legitimacy enjoyed by ruling elites. However, a substantive application of political theology to the domain of democratic and social development is still required.

Democracy, local government and public participation

In 1994 South Africa had its first election in which all citizens were entitled to vote, regardless of race. The African National Congress (ANC) led by Nelson Mandela won with an overwhelming 62.65 per cent of the national poll. The National Party (NP) of F.W. de Klerk, the party that had overseen apartheid rule, was placed second with 20 per cent of the ballot. This election followed four years of intense negotiations between South Africa's political parties led by the ANC and NP, which mostly focused on the process towards and the form of the post-apartheid state. While the end-point of these negotiations was the Constitution of 1996, by 1994 the basic frame of the new order was in place. Central to the post-apartheid order was a unitary, non-racial, democratic state, in

which the Constitution, including a Bill of Rights, was sovereign, and the government was to be constituted by regular elections conducted in terms of a proportional representation, party-list system. Although unitary, the state was divided into national, provincial and local spheres with distinct powers for each, albeit somewhat limited for the two latter levels. National policy and legislation took precedence over provincial or local government.

The power of the national sphere has been greatly enhanced by another factor: the overwhelming electoral dominance of the ANC. That the ANC is massively and increasingly popular is confirmed by every election result since 1994. Indeed, in 2004, it gained more than 70 per cent of the national vote and, for the first time, won all nine of the provinces. Notably, this growing popularity sits hand-in-glove with a greater concentration of power. For example, Tom Lodge (1999) points to a growing centralisation in ANC processes; Adam Habib and Rupert Taylor (1999) discuss the growing dominance of the ANC in the tripartite alliance; Robert Mattes (2002) refers to the rise of executive power at the expense of parliament; and Anthony Butler (2000) notes the concentration of executive function in the office of the president. When added to perceptions about former President Thabo Mbeki's 'zero-sum approach to power, viewing alternative sites of capacity as competitors rather than potential resources' (Butler 2000: 200), the overall trend seems clear.

The significance of the ANC's power for democracy in South Africa is read in two divergent ways. On the one hand, there are observers who believe 'that only an extended period of political stability can establish the preconditions for the longer-term entrenchment of democracy' because of the tremendous social and economic divisions that characterise society (Butler 2004: 118). Thus any threat to ANC dominance is a threat to political stability. The contrary view is that ANC dominance is harmful to democratic consolidation. Those to the centre-right of the political spectrum hold that the lack of a viable opposition will encourage authoritarian tendencies in the government, the fusion of party and state, and thus the progressive erosion of autonomous institutions and

conditions for political competition (Giliomee and Simkins 1999: 337–40). Such sentiments have come to the fore in the ANC succession race, and Mbeki has been accused of using state institutions to exclude his rival for power. Similar views are expressed by those on the left. For example, the South African Communist Party (SACP) Deputy Secretary-General Jeremy Cronin has noted the ANC's 'swings between demagoguery and managerialism', warning of 'terrible perils for democracy' and that '[Robert] Mugabe epitomises where we could end up' (quoted in Malala 1998).

In short, as with other liberation movements in Africa, India and Mexico, the ANC's record as liberation movement has ensured its victory as political party. Although there have been clear tensions over its key policy choices, including macro-economic policy, HIV and AIDS and crime, the response from both ANC activists and the public, until recently, has been to try to change the ANC, rather than supporting or forming another party. When added to the centralised design of the political system, the dominant party practice in South Africa further concentrates power at national, rather than local, level. Hence, the ANC candidate who ultimately leads a municipality is a decision made at provincial and sometimes national level in the party.

Local government

Despite this effective centralisation of power, the significance of post-apartheid local government is enhanced for three reasons. First, not only does each sphere of government have developmental responsibilities of its own, but local government is the key institution used by national government to deliver basic services, such as electricity, water and (most) housing. Second, local government is the only sphere that does not have a simple proportional representation system, as half of all local councillors are elected from constituencies. This makes it the only sphere of government in which citizens can identify an individual politician who is directly accountable to them. When this is added to the tendency of most citizens not to differentiate responsibility according to each sphere of government, disproportionate expectations are placed on ward

councillors to meet people's needs. Third, and perhaps most importantly for our purposes, local government is required to operate more democratically than the other spheres, by facilitating public participation in municipal processes between elections. Notably, versions of popular democracy similar to this are now emerging again in contemporary political theory, for instance in the recent debates about deliberative democracy. This is typically explained as a response to the divergence between the democratic beliefs and values of ordinary citizens and the sharply elite character of rule under liberal-democratic capitalism. The idea that pluralist or liberal democracy is experiencing some kind of democratic deficit is increasingly widespread.

However, public participation in South African local governance also has clear local roots. As Steven Friedman points out, the idea of public participation in local government has connections with notions of 'people power', as expressed in the opposition politics to apartheid of the 1980s (2005). Of particular importance here was the experience of participation in civic and other community-based organisations in historically black areas. Indeed, according to Yunus Carrim, member of parliament and chair of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Local Government that drew up the key legislation on public participation in local government, the *Municipal Systems Act of 2000*, the framers of this legislation were almost all former civic and United Democratic Front (UDF) activists, who would have been familiar with the idea of participatory democracy (interview, 26 October 2006). While clearly not the only political practice inherited by the reconstituted ANC after 1990, this participatory strain is still manifest in South African politics and, in particular, in the design of local governance.

The failure of participatory governance

The first reference to participation in post-apartheid local government is to be found in the South African Constitution of 1996.¹ The *White Paper on Local Government of 1998* suggests that 'municipalities should develop mechanisms to ensure citizen participation in policy initiation and formulation, and the monitoring and evaluation of decision-making

and implementation' (DPLG 1998: section 3.3, 17–20). However, it was really only with the *Municipal Structures Act of 1998* and especially the *Municipal Systems Act of 2000* that participatory local governance was given institutional life. Where the *Structures Act* sets out the various structures of local government, including ward committees, the *Systems Act* outlines how they are to be used. More specifically, section 16 obliges municipalities to 'develop a culture of municipal governance that complements formal representative government with a system of participatory governance'.

What precisely is 'participatory governance'? There are basically three aspects: the definition of municipality; ward committees; and consultative processes for planning, budgeting and the like. The first of these is in some ways the most remarkable and yet intangible. The *Systems Act* defines the municipality as consisting of the governing structures (the elected councillors), the administration (the appointed staff) and the residents. Carrim claims that the definition of residents as part of the municipality is unique in the world and establishes the grounds for greater involvement by the public in municipal matters (interview, 26 October 2006). While the practical implications of this definition are not yet obvious, the symbolic ramifications are considerable.

The second innovation is the ward committee system. The *Systems Act* provides for ward committees to be established in each ward of a Category A (metropole) or Category B (city or town) municipality, if the municipality so chooses, although the government has also suggested that the ward committee system be made compulsory for all municipalities (Msengana-Ndlela 2006). Chaired by the ward councillor, ward committees are intended to consist of up to ten people representing 'a diversity of interests' in the ward, with women 'equitably represented'. Ward committees may make recommendations on any matter affecting their wards to the ward councillor or through the ward councillor, to the metro or local council, the executive committee, the executive mayor and so on. Notably, ward committees cannot be delegated executive powers, and their primary function is to 'create formal unbiased communication channels . . . between the community and the council'

(DPLG 2005: 36). They are also required to mobilise the community to participate in service payment campaigns, development planning and budgetary processes, decisions about service provision, by-laws and so on.

The third aspect of participatory governance involves forms of public participation in core municipal processes, such as development planning, performance management, performance, the budget and strategic decisions relating to services (section 16[1][a] of the *Systems Act*). In short, public participation is statutorily injected into the most important municipal processes. Government policy on how public consultation on these issues ought to occur is quite limited and usually manifest in the insistence on using ward committees. In practice, it seems, most consultation happens through the use of public meetings called by the mayor, also known by their isiZulu name, mayoral *izimbizo* (public meetings).

Unfortunately, these government spaces for public participation do not seem to be working. A range of empirical studies has suggested that comparatively few people participate in ward committees or *izimbizo* and, more importantly, the forums have virtually no impact on local decision-making or deliberation (see Barichievy, Piper and Parker 2005; Friedman 2005; Piper and Deacon 2006; Piper and Nadvi 2007; Piper and Von Lieres 2008). According to Laurence Piper and Bettina Von Lieres (2008) this is because the top-down 'invited spaces' of participatory governance are poorly implemented, poorly designed (such that they do not create incentives for real participation) and poorly supported by key political elites. Simply put, despite the tradition of participatory politics, politicians do not really want public participation to work – at least not yet. Indeed, despite the fact that the *Systems Act* was passed in 2000, it was only following popular protests against local government in the year preceding the local government elections of 2006 that national government started implementing participatory governance with any urgency. In late 2005, the Minister of Safety and Security, Charles Nqakula, reported to parliament that there had been 5 085 protests against local government countrywide, related to issues such as poor service delivery

in the previous year (*Daily News*, 14 October). Nevertheless, most provinces still do not have developed public participation policies for local government and the national policy is yet to be finalised.

Civil society as enraged or disengaged

The failure of the 'invited spaces' of participatory governance reflects what appears to be a deeper, emergent problem in local state-society relations: the estrangement of the local state from civil society. As Richard Ballard, Adam Habib and Imraan Valodia note, democratisation had a demobilising effect on South African civil society (2006: 14–17). Civil society activism was channelled into anti-apartheid activity in the 1980s, mostly under the hegemony of the ANC, which was the dominant social movement in the country. After the 1994 elections, the movements that mobilised people were absorbed into the ANC government or into partnerships with the government, and most held the view that the government would deliver to the poor (see Heller 2001). Furthermore, the remaining non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector came under pressure to 'professionalise' and withdraw from advocacy to a more limited role in service delivery (see Greenstein 2003).

From the late 1990s, however, there has been a rebirth in oppositional civil society, although only some of this is framed in terms contrary to the 'emerging pro-growth consensus', while much is framed in broader rights-based opposition (Ballard, Habib and Valodia 2006: 400). Notably, while there is no neat division between those movements that will engage with the state and those that will not, the counter-hegemonic movements' engagements 'tend to create crises, which more rights-based campaigns can capitalise on to influence policy and government practice' (404). Critically, however, opposition civil society is not particularly strong, and hence Jo Beall argues that emergent state-society relations exist in a kind of 'fragile stability' that is likely to continue into the medium term until new social actors emerge to change this equilibrium (2005: 681).

Recent empirical work around the country has painted a picture of an ambivalent civil society, which is either enraged or disengaged. The enraged segment refers to social movements, such as the Soweto

Electricity Crisis Committee or the *Abahlali Basemjondolo* Housing Movement in eThekweni, which have publicly organised and protested the lack of delivery of the local state. As noted, this segment is quite small and exists in some real political tension with the ruling ANC party. Conversely, the disengaged segment refers to the bulk of civil society, especially the NGO sector, which tends to ignore the local state, both because of its comparative lack of powers and high levels of disorganisation, and because of the local state's lack of interest in meaningful partnership (see Piper and Nadvi 2007: 31–33). For most of civil society, a relationship with the local state is largely non-existent.

In this context, the implications for citizenship are not positive. On the one hand, citizenship tends to be understood in terms of social agency for one's community against the democratic state; on the other hand, citizenship is constructed in terms of social agency without or despite the state. Hence, recent survey research into the attitudes of 554 young people in eThekweni found a clear distinction between the notions of 'government' and 'community', such that only 36 per cent agreed that government was working to solve community problems (only 16 per cent trusted political leaders), while 59 per cent trusted school leaders and 57 per cent trusted community organisations (Brundige 2007: 83–84). Furthermore, while only 41 per cent reported following national politics, 69 per cent reported following community events (99). In general, young people defined citizenship in terms of community work (roughly 50 per cent), rather than rights (1.8 per cent) or political actions (10 per cent) (102–03).

In many ways, this youth dissatisfaction with government and the conceptual disengagement of government from community are more evidence for the familiar refrain in the public domain of an emergent political class pursuing its own interests in the name of the people, but often at the expense of the people. It is a kindred sentiment to that which underwrites the appeal of Jacob Zuma as 'of the people' in a way that Mbeki is not. To my mind, it represents a desire for a return to the ANC as a social movement rooted in the community from its new and alien role as a professional party serving political elites. However, should

imminent change in ANC leadership not make the local state more responsive to local people, communities will be forced either to disengage from the local state and to seek relationships with other players (such as international donors) or grow increasingly enraged to force the state to deliver.

The case for active citizenship through a participatory sphere

It is quite possible, perhaps even likely, that South Africa will continue along the liberal-democratic trajectory of regular elections and market economic growth without significant forms of public participation in the future. It might even be the case that this trajectory is largely successful, growing the middle classes and keeping political elites reasonably responsive to the people over time. However, it seems equally plausible that this trajectory will not optimise the developmental and democratic potential of South Africa's people, especially the poor. A better option would be to combine the broad liberal-democratic framework with a social project that includes constructive state-society relations centred on the idea of an active citizenship that engages the government through a 'participatory sphere'.

According to Cornwall and Coelho, democratic state-society relations require a 'participatory sphere' that lies at the interface of the public sphere and the state. Composed of hybrid institutions, some of which are extensions of the 'invited spaces' of the state and some of which are 'invented spaces' claimed from the state, these institutions have 'a semi-autonomous existence, outside and apart from the institutions of formal politics and everyday associational life . . . They are spaces of contestation, but also of collaboration and co-operation' (2007: 1). The point of this autonomy is precisely to open space for the greater inclusion, voice and impact of otherwise marginalised citizens, usually the poor, on local governance.

Further, public participation promises to enhance economic and social development. In this regard, it is notable that local participation and decentralisation have become crucial elements of the dominant developmental model employed by the World Bank, United Nations

and other agencies over the last twenty years. In terms of participation, the World Bank contrasts its previous 'external expert stance', where development project sponsors and designers were outside the local system about which they took decisions, with the new 'participatory stance'. The latter involves not only consulting and listening to local people and being open to local innovation, but also local people directly participating in project decision-making (World Bank 1996: 3–5). Experience has shown that meaningful public participation in development projects generates better outcomes, partly because of better informed and quality deliberation, but also because of better support for projects through co-ownership. Hence one benefit of participation is better delivery due to projects that are better conceived and implemented.

Other reasons for participation include its democratic dividends. This is articulated by new 'deliberative' or 'discursive' theories of democracy, unhappy with reducing democracy to periodic elections (Cohen 2002). Where some see public participation as enhancing democracy through uncovering new voices in informal or 'wild' spaces where communication is unconstrained and spontaneous (Dryzek 2005), others see deliberation as implying new structures to enhance deliberation and so deepen democracy in existing public institutions (Hendricks 2006). Key advocates of the latter approach are Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright (2001) in their analysis of the features of 'Empowered Deliberative Democracy' (EDD) institutions.

Of course, the preconditions for deliberative democracy are not present in every context. As noted above, in South Africa there is little evidence of a democratic public sphere in which citizens can engage effectively with the state. There is often a marked disconnect between public spaces in which citizens voice their claims and the political sphere of the state and its institutions. This disconnect is embedded in a wider political culture that brings together democratic and clientelist elements, often overlain by complex identity politics in terms of race, ethnicity and gender. In these postcolonial contexts, political culture is shaped by often messy negotiations between old and new governance structures in post-authoritarian contexts. Consequently, there may be little convergence

between local democratic culture and state-driven culture. For instance, traditional authority and constitutional democracy in South Africa coexist in complex ways.

Notably, the support for deliberation or deliberative institutions is echoed by associative democratic theories of consolidation, which point to the central role of civil society as a counterbalance to state hegemony. In so far as new democratic institutions enhance civil society's influence over the state, they are seen as good for democracy. This is especially the case for those who see the electoral dominance of the ANC in South Africa as effectively constituting a 'dominant party system', with the associated threats of unchallenged elite rule (Mattes 2002). Indeed, as I will argue below, it is precisely because of the complex, messy and contradictory nature of state-society relations that faith-based organisations are so important.

The potential of faith-based organisations to enliven local democracy and active citizenship

The argument for the potential role of faith-based organisations in building active citizenship is one that appeals to both the quantity and quality of such organisations. In terms of quantity, I want to draw attention both to the religious nature of most South Africans and the huge number of existing faith-based organisations, many of which have significant social influence. As is the case throughout the postcolonial world, faith offers a tremendous resource for social organisation often not tapped into for socio-political ends. Related to this, the quality of these religious organisations in South Africa is fairly conducive to advocacy for more democratic forms of citizenship. Despite the widespread recognition of the separation of religion and state, most mainstream churches have embraced a political theology that affirms human rights, democracy and development as social goods independent from partisan political competition. Hence, while church leaders do not tell their congregations who to vote for, they can advocate for human rights and social development. Importantly, the churches have an additional strength that other progressive civil society organisations do not: a source of normative authority as doing God's work as an alternative

to the political legitimacy of popular support, often claimed by civil society organisations, but still largely associated with ruling elites. This authority is especially important in contexts, such as Africa, where ordinary people understand politics in religious terms, too.

Religion and quantity

The significance of religion and faith-based organisations for public life is increasingly recognised around the world. There are various reasons for this, including what Samuel Huntington calls the 'clash of civilisations' (1993). This is a view contrary to Francis Fukuyama and company who hold that we live at 'the end of history' where liberal-democratic capitalism is not only hegemonic, but also optimal for human development and therefore a stable and enduring system (Fukuyama 2002). Against this view, Huntington argues that there remains a fundamental source of conflict in the world centred not on ideological or economic, but on cultural difference. Furthermore, he argues that the basic divide will be between the 'West and the rest', although he draws particular attention to the 'Confucian-Islamic' connection. It is not hard to see how the current understanding of 'terrorism' is explained in these terms, as is the emergence or re-emergence of religious nationalism in India and elsewhere in the postcolonial world.

In Africa, too, religion matters. Notably, only 0.8 per cent of Africans are non-religious, which probably makes the continent the most religious in the world. Furthermore, some 394 640 000 or 46.3 per cent of African people are Christian; 344 920 000 or 40.5 per cent are Muslim; and 100 420 000 are followers of 'ethnic' religions (White 1998). In South Africa, too, the vast majority of South Africans are religious. According to the 2001 census, some 85 per cent of South Africans are religious, compared to 88 per cent in the 1996 census. Of these, the vast majority (nearly 80 per cent) report being Christian, with 33 per cent belonging to 'mainline' churches and 32 per cent to Zionist or African Independent Churches. According to Harald Froise (n.d.), since 1980 the African Independent Churches have increased by 25 per cent, which makes them the fastest growing sector of Christianity. Of the other religions, Islam stands at 1.5 per cent and Hinduism at 1.2 per cent. Those who reported

‘no religion’ stood at 15 per cent in 2001 (Stats SA 2004). In sum, it is pretty clear that South Africa is both religious and predominantly Christian.

The importance of religion in South Africa is also reflected in the number and significance of faith-based organisations in civil society. For example, an online search of the national Department of Social Welfare non-profit organisation database reveals that of the registered organisations in the country, faith-based organisations constitute the fifth highest of seventeen categories at 4 814 or 12 per cent. Only the categories of ‘social services’, ‘development and housing’, ‘education and research’ and ‘health’ were higher.

Registered non-profit organisations according to the Department of Social Welfare database.

	Sector	Number	Per cent
1	Business and professional associations	15	0.04
2	Business and professional associations, unions	158	0.38
3	Culture and arts	1	0.00
4	Culture and recreation	480	1.15
5	Development and housing	9 728	23.27
6	Education	1	0.00
7	Education and research	6 579	15.74
8	Environment	590	1.41
9	Health	5 374	12.86
10	HIV/AIDS	2	0.00
11	International	49	0.12
12	Law, advocacy and politics	1 041	2.49
13	Not classified elsewhere	59	0.14
14	Philanthropic intermediaries	68	0.16
15	Philanthropic intermediaries and voluntarism promotion	480	1.15
16	Religion	4 814	11.52
17	Social services	12 358	29.57
Total		41 797	100.00

Source: Compiled from <http://www.npo.gov.za/frmSNOrg.aspx>, accessed 26 February 2009.

In addition to being numerous, faith-based organisations have played – and continue to play – a significant role in South African public life. Already noted is the role of the Dutch Reformed Church in justifying

apartheid and the mainstream Christian churches in, eventually, opposing apartheid. In particular, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and individuals, such as Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Catholic Archbishop Denis Hurley, played high-profile roles as opponents of apartheid. Indeed, Archbishop Tutu has continued his role as a commentator on public life, in particular commenting on the conduct of government when it fails to meet the normative standards of human rights, democracy and development.

Religion and quality

The issue of quality refers to the potential role that faith-based organisations could play in helping to democratise local governance in South Africa. While recognising that not all faith-based organisations are necessarily democratic, it is clear that the political theology of the major churches in South Africa is supporting of advocacy for a more active citizenship. Furthermore, such organisations have an additional moral resource through their appeal to God's authority that other civil society organisations do not.

Around the world, faith-based organisations are increasingly seen as having a legitimate role in democratic governance. Hence Veit Bader argues that the extreme exclusion of religious reasons and arguments in liberal democracies is 'morally arbitrary, unfair, and practically counterproductive' (2003: 265). Furthermore, the strict separation of church and state in legal discourse has also come under attack (266). Arguing that the church-state relationship is too narrow a concern, Bader holds that we would do better to think of a liberal-democratic institutional landscape that consists of society-culture-politics-nation-state and organised religions (266). He suggests that it is theoretically consistent and perhaps pragmatically advisable to conceive of an institutional context that accommodates organised religion alongside the state. This he sees as supplementing, rather than replacing, representative democracy (284). Bader's arguments are adventurous, but they confirm a growing recognition among most scholars of the constructive role that organised religion or faith-based organisations can play in liberal and democratic contexts.

We do not need to go as far as Bader in arguments for institutionalising religion into the system to affirm a democratic role for religion. As scholars of democracy and democratisation have long argued, a vibrant civil society is crucial to democracy in at least two ways. First, it can act as an alternative source of organisational power, which can, in a democratic context, pressurise the state to respond to social needs or constrain abusive state actions. In a non-democratic context, such as the apartheid and Soviet orders, civil society can be a source of resistance to oppression. Both the defiance campaign in South Africa in the late 1980s and the so-called velvet revolution in the Czech Republic were driven by civil society formations. Second, civil society organisation is a key source of social capital (networks and associated relations of trust), which Robert Putnam (1993) has argued undergirds the horizontal citizens relations required for a meaningful democracy. A significant amount of empirical research has been done on the role that civil society organisations, including religious organisations, play as schools for democracy. For example, Michael A. Jones-Correa and David L. Leal (2001) found that in the United States, Latino participation in elections and political processes was positively influenced by membership of churches.

While the association between political participation and civil society organisations is widely accepted, not all civil society organisations encourage democratic values or practices. There exists a clear distinction in recent work on social capital and civil society organisations between 'good' and 'bad' civil society. There are different ways of making this distinction. For example, a common distinction is between 'bridging' and 'bonding' social capital. The former refers to associations that cross social cleavages in their membership, the latter to associations that reinforce social cleavages (Szreter 2002). The argument is that bridging social capital is better for building the common identity and citizenship required for effective democracy. Similarly, one could differentiate between those organisations that explicitly affirm democratic values and those that overtly oppose them.

These distinctions apply to religious organisations as much as to other sectors in civil society. For example, while the role of religion in

democratisation has been mostly positive in the recent past, it is not uniform. Huntington notes that the numbers of Christians in Africa grew from some 236 million in 1985 to 400 million by 2000 (1993: 281). This is particularly important as the 'third wave' of democratisation between 1974 and 1990 was primarily a Catholic wave. Of the 30 countries that made the transition to democracy during this period, roughly 75 per cent were Catholic. In addition, the growth of popular religions is also good for democracy as, according to Jean-Francois Bayart (1993), they are the ordinary person's way of 'cocking a snoot at authority' (quoted in Haynes 2004: 82). Similarly, Achille Mbembe (1998) argues that 'the current explosion of religious revivalism in Africa is another ruse by the common man to create a counter-ideology and alternative political space in response to the totalitarian ambitions of African dictators' (quoted in Haynes 2004: 82).

However, the picture is not quite this simple. Not all popular religions are pro-democracy and, as Jeff Haynes points out, in Africa senior religious figures have typically forged close relationships with the state, usually for various pragmatic reasons, and the upshot has been to make them 'ambivalent towards the concept of fundamental political change' (2004: 87). Similarly in South Africa, while many establishment churches did line up against apartheid, it took some time for this to happen. In addition, the ruling whites-only NP regime justified its racist rule in religious terms developed by the Dutch Reformed Church. Organised religion thus found itself on both sides of the apartheid struggle, rather than consistently on the side for democracy and human rights.

This noted, today the attitude of faith-based organisations in South Africa towards democracy is overwhelmingly positive. Indeed, despite the widespread recognition of the differentiation of state and religion, faith-based organisations retain tremendous potential to act as democratic advocates because of their political theology. In making this case, I follow the distinction drawn by Daniel Philpott between, on the one hand, 'differentiation', which is the precise relationship between political and religious institutions and, on the other hand, political theology, which is the set of ideas a religious authority holds about legitimate political

authority (2007: 505–07). I suggest that while religion and state are clearly and consensually separated, most churches support human rights, democracy and development. This enables a relatively easy distinction between advocating for social or community upliftment based on human rights, democracy and development and a simultaneous distancing from politics, understood as the competition for power by parties also committed to these same goals.

First, ‘differentiation’ refers to the balance of power between potential conflicting authority claims between religions that claim truth about the moral order of the universe and states that claim sovereignty over a people and territory (Philpott 2007: 506). While there is a variety of possible relationships between these competing authorities, from theocracy at the one extreme to atheist dictatorship at the other, most end up somewhere in between and can be categorised both as to how separate church and state actually are and whether or not such separation is mutually agreed on. Hence, while the apartheid order saw a low integration of state and church to the mutual consent of both (although not the majority of people or all churches), post-apartheid South Africa has a highly differentiated system to the consent of most. Today the Constitution affirms all religions and not only one; the state does not promote religious purposes through law and policy; it does not restrict freedom of religion; and no religious body has any special constitutional standing.

Second, political theology is the set of ideas that a religious authority holds on what constitutes legitimate political authority (Philpott 2007: 505–07). As pointed out above, Catholicism is associated with the wave of democratisation in the world in the late twentieth century. Behind this lies the new political theology of the church following the second Vatican Council of 1962–65, which affirmed human rights, religious freedom, democracy and economic development. Similar commitments exist today in other mainstream Christian churches, if not in Islam. For example, the Anglican Church declares on its website: ‘There are many challenges and opportunities for ministry in this Province. For example, the new democracy in South Africa after many years of oppression under

the policy of apartheid, in the rebuilding of Angola and Mozambique after many years of civil war, the pandemic of HIV & AIDS affecting many of its members, poverty eradication, environmental issues, etc.' (Anglican Church of Southern Africa 2009).

What this means is that despite the clear differentiation between state and religion in South Africa, the political theology of most churches would probably justify social advocacy based on advancing human rights, democracy and development, and would see these as community or social, rather than political, issues. If this assessment is correct, most faith-based organisations in South Africa have unique normative resources to justify supporting active forms of citizenship, including social development projects and rights-based education to empower local communities.

These normative resources matter especially in our context for two reasons. First, it may well be the case that many ordinary people in South Africa see public life in religious terms – at least in part. This is suggested by Gerald West's work in this volume on Thabo Mbeki's increasing reference to the Bible in his public speeches (see Chapter 3). It is also suggested by work elsewhere in Africa. For example, Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar argue that 'religious modes of thinking about the world are widespread in Africa, and have a pervasive influence on politics in the broadest sense' (2007: 385). Indeed, they hold that Africa cannot be properly understood without appeal to religious ideas that most people embrace. In addition to challenging theories and analysis of African social life, this approach suggests that not only political institutions, but especially political practice are already understood by many Africans from a religious perspective. They further argue that many Africans feel powerless before what are perceived as 'vast forces that amount to something resembling a cosmic conspiracy'. These forces have both a material and a spiritual dimension (2007: 397). Implicit in the self-understanding of Africans is that there must be a spiritual solution to what Westerners would view solely as material problems.

The second reason why religion is especially important for democratic advocacy in South Africa is the monopoly on political legitimacy enjoyed by elites, thanks to the historical role of the ANC in liberating South

Africa from apartheid oppression. While this credibility is perhaps slowly being white-anted from within in the light of delivery and governance failures, there can be little doubt that the ANC and, by extension, the government feels an exclusive claim to represent the people. As identified above, this attitude is often manifest in a very dismissive attitude towards civil society, which is simply not perceived as politically legitimate enough to question or demand. Faith-based organisations, however, have the alternative and powerful moral resource of God's word to contest attempts to exclude civil society on normative grounds.

Of course, to say that the potential for justifying progressive advocacy exists is not to say that it has been developed. This work still needs to be done or at least developed in the public realm, as clearly there are already many faith-based organisations doing democracy or development work that may well have a more advanced theology of social engagement. In this sense, I echo a view developed by Ebrahim Rasool who laments the failure of post-apartheid religious organisations to develop a 'theology of transformation'. He says:

We find religious organisations and institutions fighting battles on various issues, but with no coherent sense. No one seems to be crafting a theology of transformation to guide us and bring us together, as was the case with the theology of liberation in the Apartheid years . . . There must be some objective value that we are guided by in our Scriptures, so that we speak with conscience and not simply with the pragmatism of the moment. We thus begin to spell out the complementary roles of politics and religion, without holding that religious activists should be politicians, or that politicians should be religious activists, or that they all have the same role (2002).

It is also important to recognise that the potential for social advocacy and its successful realisation are two very different things. Hence Tanja Winkler (2006) notes that even among faith-based organisations involved in social development work in Johannesburg, there are significant differences between those that organise around particular interests and

affirm bonding practices and those that reach across social divisions in a bridging manner. Consequently, the relationship between these various faith-based organisations is often competitive, rather than co-operative.

Conclusion

Successful democratisation in South Africa requires more than regular elections and economic growth. It also requires the active participation of citizens in decisions that affect their material, political and cultural lives, especially at the local level. The centralisation of power in the country, the poor performance of local government, and the general failure of government's invited spaces paint a somewhat bleak picture of an emergent breakdown in constructive local state-society relations and an increasingly marginalised citizenry.

This chapter argues that faith-based organisations are uniquely placed to be significant contributors to the revitalisation of constructive local state-society relations and a more active citizenship. Not only are most South Africans religious, but faith-based organisations are many in number and significant in influence. Most faith-based organisations have at their disposal a political theology and a tradition grown out of apartheid that supports human rights, democracy and development and could thus form the basis of a theology of active citizenship, without threatening the legal and normative differentiation between state and religion. Lastly, faith-based organisations have a unique legitimacy among civil society organisations, which makes them less vulnerable to normative exclusion by political elites. Of course, more work is needed in developing the theology of active citizenship and many challenges face the substantive realisation of a successful advocacy practice, but the potential is clear.

Note

1. Section 152 of the Constitution places an obligation on local government 'to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government'. Further, section 195(e) states that 'in terms

of the basic values and principles governing public administration – people’s needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making’.

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