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(London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi)
Vol 3(2): 117–149
DOI: 10.1177/1473095204044778
www.sagepublications.com

THE DESIRE CALLED CIVIL SOCIETY:
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CRITIQUE
OF A BOURGEOIS CATEGORY

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Abstract How does ‘civil society’ serve the Washington Consensus while also attracting the aspirations of left political activists and progressive planners? We address this troubling question by interrogating the *concept* of civil society, with due respect to the actual role played by civil society in the development of capitalism. Based on close readings of Hegel, Marx and planning theory dealing with it, we also argue that the discourse of civil society now serves neoliberalism quite well, but provides dubious support for ‘radical’ or ‘insurgent’ planning. As an ideal for the latter, we propose instead the radical democratization of *both* the economy *and* the state.

Keywords civil society, Hegel, Marx, neoliberalism, radical planning, Tocqueville

The first man who, after fencing off a piece of land, took it upon himself to say 'this belongs to me' and found people simple-minded enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*

The second coming of civil society

Today, 'civil society' is on the agenda. The unmistakable salience now enjoyed by this notion across much of the political spectrum represents not merely a new orientation for planning theory, but an historical event of political significance. Not, however, an entirely unprecedented one. The modern concept of civil society, as Fredric Jameson (1998a: 96–7) notes, *first* figured prominently in the attempts of classical political philosophers – Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Smith, Ferguson and above all Hegel – to 'theorize the modes of secularization available within the structures of European feudal society, that is, within the European "*ancien régime*"'.¹ The historical occasion then, in other words, was the 'transition to capitalism' from feudalism. The situation within which the concept of civil society is being reincarnated today, to be sure, cannot be described in exactly those terms. Yet an uncanny sense of *déjà vu* accompanies it still. For while it is certainly true that we are no longer experiencing a transition from feudalism to capitalism in much of the world, few would wish to deny that the current resurgence of civil society – hand in hand with a few other key terms like democracy, human rights, social capital, participation, self-help and of course 'free markets' – coincides closely with so-called 'globalization', which often operates as a code-word for the universalization of capitalism. What accompanies civil society today is not a transition *to* capitalism as such, but a quantum leap in the territorial expansion ('globalization') and a socio-cultural intensification *of* it (i.e. the 'condition of postmodernity', à la Fredric Jameson).² It should be hardly surprising, therefore, that civil society is now very much the watchword of the Washington Consensus (Finnegan, 2003) – the World Bank, the IMF and the US Treasury Department – and enlightened multinational corporations even as it continues to designate the chosen terrain of operation for NGOs, social movements, and 'insurgent' planners (Sandercock, 1998a, 1998b).

Yet, how could such a quintessentially bourgeois category, now so thoroughly co-opted by the ideology of neoliberalism, also attract like a lightning rod the agreeable aspirations of radical democracy and even 'anti-capitalism'? Does it make sense today for planners and activists aligned with such anti-systemic politics to carry all of their counter-hegemonic eggs in one basket that was originally woven to provide a liberal political shell for the emergent capitalist economy of the bourgeois social order? Is not the valorization of civil society today part and parcel of the neoliberal attack on

the state as such and the attendant call for people to ‘get the government out of their lives’ and finally start looking after themselves with the help of NGOs and ‘free enterprise’? These questions demand historical and theoretical reflection on the concept in question, as well as attention to the track records of actually existing civil societies. They also provide the occasion to explore how some leading strands of contemporary planning theory respond to its contested political prospects. In order to address all that, we begin our article with an exploration, however brief and selective, of several key moments in the meaning and practice of civil society through the history of capitalism, focusing in particular on the most powerful theorizations of this concept offered by Hegel and Marx before it was taken up by the World Bank, NGOs and planners of various descriptions. In so doing, the first sections of our article will also examine some of the basic theoretical and political questions concerning democracy, capitalism and especially *the state* in a way not found often in the civil society discourse in planning theory or practice (e.g. Douglass and Friedmann, 1998).

We trust that this theoretical effort is vital, because more than one meaning of modern civil society can be easily detected in contemporary political theory and practice. As explained below, in the classical sense of the term expounded by Hegel and critiqued by Marx, civil society referred to a sphere of the social that was distinct from the state, but not from the economy. A quite different view was popularized almost contemporaneously in North America by Alexis de Tocqueville’s (1835/1945, 1840/1945) *Democracy in America*, which sees civil society as a social space separated from *both* the (liberal-democratic) state *and* the (capitalist) economy, comprised of ‘voluntary associations’ such as ‘families, churches, neighbourhoods’ and a ‘free press’. Planners in particular have not always paid sufficient attention to this crucial difference, and in some cases have even confused the two. Yet these two conceptions of civil society often lend themselves to very different political sensibilities concerning not only planning, but also democracy, capitalism and prospects for radical social change in the face of globalization and neoliberalism. As such, they demand close scrutiny, in comparative and critical perspective, with due attention to the often obfuscated ‘Americanism’ of the *particular* conception of civil society that now claims to speak globally for the *universal* interest. In the final section of this article, accordingly, we offer a close reading of John Friedmann’s (1998) highly instructive theorization of civil society in *Cities for Citizens: Planning and the Rise of Civil Society in a Global Age*.

Our focus on Friedmann here requires little justification. The range and depth of his contributions to the field of planning – stretching from history to theory to politics in one grand sweep; from the urban to the national to the international in another – remain unmatched. His is a majestic oeuvre of the political left distinguished not only by erudition, but also judgement: we (all of us) have frequently turned to his rewarding writings over the

years to find our own political bearings in a world of complex planning thought and action. There is no better object of study, then, than Friedmann's contribution to *Cities for Citizens* for anyone wishing to critically examine from a left political perspective the current discourse of civil society in planning and beyond. The problems he encounters in it, moreover, are by no means his alone: rather, they are symptomatic of the habits of political thinking nurtured by a peculiarly American concoction of neoliberalism and postmodernism, and, ultimately, the state of the world which brings such thought into being. Here our objectives will be two-fold. First: to highlight the theoretical and practical dilemmas contained in the concept and actuality of civil society, which are linked to the fundamental political-economic contradictions of the social order that gave birth to it. Second: to open up some questions concerning the wisdom of progressive planners' largely uncritical and unselfconsciously (if not naively) American enthusiasm for a 'politics of civil society' – 'radical', 'insurgent' or otherwise – while urging them to be more discriminating and vigilant in their orientation towards it. With these we also hope to contribute – in conclusion – to a theoretically informed and politically conscious elaboration of the *question*: how could 'radical' and 'insurgent' planners together with progressive political activists work towards a genuinely democratic-socialist politics involving the self-management of society by ordinary people in their everyday life?

The state and civil society: Hegel after political economy

In pre-modern political discourse in the West, civil society often merged in meaning with 'political society', with no sharp boundary drawn between it and the state. Even by the time of John Locke's writings, it was common for him to use the expression 'civil or political society' and argue that 'civil society is the state liked', meaning that 'civil society' amounted to the 'political state', which came into being as 'the historical remedy for the inconveniences of the state of nature' (Dunn, 2001). The clear distinction between civil society and the state habitually invoked today came only with the development of capitalism, from the 18th century onwards. Historically this was made possible by the differentiation of society into various relatively autonomous 'levels' or 'spheres', on the basis of (in Marxist terms) the development of productive forces and production relations in tandem with corresponding transformations in socio-political institutions and forms of consciousness; or (in Weberian terms) by the increasing rationalization and social division of labor, which Habermas (1981/1984, 1985/1987) takes up in his account of the differentiation of society into 'systems' and 'life-worlds'. This historical process also involved an unprecedented entrenchment and spread of the 'self-regulating' market and private property, under

the auspices of the capitalist state as much as the relentless logic of capital accumulation by means of commodity production (Marx, 1867/1976). Such, in a nutshell, are the minimal historical coordinates needed today to ask: what *is* civil society?

In an article of unusual clarity, sociologist and historian Craig Calhoun (1993) offers a useful working definition of civil society for our purposes. He proceeds from three interrelated questions of clarification. First: ‘what counts as . . . a political community?’ Second: ‘what knits society together or provides for social integration?’ Third, and most important for progressive planners and political activists: ‘[w]hat opportunities are there for changing society by voluntary (especially political, state-oriented) collective action?’ The ‘state’ or the ‘political community’ – as a distinct space *within* society – cannot cover all possible responses to these questions; neither can civil society:

The idea of civil society entered [modern] political philosophy and social theory as a way of describing the capacity of a political community to organize itself, independent of the specific direction of state power. Claims to such capacity were linked – notably in Locke – to rejections of the absolute authority of monarchs and assertions of the rights of popular sovereignty. Such arguments placed a new emphasis on the social integration of a people, on society as such rather than merely on the aggregation of subjects. In such a view, the state no longer defined the political community directly, for its own legitimacy depended on the acquiescence or even support of an already-existing political community. (Calhoun, 1993: 270–1)

In historical and sociological terms, then, where can we locate the locus of a *political* community’s capacity to self-organize? In the context of the modern state system, the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991) of the nation often comes to mind first. Yet, as Calhoun notes, the early modern thinkers first developed the idea of civil society prior to the rise of modern nationalism. They did not therefore look to the *nation* as we know it in search of evidence for a political community’s capacity to self-manage outside the purview of the state. Rather, for these thinkers ‘the crucial demonstration of such capacity came from the rise of the self-regulating market’ (Calhoun, 1993: 271).

The modern capitalist market . . . appeared first in the discourse of civil society and democracy not in its currently familiar guise of a putatively necessary *support* for democracy. Whether or not free markets are necessary for political freedom, the crucial early contribution of markets to the idea of civil society was as a *demonstration* of the possibility of self-organization. Markets led thinkers like Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith to the idea that the activity of ordinary people could regulate itself without the intervention of government. (Calhoun, 1993: 271, emphases in original)³

The supposedly ‘causal’ relationship between economic liberalization

and political democracy so casually invoked today in White House press releases and World Bank publications, in other words, is not without a certain pedigree in liberal political thought. As for the pioneering Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Ferguson and Smith, their enthusiastic early appreciation of the 'self-regulating market' may be attributed, at least in part, to the historical novelty of the phenomenon, especially when viewed against the backdrop of the absolutist state. Already by the time of Hegel, however, the inherent contradictions of the laissez-faire economy were becoming abundantly apparent, along with the problems of a civil society premised upon and inextricably linked to it. A critical awareness of these in fact provided the points of departure for the most sophisticated and in some ways still unsurpassed classical theory of the modern *state*, Hegel's (1821/1991) *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.

Hegel read keenly and critically the classical political economists. Consequently, as the first modern philosopher to clearly distinguish the modern market economy as a social institution distinct from both the family and the political state – in a three-tiered view of society involving the family at its base, civil society rooted in the market economy at the intermediary level, and the 'political state' at the top – he identified two endemic problems of civil society stemming from its structural contradictions: its tendency towards atomization and pauperization coupled with the propensity toward cyclical economic crises (Hegel, 1821/1991: §243–5ff.). All of this disqualified a civil society premised on predominantly capitalist economic relations for the role of securing *political* community and the task of lifting society above the Hobbesian state of nature, from which Locke had earlier wished to radically distinguish his conception of the state. Whereas Locke envisioned civil society as the 'state liked', Hegel's superior understanding of political economy led him to turn this formulation on its head, that is, to regard the *state* as the solution to the inherent contradictions of civil society. So with Hegel we have the *state* as civil society rendered 'rational', in the realization of freedom. Here is one sense in which Hegel is to be understood, in the words of Allen Wood's (1991: xi) excellent editorial introduction to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, as 'a critic of liberalism, even its deepest and most troubling modern critic'.

The distance between Anglo-American liberalism and Hegel is also captured in the German term for civil society, which is never conveyed adequately in the standard English rendition: namely, *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, i.e. *bourgeois society*. Hegel, unlike some postmodern planners or neoliberal ideologues, clearly registers in his theory of the state that civil society is deeply marked by self-interest and the contradictions of capitalism – a system whose economic logic *denies* the conditions of freedom, notwithstanding the wealth it generates. Accordingly, he understands that the most daunting challenge before him is that of 'actualizing' freedom by 'rationalizing' civil society. Yet at the same time, as Wood elsewhere warns, for Hegel '[t]he *bourgeois* is not simply the self-interested *homo æconomicus*' of Smith.

Instead, Hegelian subjects, by virtue of their social being, necessarily *belong* to a 'trade or profession', from which they derive a sense of community along with their social 'standing': '[t]heir image of themselves comes to be bound up with the honor or dignity of their estate, . . . through which they gain recognition both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others'. In the process they also 'acquire ethical dispositions, values and interests in common with others in their estate, and this leads to a sense of solidarity with these others, institutionalized in corporated membership'. As a social being rather than an atomized utilitarian in the image of neoclassical economics, then, 'the burgher's concerns as a . . . corporation member prominently include concerns about the welfare of others and the common good of civil society as a whole'. 'In this way', writes Wood (1990: 27), 'the individual's participation in civil society passes over naturally', in Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 'into the universal life of the state'.⁴

Here we glimpse the basis of Shlomo Avineri's (1972: 147) sound assessment that 'Adam Smith is . . . *aufgehoben* – both preserved and transcended – into the Hegelian system'. Civil society as the classical political economists understood it, that is to say, is not dismissed as 'bourgeois' in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. On the contrary, Hegel acknowledges it as a vital realm of freedom that endows modern individuals with unprecedented opportunities to 'choose their own modes of life' as autonomous subjects. 'Freedom' in the ordinary liberal sense of the term – including civil liberties – is fully preserved in the Hegelian state. But Hegel also considers *this* kind of bourgeois 'freedom' as quite limited.⁵ Here his originality lies in going beyond Hobbes, Locke, Smith and their followers to entrust the state with the crucial task of overcoming the atomizing, polarizing and alienating moment of civil society as well. To this end, Hegel's solution bears the name of *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*): a system of rational social institutions meant to nourish the political life of the community and ensure the well-being of society as a whole. 'Estates' and 'corporations' – occupational associations emerging from the structure of production relations – are therefore called upon in Hegel's theory of the state to safeguard people from the recurrent dangers lurking in civil society, by providing them with not only such essentials as education, health care and unemployment insurance, but also a responsible sense of collective purpose and fulfillment in contributing to the general welfare of the political community to which they belong. The 'political state' too is here charged with the task of 'policing' civil society, in order to manage its inherent economic crises. In this scheme, *the state* as Hegel understands it includes the *entirety* of 'ethical life', integrated across the three levels of society: namely, the 'altruism' of the *family*; the liberal-bourgeois 'freedom' of *civil society* harmonized by 'estates' and 'corporations'; and the universal 'rationality' embodied in the institutions of the '*political state*'. Yet, for all that, his appreciation of political economy also turned out to be too good for his own good. To his credit, Hegel admitted an essentially economic problem to which he could not devise any

lasting political solution in a proleptic passage of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*: the problem of what Marxists later theorized as the ‘crisis of capitalist accumulation’, to which he suggested, in a striking afterthought, the expansion of the economic base of civil society overseas through imperial conquest – or what we might now call ‘globalization’.⁶

As Wood (1991: x) quite correctly says, ‘Hegel was no radical, and certainly no subversive’. Needless to add, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* ought to be and has been subjected to several criticisms, above all from the standpoints of feminism (not least for its exclusion of women from public life and the subordinate role assigned to them within a blatantly patriarchal view of the family); of Marxism (which does not share its ‘professional’ and ‘urban middle class’ bias or faith in reforming bourgeois civil society); and, of Hegel’s own philosophy (which was certainly not lost on Marx). Yet in some respects Hegel remains distinctly superior to liberals (Wood, 1991: xi). For although in institutional terms his ideal state approximates in its ‘estates’, ‘corporations’, and ‘economic policing’ the welfare functions of the modern liberal state, the latter makes not even a perfunctory attempt to foster the sense of *social solidarity* that was held in the highest regard not only by Hegel, but also John Friedmann (1987: 314, 343), at least when he proclaimed in *Planning in the Public Domain* (without any reference to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*) that ‘the world-historical project that is beginning to emerge’ for planning, for which ‘we do not yet have a name’, is the ‘*recovery of political community*’. To put it differently, in Wood’s (1990: 258) words, ‘[a]lthough the state Hegel favours may be quite liberal, the ethical theory through which he justifies it is not liberal at all’. He ‘attacks the subjectivistic, atomistic and moralistic foundations of modern liberalism, and . . . provides an alternative rationale for quite similar social institutions, based on a combination of communitarian principles and the radical German idealist conception of absolute freedom’.⁷ Herein lies Hegel’s critical value today:

[A]lthough Hegel’s theory was put forward as a rational *defence* of the modern state, his true legacy belongs rather to the *critics* of modern society. The basic tendency of Hegel’s social thought is to undermine modern society’s liberal self-interpretation; to the extent that its institutions have been shaped by this interpretation, its tendency is even to criticize these institutions themselves. He presents a communitarian rather than an individualistic rationale for modern economic and political institutions and of the freedom they seek to actualize. This provides the basis for an indictment of any society which tries to call itself ‘free’ even though it fails to offer its members any rationally credible sense of collective purpose, leaves them cynically disconnected with and alienated from its political institutions, deprives them of a socially structured sense of self-identity, and condemns many of them to lives of poverty, frustration and alienation. (Wood, 1991: xxviii, emphases in original)

On Marx and democracy: ‘political emancipation’ and ‘human emancipation’

We shall address some implications of this ‘anti-liberal’ Hegel for our contemporary fascinations with civil society presently. In order to do so critically, however, we must also take a look at his most illustrious student, who also ranks high among the ‘critics of modern society’. Karl Marx’s immanent critique of liberal-democratic capitalism and its bourgeois state form begins with Hegel. In his article ‘Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State’ written in 1843, the ‘early’ Marx (1843/1975b) faults the master on several counts. First, for his idealist method, as is well known. Second, for ignoring and leaving intact the fundamental relationship of the modern *state* to *private* property, the basis of capitalism.⁸ Third, for proposing a spurious resolution of the separation that exists between ‘civil’ and ‘political’ life in bourgeois society.⁹ Here Marx does not call into question Hegel’s conception of freedom or the ideal he assigned to the state – the actualization of freedom – but rejects the *ethical life* he proposed in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* for being inadequate to the task of bridging the division between the ‘*political state*’ and *civil society*, that is, the separation between the political and the economic (Wood, 1995: 19–48). In spite of Hegel’s best intentions, as Marx points out, the problem lay above all in the economic constitution of civil society, which Hegel (1821/1991: §289) himself acknowledges as ‘the battlefield where everyone’s individual private interest wars against everyone else’s’. He also underlines how this kind of civil society renders the state a terrain on which ‘we have the struggle (a) of private interests against particular matters of common concern and (b) of both of these together’. Here Hegel comes quite close to Marx’s classic view of the bourgeois state as a site of class struggle – without, however, drawing the necessary conclusion.¹⁰ He understands, of course, the need to ‘mediate’ conflicts endemic to civil society, and attempts it by means of the state; but he also fails to see (with many others, of course, before and after him) the need for something more than a Prussian-style constitutional monarchy or American-style ‘democracy’ (not to mention ‘conflict resolution’) in order to overcome the persistent crises of capitalism. It is here that Marx goes beyond Hegel, in proposing a radical revolution in the economic basis of the social order, as part of a genuinely *democratic socialization* of both political society and civil society until the need for their separate existence ceases to exist.

The most relevant aspect of Marx’s critique of Hegel – and the ensuing critique of bourgeois liberalism – to our discussion pertains to his radical conception of *democracy*. According to Marx (1852/1963), democracy understood as men and women ‘making their own history just as they please’ could only be realized in what we might call the ‘everyday life’ of ordinary people.¹¹ To the extent that it is housed in a ‘special’ institution –

i.e. the ‘political state’ – that stands apart from people’s everyday life activities – i.e. their existence in civil society – democracy is doomed. This is especially so when that ‘civil’ society works not according to people’s conscious and free intentions, but by the ‘objective’ laws of Adam Smith’s ‘hidden hand’ – which is the very embodiment of what Marx (1844/1975) calls alienation. It follows from this interpretation of Marxism as a ‘critique of separation’ (Debord, 1967/1995) that for democracy – and indeed freedom in the Hegelian-Marxist sense – to become possible, the division of social life into the separate spheres of the ‘political’ (expressed in the state) and the ‘civil’ (conditioned by the market economy) must be overcome.¹² It is in this sense that the growing call for radical *economic-democracy* heard in anti-*neoliberal* politics worldwide, which is also a demand to *abolish* the distance between an increasingly autonomous globalizing economy and new forms of popular sovereignty struggling to *catch up* with it (Bourdieu, 1998), can be distinguished from liberal reformism and understood as *anarchist* and *socialist*; and the experiences of ‘popular budgeting’ in cities such as Porto Alegre provide promising new directions for progressive planning, understood as experiments in bridging the liberal-democratic separation between the political and the economic (Abers, 1998; Goldsmith, 2000; Sader, 2002).¹³ British radical philosopher Peter Osborne (1991: 221) understood Marx’s conception of democracy – his critique of the separation of political institutions from everyday life – in this regard with exemplary clarity when he identified socialist strategy as ‘an ongoing socialization of the political and politicization of the social’.

Henri Lefebvre (1947/1958/1991: 49), the French Marxist philosopher, also expressed succinctly what Marx meant by democracy in a complementary way: ‘socialism (the new society, the new life) can only be defined *concretely* on the level of everyday life, as a system of changes in what can be called lived-experience’. For a society to legitimately call itself democratic, that is to say, its ‘citizens’ must *not* experience a difference between their ‘political’ and ‘other’ (‘civil’ or ‘economic’, i.e. ‘everyday’) activities.¹⁴ That by this standard the liberal-democratic state as we know it is hardly *democratic* informs the central thesis of what feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser (1997: 96) calls ‘Karl Marx’s still unsurpassed critique of liberalism’ – his essay ‘On the Jewish Question’ (Marx, 1843/1975a). Written a few months after his critique of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, it addresses the state and civil society of liberal capitalism more generally, with concrete references to Germany (‘the *theological* state’), France (‘the *constitutional* state’) and especially North America, which Marx takes to be ‘the land of complete *political* emancipation’ (Marx, 1843/1975a: 216, emphasis added). Here he clearly registers the superiority of the North American state over the contemporaneous German and French forms, especially its secular-liberal constitution, underlining that ‘[p]olitical emancipation is certainly a big step forward’ (Marx, 1843/1975a: 221, emphasis in original). But Marx also notes a telling contradiction, to begin with, in its celebrated separation

between ‘church and state’. Although ‘in North America . . . the constitution does not impose religious beliefs or practice as a condition of political privileges’, Marx writes, ‘people in the United States do not believe that a man without a religion can be an honest man’.¹⁵ Given that liberalism and capitalism in some essential aspects have not changed all that radically in the New World since Marx’s time, it should come as no surprise that one *still* swears by the Bible before testifying in court in America; and that when the President of the United States of America and Commander-in-Chief of its armed forces swears before the Chief Justice prior to assuming the highest office of the state, he (she would make no difference here) too must still conclude the ceremony of his inauguration by saying, ‘so, help me *God!*’.

‘What’, asks Marx, ‘is the relationship between *complete* political emancipation and religion?’ His reply: ‘[i]f in the land of complete political emancipation we find not only that religion *exists* but that it exists in a *fresh* and *vigorous* form, that proves that the existence of religion does not contradict the perfection of the [*secular-liberal*] state’ (Marx, 1843/1975a: 217, emphases in original). It is not only religion that flourishes in the wake of ‘*complete* political emancipation’, but also commerce. ‘[I]n North America . . . the very *proclamation of the Gospel*, Christian teaching, has become a commercial object’, observes Marx, such that ‘*the bankrupt businessman is just as likely to go into evangelizing as the successful evangelist into business*’ (Marx, 1843/1975a: 238, emphasis added). In one dashing sentence, Marx here gives the lie to the De Tocquevillean separation between ‘civil society’ and ‘economy’ (between church and commerce), on the authority of De Tocqueville’s co-author and lifelong friend Gustave de Beaumont no less.¹⁶ If that separation between civil society (understood narrowly as the realm of benign ‘voluntary associations’) and the capitalist economy was questionable then, it is a thousandfold more untenable today, in the condition of postmodernity that spells – in Perry Anderson’s (1998: 55) memorable words – ‘the saturation of every pore of the world in the serum of capital’. We shall return to De Tocqueville later, but for now follow Marx’s remarkable anticipation of Gramsci’s conception of political hegemony and Lenin’s maxim that ‘the democratic republic is the ideal shell of capitalism’ as he extends his critique to the pretensions not only of secularism but also *democracy* in liberal capitalism:

Indeed, the perfected Christian state is not the so-called *Christian* state which recognizes Christianity as its foundation, as the state religion, and which therefore excludes other religions. The perfected Christian state is rather the *atheist* state, the [so-called] *democratic* state, the state which relegates religion to the level of the other elements of civil society. The state which is still theological, which still officially professes the Christian faith, which still does not dare to declare itself a *state*, has not yet succeeded in expressing in *secular*, *human* form, in its *reality* as state, the *human* basis of which Christianity is the exaggerated expression . . . The [so-called] democratic state . . . does not need

religion for its political completion. On the contrary, it can discard religion, because in it the human foundation of religion is realized in a secular way. (Marx, 1843/1975a: 222–3, emphases in original)

To fully appreciate the force of Marx's claim that the *ideal* (i.e. hegemonic in the Gramscian sense) Christian (liberal-capitalist) state is the *atheist* (liberal-capitalist) state, 'the *human* basis [condition] of which Christianity is the exaggerated expression' could use an explication. The best available comes in his own inimitable words:

Religious suffering is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.

The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to *call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions*. The criticism of religion is therefore in *embryo* the *criticism of that vale of tears* of which religion is the *halo* . . .

Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*. (Marx, 1843/1844/1975: 244)

The implications of these formulations and the critique of Hegel introduced earlier for civil society and the state should now be clear. Prior to 'complete political emancipation', exploitative social differences and their corresponding ideologies found clear expression in authoritarian state forms, which were directly instrumental in reproducing them in everyday life. There the 'human' basis of exploitation in civil society lay in the state: you were wealthy because you were powerful. The achievement of 'complete political emancipation' has not been the elimination of those social differences, as would be required by and for democracy according to Marx, but merely their formal expulsion from the state into the everyday life of civil society. Here the 'human' basis of exploitation in civil society lies in civil society: now you are powerful because you are wealthy. In its liberal-democratic mold, in other words, the capitalist state as a – separate – *political* entity cannot – by itself – either abolish or transcend the contradictions of civil society. It can at best only banish these from its *own* formally constituted *political* realm, only for them to flourish in 'fresh' and 'vigorous' form in civil society. Just as the *secular* state does not do away with the dominance of *religion* in the everyday life of civil society, and indeed provides the best *political* cover for its heavenly operations on earth, so to speak, so the capitalist *liberal-democratic* state as a *political* entity cannot resolve the *economic* contradictions of civil society, which therefore remains – as Smith, Hegel, Marx and at times even the

De Tocqueville of the second volume of *Democracy in America* all agreed – ‘the sphere of egoism and of the *bellum omnium contra omnes*’ (Marx, 1843/1975a: 221): the war of all against all.

We can be equal in community with everyone else as citizens in our *political* life, while being immersed in patently unequal conflict (class, gender, race, etc.) with the same folks in our *everyday* life. The equality and community of ‘complete political emancipation’, in other words, know for the most part how to get along well with the inequality and egoism of the *bellum omnium contra omnes*. This accommodation, as Marx makes it clear, necessarily results in the projection of the formal separation between the state (politics) and civil society (economics) onto the *double-life* – acted out typically in the latter, with cameo appearances in the former – of anyone so fortunate as to possess the right of liberal citizenship.

The difference between the religious man and the citizen is the difference between the tradesman and the citizen, between the day-labourer and the citizen, between the landowner and the citizen, between the *living individual* and the *citizen*. The contradiction which exists between religious man and political man is the same as exists between the *bourgeois* and the *citoyen*, between the member of civil society and his *political lion’s skin*. (Marx, 1843/1975a: 221, emphases in original)

Hence the need – according to Marx – to go beyond ‘*political* emancipation’ all the way to universal ‘*human* emancipation’. For him ‘only the critique of *political emancipation* itself would constitute a definitive critique . . .’ (Marx, 1843/1975a: 215, emphasis in original). Marx writes succinctly about the accomplishments of ‘complete *political* emancipation’: ‘[M]an was not freed from religion [ideology] – he received the freedom of religion. He was not freed from [private] property – he received the freedom of property. He was not freed from the egoism of trade – he received the freedom to engage in trade’ (Marx, 1843/1975a: 233, emphasis in original). What we need therefore is not the emancipation of politics from civil society (i.e. ‘complete *political* emancipation’) but the emancipation of civil society from politics (i.e. from the ‘emancipated’ political state) and from *itself* – to emancipate ‘the *living individual*’.

Only when real, individual man resumes the abstract citizen into himself and as an individual man has become a *species-being* [social being] in his empirical life, his individual work and his individual relationships, only when man has recognized and organized his *forces propres* [own forces] as *social forces* so that social force is no longer separated from him in the form of *political* force, only then will human emancipation be completed. (Marx, 1843/1975a: 234, emphases in original)

Actually existing civil society and planning theory

But many Marxists, not to speak of liberals, have thought differently, arguing that there is a parliamentary road to socialism – a long march through bourgeois political institutions (parliament and rule of law) in order to transcend bourgeois civil institutions (private property and capitalist social relations). This has been the position of radical social democrats, most influentially articulated by Eduard Bernstein (1978) in his *Evolutionary Socialism*, the ‘Third Way’ manifesto of the German Social Democratic Party in the early decades of the previous century. Its premise, widely shared at the time, was appealing: with universal franchise, there is little to prevent the working class (being the clear majority) from peacefully voting itself into power in the bourgeois state and then democratically ‘revolutionizing’ it as well as society. Addressing this expectation in a landmark article on ‘The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci’, Perry Anderson (1976/1977: 27) soberly notes how ‘experience shows that . . . elections never produce a government dedicated to the expropriation of capital and the realization of socialism’. Now, more than 75 years after the workers began to vote, Anderson’s judgement rings truer than ever. ‘What’, he asks, ‘is the reason for this paradox?’ In response, Anderson echoes the early Marx:

The bourgeois State . . . ‘represents’ the totality of the population, *abstracted* from its division into social classes [and other lines of domination], as individual and equal citizens . . . [I]t represents to men and women their unequal positions in civil society as if they were equal in the State . . . The economic divisions [here we can add others too, as Marx did with religion] within the ‘citizenry’ are masked by the juridical parity between exploiters and the exploited, and with them the complete *separation* and *non-participation* of the masses in the work of the parliament. This separation is then . . . represented to the masses as the ultimate incarnation of liberty: ‘democracy’ as the terminal point of history. The existence of the parliamentary State thus constitutes the formal framework of all other ideological mechanisms of the ruling class . . . [It] is all the more powerful because the juridical rights of citizenship are not a mere mirage: on the contrary, the civic freedoms and suffrages of bourgeois democracy are a tangible reality, whose completion was historically in part the work of the labour movement itself, and whose loss would be a momentous defeat for the working class. (Anderson, 1976/1977: 28)

Following our theoretical review of the state and civil society set in the historical perspective of liberal-democratic capitalism, we preface our turn to actually existing civil society – its theory and practice today – with Anderson’s celebrated passage for at least two reasons. First of all, it suggests, in the spirit of Hegel and Marx, that civil society in its current state is something to be overcome, rather than celebrated. Second, by following Marx’s groundbreaking distinction between ‘political emancipation’ and

'human emancipation', it throws into sharp relief the complexities and challenges that confront a radical left political strategy towards the capitalist state, eschewing simplistic 'yes' or 'no' standpoints. By noting both the problems and the accomplishments of the bourgeois state, Anderson invites us to raise a question of great significance to socialist politics as well as planning theory and practice: while its considerable social-democratic achievements, however incomplete from the standpoint of 'human emancipation', are being ruthlessly rolled back by no less an authority than the Washington Consensus, only to be unceremoniously unfolded at the same time as a red carpet for global capital, does not the demonization of the state today, by the neoliberal right as much as the postmodern believers of civil society, as a blunt Orwellian instrument belonging to a bunch of control freaks teleologically hacking their way towards Enlightenment despotism in gross violation of the *laissez-faire* spirit, does not this commonplace caricature of the state add insult to the injury of those who used to obtain from it a modicum of relief from the excesses of market-ruled civil society?

The renowned African-American historian Robin D.G. Kelley (1997: 10), for one, agrees more with Hegel and Marx than with the NGO-World Bank-postmodern planning coalition when he exposes the 'futility of self-help strategies' lodged in civil society and pitted (in De Tocquevillean formation) against both 'the state' and 'global capital and multinational corporations'. 'In defense of the welfare state' – rather than of the 'self-help' ideology that complements, at least as much as it attempts to compensate for, the neoliberal attack on the state – Kelley argues 'that government supports should not be seen simply as entitlements but as a matter of rights'. 'Damaging', according to his radical perspective, 'is the current wave of antistatistism emerging in the African American communities':

I hear too many black people describe the state as if it is 'the white man'. Of course, antistatistism is hardly unique to black people; on the contrary, antistatistism goes hand in hand with *laissez-faire* and right-wing institutions such as the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the like, which have helped disseminate and popularize an ideology of self-help that is hostile to the state. The difference, however, is that few African Americans nowadays express a sense of entitlement – that they have a right to state support as taxpaying citizens. Rather, they see 'self-help' in terms of breaking dependency, getting out from under 'the white man'. (Kelley, 1997: 80–1)

Poignantly questioned here by Kelley is a familiar trope – the refrain played by the advocates of postmodern civil society in the background of *Cities for Citizens* – that aligns the (modernist) state with evil and (postmodern) civil society with good. With this question, he also highlights the link between the 'self-help' virtues of civil society and the ideology of neoliberalism (Kelley, 1997: 91–102); and proposes an alternative to the pervasive antistatistism of the discourse on civil society that makes much better sense in our climate of neoliberal globalization: 'instead of avoiding the state, we

need to recognize it as an extremely important site of struggle' (Kelley, 1997: 95). In *yo' MAMA's disFUNKtional!*, Kelley is clear about where he stands on civil society considered as not only *the* alternative to the state, but as an end 'in itself' à la Friedmann (1998: 28): 'Call me old-fashioned, but opposing strong government support in favor of some romantic notion of self-reliance is tantamount to relinquishing our citizenship' (Kelley, 1997: 81).

As students of 'development' and 'international planning' know well, the ideology of self-help has been active for well over two decades on the global stage, practiced first and most aggressively in the policies promoted by the World Bank in the area of low-income housing in developing countries. It has also played – along with 'social capital' – the leading ideological role in 'micro-credit' programs custom-made to empower poor women in the Third World (Fine, 2001, 2003; Harriss, 2001). That the good life promised (but much less delivered) to a few people by such policies and programs came at the expense of a calculated dependence of entire continents on the highly mobile network of global capital reaping its harvests mostly in the North remains no secret to anyone who has paid any critical attention to them. Prior to the advent of what Fraser (1997) calls the 'post-socialist condition', however, their architects spoke in guarded tones about the 'late capitalist' underbelly of such 'development', drawing no explicit link between what they were doing and the agenda of global capital. Since the Second Coming of civil society in the 'postsocialist condition', by contrast, the captains of neoliberal globalization have dramatically closed the gap between their word and deed: civil society, free markets and democracy are now virtually interchangeable terms, all sanctimoniously attached to human rights as well (with a touch of feminism too, especially when the Empire embarks on the Middle East). Peter Gowan (1999: 249) explains how this shift came about in *The Global Gamble: Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance*:

In the 1970s, the attack was rather crude: the cry went up that the state was too weak because of democratic overload. All the pressures from civil society (then called special interests) were making western countries 'ungovernable'. In the 1980s the target and the aim remained the same, but the discursive tactics changed 180 [degrees]. Neo-liberalism was born and 'the individual' was being crushed by a rapacious state. The crusade was launched against 'the state' to free the individual, the economy and Uncle Tom Cobbley . . .

The neo-liberals also took up the language of civil society to turn the liberal concept on its head . . . The institutions of this neo-liberal civil society are above all there to ensure that the population stops prioritizing public welfare, stops looking for collective solutions to society's problems. In the name of freeing society (or the 'individual') from the (welfare) state, the social engineers of neo-liberalism have been attempting to free the state executive from social responsibility and from accountability to civil society.

What, then, explains the fascination of ‘radical’ and ‘insurgent’ planning theorists with a notion that the Washington Consensus effectively considers as its private property and explicitly equates with free markets in concert with multinational corporations? Answers to this question can be found in *Cities for Citizens*, especially in John Friedmann’s (1998) revealing contribution to it. This he begins by saying that ‘[c]ivil society designates those social organizations, associations and institutions that exist beyond the sphere of direct supervision and control of the state’, and correctly identifies this definition as the ‘core meaning’ of the term (Friedmann, 1998: 21). In the very next sentence, however, this Hegelian-Marxist sense of civil society gets conflated with another, taken from De Tocqueville’s (1835/1945, 1840/1945) ‘observations of American’s propensity to form themselves into a plethora of voluntary associations’. In the latter case, ‘civil society’ is seen with Yankee eyes ‘as essentially composed of institutions – neighbourhood, family, church and voluntary associations – that “mediate” between the individual and the state’. In the deceptively smooth slide from the one to the other lies a decisive shift in political perspective, however: for in contrast to the first, the second definition of civil society – the darling of American liberals enamored with De Tocqueville – symptomatically *excludes* from its focus on ‘voluntary associations’, which know how to stay away from the state and do their good work early in the evenings and on weekends, a key institution in everyone’s everyday life: the capitalist economy.

Friedmann cites both *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and *Democracy in America* as texts that ‘first use’ civil society ‘in its modern sense’, but with absolutely no respect for the *fundamentally* different ways in which Hegel and De Tocqueville understood and theorized the term (Friedmann, 1998: 22). To wit: he discerns ‘two very different philosophical propositions’ concerning civil society. The ‘liberal’ one stems ‘from a critical [sic] reading of the Scottish Enlightenment – Francis Hutchinson [sic: Hutcheson], Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith’, and regards the individual as an autonomous subject. And he says we owe the second to a different view of the latter, which maintains that, ‘[a]s social beings, we are communicative beings’. This perspective he attributes to ‘the young Karl Marx’ and ‘Antonio Gramsci’ and adopts as his own, claiming that his ‘own position follows in this [socialist] tradition’.¹⁷ What he says from the next sentence onwards, however, departs abruptly from that tradition. Uniquely for a follower of Marx *or* Gramsci, but not surprisingly for a student of De Tocqueville, Friedmann then suggests that to him ‘civil society appears as *one of four* partially autonomous and overlapping spheres of action and . . . social practices’ (Friedmann, 1998: 22, emphasis added). The first justification for his quadrupedal view of society comes from ‘[c]ivil society’s “opposition” to the state’ that is universally recognized. Friedmann proposes next that ‘civil society must also be seen as standing in “opposition” to the corporate economy, the sphere of capital writ large which, over the course of the nineteenth century, separated itself from civil society to become a distinctive sphere of action’

– invoking De Tocqueville implicitly, while citing Karl Polanyi (1944/1957) as his authoritative source. Here Friedmann’s reading fails him, however, as he confuses formal separation with relative autonomy: for Polanyi’s thesis unequivocally holds not only that the economy *separated* from society during what he calls ‘the great transformation’ – referring to the first grand experiment of laissez-faire social engineering – but also that the ‘*disembodied*’ economy then returned to ‘*embed*’ society in it. In fact, few economic historians have so devastatingly shattered the De Tocquevillean view of ‘autonomous’ civil society as did Polanyi, in clarifying the ills of a *society embedded in the ‘self-regulating’ market*. With just these two ‘oppositions’ set in place, anyhow, we have more or less the world according to De Tocqueville – the state there, civil society here, and the economy somewhere else (God only knows where *capitalism* is!).

The stark deficiencies of this model from any perspective to the left of mainstream American liberalism have been amply documented (Ehrenberg, 1999; Sader, 2002; Wood, 1995). Friedmann is perhaps aware of these as he attempts to add a minor but symptomatic modification to the picture painted by De Tocqueville – by introducing a ‘fourth sphere of action’. This last, he writes, ‘is the political community or the terrain of political conflict and struggle’. Included in it are such things as ‘political parties, clubs, social movements and the like, which represent the public face of civil society’.¹⁸ By implication De Tocquevillean civil society – itself distinguished from the state and abstracted from the economy – is now divided into two: one *public* (i.e. ‘political’) and the other *private* (the realm, mostly, of ‘reciprocity and trust’, akin to Habermas’s ‘lifeworlds’). The four ‘spheres’, then, are: the state; ‘political community’ and ‘political conflict’ (‘public’ civil society); civil society (‘private’ and ‘voluntary associations’ including the family, church, etc.); and the economy. What are we to make of all this? The first thing to note concerns the motive behind Friedmann’s last move: the splitting of De Tocquevillean civil society into a realm of altruism (‘moral economy’) on the one hand and ‘political community’ (galvanized by ‘social movements’, etc.) on the other. Unwittingly acknowledged here are several difficulties bequeathed by De Tocqueville to anyone who professes today to be a student of Marx or Gramsci: the demonstrated inadequacy of mere ‘voluntary associations’ to mount a serious challenge to the ravages of *neoliberalism*; to overcome deepening social *divisions* within the everyday life of civil society; and to forge a sense of, and a material basis for, *political* community. Friedmann’s new schematic sketch of civil society, rather than resolving these, has the unintended merit of highlighting their intractability within an essentially liberal problematic.¹⁹

In the delineation of Friedmann’s last ‘sphere’, for example, his slippage between ‘political *community*’ and ‘political *struggle*’ is clearly symptomatic of these problems, as he attempts to fit in *one* social space the locus of *both* ‘struggle’ and ‘community’. For here Friedmann simply brushes over the need to show *how* – as did Hegel, however problematically – the ‘war of all

against all' could be *resolved* to achieve 'community'. The error of his false reconciliation between 'struggle' and 'community' becomes clear a few pages later, where he makes the extraordinary assertion that '*civil society* . . . is a *society of citizens*' (Friedmann, 1998: 28, emphasis added) – conflating in one stroke his laboriously redefined category with what is understood as the *state* by his alleged intellectual gurus, thus undermining the very 'opposition' between civil society and the state asserted at the outset; or, as Marx puts it, the 'difference between the *bourgeois* and the *citoyen*, between the member of civil society and his *political lion's skin*'. Here the gap between Marx and Friedmann's liberal quest for 'justice in the postmodern society' is plain: for whereas the 'young Marx' so brilliantly exposed, as we pointed out, *how* the 'difference . . . between the *living individual* and the *citizen*' is *concealed* by bourgeois ideology (Anderson, 1976/1977: 28), many years later Friedmann comes to claim precisely *that* ideological obfuscation, as part of his own conceptual innovation on civil society. 'False consciousness' is mocked in postmodern tone by Friedmann (Friedmann, 1998: 28) as a theoretical relic of misguided Marxism; yet it is patently professed here.

Unusual too – not only from a feminist perspective – is the *moral* significance accorded in Friedmann's quadrupedal scheme to the *family*, for being *the* exemplary instance of 'reciprocity and trust' (Friedmann, 1998: 23ff.), that is, the institutional fountainhead of the 'moral-economic' value he wishes to extend to the whole of society, *via* 'voluntary associations' and other benevolently disposed agents waiting in the wings of civil society. The *intent* of this gesture, which he shares with Hegel, is admirable. Unlike Hegel, moreover, Friedmann quite properly acknowledges how the altruism of this private realm also includes exploitative patriarchal power dynamics, and explains that by family values he means only the former (Friedmann, 1998: 24). Also quite unlike Hegel, however, Friedmann seems to think that the altruistic portion of *family* values – rather than an 'ethical life' (à la *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*) – can form the basis of a 'communitarian' resistance to 'corporate capital' (Friedmann, 1998: 23–4). Hegel (1821/1991: §158–81), to his credit, knew well that this agenda would be a non-starter within the totality of liberal-capitalist social institutions, so deeply entrenched and fundamentally premised on the *actually existing* family as its basic organizational unit (as every feminist knows and Friedmann himself admits). Such was the enabling premise of Hegel's rationale for the state. Acknowledged clearly in it is this: while individuals may well be altruistic within their own families, they have no option but to behave very differently while engaging the 'war of all [altruistic families] against all [altruistic families]' on the terrain of civil society. The lesson is straightforward: just as we cannot love other people's partners and kids the same way we love ours in the hustle and bustle of capitalism, so *this* kind of altruism quite simply cannot be teleported across different 'levels' of society, from the private realm of the family into the public realm of civil society – short of a *feminist-socialist* revolution.²⁰ A *different* kind of

altruism is possible in the meantime, however: a more ‘universally’ *socialized* altruism that is firmly built into a *rational system of social institutions* operative at the *higher* levels and *wider* scales of social integration available in civil society and the ‘political state’, the totality of which Hegel called ‘ethical life’ and regarded as the guarantor of ‘*universal altruism*’. It was a latter-day attempt to approximate this ideal that we used to recognize in the social-democratic welfare state – before, that is, the onslaught of neoliberalism. This much should be readily evident from even a cursory perusal of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.

The questions concerning Friedmann’s advocacy of civil society become most pronounced when he is forced to admit that ‘[w]e cannot say civil society is inherently “good”’ (Friedmann, 1998: 29). After all this social space, however defined, serves also as the stomping ground of Michigan militias (Abu-Lughod, 1998), ‘homeowners’ soviets’ (Davis, 1990), Jean-Marie Le Pen’s French National Front (Storper, 1998) and the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS)²¹ of *Hindutva* fame (Basu et al., 1993); it is not the privilege of *only* good ‘families, neighbourhoods, churches’ and our lovely neighbors admiring ‘Little Leaguers slid[ing] into first base’ (Friedmann, 1998: 28). What does Friedmann say to that? ‘Social and political exclusions are intolerable’, he writes: ‘[p]eople must be held to the valued practices and ethical standards of the nested communities to which we all belong’. Moreover, ‘wherever they are found, intolerance and evil must be resisted’ (Friedmann, 1998: 29). Such vacant platitudes are uncharacteristic for a theorist of Friedmann’s caliber; even if they are not atypical for partisans of the ‘politics of civil society’ used to thinking in terms of the moralizing categories of ‘good’ (civil society, postmodernism, multiculturalism) and ‘evil’ (Enlightenment, modernity, state). Clearly, the invocation of ‘good’ versus ‘evil’ – rarely a credible theoretical move – here betrays a deep problem. Given the prevailing postmodern norms of epistemological relativism invoked by Leonie Sandercock (1998b) and questioned by Michael Storper (1998) in *Cities for Citizens*, there exists no reason for anyone to disagree with these bland assertions. Both Bush and Bin Laden can with equal justification claim them as their own. Indeed, one can well imagine a Michigan militia ‘voluntary association’ arguing in the tradition of ‘identity politics’ – no less convincingly than any multicultural group in Sandercock’s postmodern coalition of ‘insurgents’ or ‘radicals’ – that it is *they* who are the excluded, stigmatized and marginalized people in society. In fact, such a claim would follow directly from ‘the valued practices and ethical standards of the nested communities to which’ the Michigan militias ‘belong’. If ‘exclusion’ and ‘intolerance’ constitute the fundamental ‘evil’ in the age of postmodern multiculturalism, then what reason can Friedmann or Sandercock provide to *exclude* the Michigan militia and kindred spirits from their chosen coalitions in civil society to make it ‘good’? None is offered by them in *Cities for Citizens*.²²

None of these difficulties, however, deter Friedmann from proclaiming

that ‘*civil society is ultimately for itself*’, as an end in itself (Friedmann, 1998: 28, emphasis in original). And for good measure, he adds that ‘Marxist terminology cannot capture’ the meaning of ‘being for itself’ that informs his ideal of civil society. An aimless jab at Marxism now and then while making a difficult argument is quite acceptable postmodern decorum; but we have a right to expect better from Friedmann of all people. Not least because Marx (1894/1981: 959) actually *did* identify – in a crucial passage of *Capital*, Vol. 3 – [t]he true realm of freedom’ as precisely ‘the development of human powers as an end in itself’.²³ This is the sense in which Marx understands, following Hegel’s concept of freedom (Wood, 1991: xi–xiii, see note 6), ‘being in and for itself’ – an expression used *repeatedly* by both. So we urge that history be kind to Friedmann, more than it – or he – has been *lately* to Marx, and judge his impressive oeuvre in the exemplary achievement of *Planning in the Public Domain*, not by his erratic contribution to *Cities for Citizens*. For the John Friedmann everyone should gratefully remember at the end of the day is the prescient one who called for the ‘guidance of history by reason’, named the task of planning as the ‘recovery of *political* community’, and also wrote, within a few months of Fukuyama’s (1989) arrogant announcement of ‘end of history’ and in the best spirits of Hegel and Marx, this:

Reintegrating . . . the population with an existing political community in which they exercise their rights . . . cannot be done in any meaningful sense *unless the systems-in-dominance* – authoritarianism [state], . . . capitalism [civil society], and patriarchy [family] – *are themselves changed in fundamental ways*.²⁴

Radical politics beyond civil society

What *is* responsible for such a confusing and regressive theoretical turn on the part of a scholar so experienced and knowledgeable as John Friedmann, whose salutary political intentions and enviable academic accomplishments no reader of the magisterial *Planning in the Public Domain* – still the best guide to planning theory – could doubt? It is the heightened influence of *De Tocqueville* – the greatest French gift to American liberal ideology – in the ‘postsocialist condition’. For he remains the overwhelming authority – acknowledged or (more often) not – behind the profoundly ideological line drawn in the New World between the economy and civil society. What led De Tocqueville to supply such ideological ammunition to American liberals? Throughout his New World excursion, De ‘Tocqueville was captivated by a single idea’, writes historian Thomas Bender (1995: 677): ‘the progressive and inevitable leveling of social conditions in Western civilization’. (A good idea, Gandhi would have said!) As De Tocqueville (1835/1945: 6) himself put it: ‘The gradual development of the principle of equality is . . . a providential fact’. But this utopia was taken for granted, as an automatic complement of liberty. According to Bender, ‘Tocqueville,

unlike Karl Marx, his near contemporary, was little concerned with understanding the historical process that brought about equality' – and – we should add – inequality. This *assumption* of progressive 'leveling' was coupled with an understandable aversion. As Bender notes, 'democracy in its revolutionary guise terrified him [because] in France it had cost some members of his family their lives'. As a progressive French aristocrat with the Terror of 1793 looming large in his mind, then, De Tocqueville was predisposed to discover in the New World how liberty and democracy could flourish without much of a social struggle, entirely peacefully. As to where De Tocqueville stands in relation to liberalism, democracy and socialism, the distinguished political philosopher and Life Senator of the Italian Republic Norberto Bobbio offers an impeccable judgement:

Tocqueville . . . never hesitates for a moment in favouring individual liberty over social equality . . . For the same reasons that he was a liberal before he was a democrat, Tocqueville was never drawn to socialism; on the contrary, he frequently expressed his profound aversion to it . . . When it came to the underlying confrontation between democracy and the lofty ideal of liberty, Tocqueville was not a democrat, but he became a defender of democracy where it was a case of countering socialism. (Bobbio, 1988/1990: 51–6)

If it is not difficult therefore to understand why De Tocqueville is so popular in the 'postsocialist condition', then a few points can be made in conclusion about the hegemony of his particular conception of civil society – often billed as 'postmodern', but in reality as American as apple pie. First of all, although De Tocqueville was French, the discourse of civil society as it appears especially in the first volume of *Democracy in America* and in its subsequent reception by mainstream liberal American scholars represents a sharp deviation from that of the European traditions of philosophical social thought, within which the most pioneering and towering influences are surely Hegel and Marx. As emphasized in our account, in the classical modern conception of civil society, the economy is endemic to it, not external. Consequently, neither Hegel nor Marx wasted much time trying to enlist the support of civil society against the undeniable contradictions of the economy, because they knew the two were very much the same, and that the people who *dominated* both were also ultimately the same lot. For Hegel, the state blessed with an 'ethical life' was thus the much better bet. For Marx, social struggle was everywhere, fought between the *dominated* and the *dominant*, and this *within* the state, *within* civil society and by extension *within* anything else in society. If such is the case, pitting civil society against the state or the economy accomplishes little for the political *left*, because the battle lines that matter are drawn right *through* each and every sector of society, all the way from the state right down to the scale of the household, not *between* them.

This is why neither Hegel nor Marx ever claimed, as does Friedmann, that '[c]ivil society is ultimately for itself', elevating an admittedly conflicted

terrain of the social above all else as some newfound Holy Ground, from the radiant heights of which lofty things will henceforth roll down to the lowly plains of the state and the economy by the good grace of 'families, churches, neighbourhoods' and 'Little Leaguers slid[ing] into first base'. What this wishful perspective on civil society fails to register is simply the level-headed conclusion of John Ehrenberg's (1999) excellent study, *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea*: 'No conceivable combination of PTAs, soup kitchens, choral societies or Girl Scout troops can resist' either the corporate economy or the megalomaniac state 'without considering how capitalism's structural inequalities constitute everyday life'. Anyone who doubts this plain truth in the United States of America has only to consult the website of the Project for the New American Century (<http://www.newamericancentury.org>), an NGO prodigiously active in civil society, whose high-ranking 'volunteers' in the mid-1990s included Francis Fukuyama (1996) – not incidentally, the author of a fine work on civil society and social capital called *Trust* – William Kristol, Richard Perle, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz. In this context, the responsibility lies with American *parochialism* as much as the universalist pretension of liberal ideology for latching on to De Tocqueville while regarding Hegel and Marx as marginal figures: writers in a strange language peddling an 'alternative' view of civil society, who may (if at all) be acknowledged in a tiny footnote before moving onto business as usual. Hardly coincidental, then, is the indubitable leitmotif of De Tocqueville's reception in the USA and beyond: *American exceptionalism*.

Intellectually, the undemanding American notion of civil society is of little interest. Politically, it is useless for a left that can be called 'radical' or 'insurgent'.²⁵ Reporting from Porto Alegre on how the global landscape of the left has changed recently, Brazilian socialist writer Emir Sader (2002: 92–3) expertly outlines the key implications of the 'postsocialist' ideology of civil society. With special attention to the proceedings of the World Social Forum, he notes, first, 'the use of NGOs as agents for neoliberalism within civil society – particularly through the World Bank's tactic of using these organizations to implement its social-compensation policies'; and, second, the 'rejection of parties and governments' contained in the 'embrace of the civil society/state opposition'. What attracts Sader's critical attention most, however, is the uncritical acceptance of Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis by the discourse of civil society exemplified by Friedmann and many others:²⁶

The very act of defining themselves as 'non-governmental' explicitly rejects any ambition on the NGOs' part for an alternative hegemonic project, which would, by its nature, have to include states and governments as the means through which political and economic power is articulated in modern societies. They therefore either insert themselves, explicitly or implicitly, within the liberal critique of the state's actions, or else limit their activity to the sphere of civil

society – which, defined in opposition to the state [à la De Tocqueville], also ends at the boundaries of liberal politics. In fact, the very concept of ‘civil society’ masks the class nature of its components – multinational corporations, banks and mafia, set next to social movements, trade unions, civic bodies – while collectively demonizing the state. The leading role of NGOs in the resistance to neoliberalism is a sign of the movement’s defensive character, still unable to formulate an alternative hegemonic strategy. A move that brought together the struggle against US imperial dominance with the anti-capitalist elements of the movements would mark the beginning of an offensive, politicized phase in its development. (Sader, 2002: 93)

Sader thus offers a valuable point of departure for the ‘what is to be done?’ question, which inevitably follows a critique of any hegemonic category. We can end, therefore, by highlighting the relevance of his counter-hegemonic proposal to planners. It would begin by acknowledging that the state – which is presupposed by civil society – will stay with us for some time. The radical-democratic reconstitution of it therefore becomes a political task of utmost import, and a crucial question for planning theory. In addressing this, enlightenment seems less likely to come from those variations of the fashionable view that equate a highly stylized Enlightenment with that ageless figure of the Cold War, Totalitarianism; and then collapses the state along with a great deal of planning onto these unalloyed evils (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Sandercock 1998a, 1998b). A more redemptive and reasonable attitude towards Reason can be more helpful, as exemplified in the remarkable oeuvre of John Forester (1989, 1993, 1999). We have no space to dwell on it here, but will indicate a direction for further inquiry – which should be taken as a *necessary* complement to deepening economic democracy within civil society. What we have in mind comes from the clarion call issued by especially Pierre Bourdieu (1998) and also Jürgen Habermas (1999, 2001) for a ‘*social Europe*’ in the face of neoliberal globalization. Rejecting the reduction of worldwide anti-neoliberal struggles to the NGO mantra of ‘think global act local’, both argue that the socialist and democratic left should fight *back* for the state, while striving for something unprecedented as well: not only radical democracy, but also a new spatial imaginary. In the European context, this means a state that is not only grounded at the local and national levels, but also capable of operating with a democratically articulated popular will at the more global scale of the Continent, which in many ways will remain for Europeans the *decisive* scale at which the forces of neoliberal globalization must be engaged. True, the fledgling existence of a weak European parliament and a brand-new constitution in Brussels endow this line of thought with a degree of realism in that context that is difficult to discern under the vast sky of FTAA. Yet the latter leaves civil societies of the Americas – and of much of the world, thanks to the Washington Consensus sheltering under it – terribly exposed to the winds of neoliberalism, and makes Bourdieu’s idea stemming from

his own experiences with French anti-neoliberal movements well worth considering. That would, of course, mean globalizing radical democracy – with more state, not less. But from the standpoint of *human emancipation* we inherit from Marx, it would be vital also to keep in perspective the *strategic* use of the state proposed here, and not lose sight of the old man’s unsurpassed vision, in Perry Anderson’s (1992: 44) words, of a ‘new state [that] would be truly transitional towards the practicable limits of its own self-dissolution into the associated life of society as a whole’: a society no longer divided into state and civil society, wherein the difference Marx highlighted ‘between the *living individual* and the *citizen*’ would likewise cease to exist. The goal of planning thought and practice, if it is to play any role in contributing to such a state of affairs, would be neither to prolong nor celebrate civil society as we know it, but to abolish it.

Notes

1. The current literature on civil society – its history, theory and politics – is simply too vast to be adequately reviewed here. Among the recent book length studies, we recommend especially John Ehrenberg’s (1999) *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* and Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato’s (1992) *Civil Society and Political Theory*. We have also found Craig Calhoun’s (1993) lucid article ‘Civil Society and the Public Sphere’ helpful, as well as Charles Taylor’s (1991) ‘Modes of Civil Society’. Our debt to these (and other works of kindred spirit) will be apparent below. On the relationship of civil society to planning and cities, see Mike Douglass and John Friedmann’s (1998) edited volume, *Cities for Citizens*, the theoretical aspect of which we discuss at some length in conclusion.
2. For critical historical and theoretical perspectives on globalization, see Ellwood (2001), Jameson (1998b, 2000), Mandel (1995, 1972/1978) and Wallerstein (2000); on postmodernism, the pioneering classics are Harvey (1989) and Jameson (1991); but see also Perry Anderson’s (1998) *The Origins of Postmodernity* for the most insightful and critical recent review.
3. Of course, neither Ferguson nor his better known student Smith were unaware of the ills of the ‘free market’, and the social division of labor upon which it is premised. Marx noted approvingly their reservations on markets and specialization in *Capital*, Vol. 1 (especially Chapter 14) and *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Marx, 1847/1995).
4. For the relevant passages in *Philosophy of Right* see Hegel (1821/1991: §197, §201, §207, §251, §253, §256, etc.).
5. Hegel’s concept of freedom – central to his theory of the state (and, later, to Marx’s immanent critique of it) – is lucidly explained by Wood (1991: xi–xiii): ‘Most people, according to Hegel, think that freedom consists in *possibilities* of acting, but freedom is really a kind of *action*, namely one in which I am determined entirely through myself, and not at all by anything external . . . Free action is action in which we deal with nothing that is external to our own objective nature . . . Hegel describes freedom as “being with oneself in an

other”, that is, actively relating to something other than oneself in such a way that this other becomes integrated into one’s projects, completing and fulfilling them so that it counts as belonging to one’s own action rather than standing over against it . . . Freedom is actual, therefore, only in a rational society whose institutions can be felt and known by individuals who are “with themselves” in those institutions . . . We might put the point by saying that for Hegel *I am free when I “identify” myself with the institutions of my community, feeling myself to be a part of them, and feeling them to be a part of myself* . . . Hegel thinks that in the modern world, people cannot be free in his sense unless social institutions provide considerable scope and protection for arbitrary freedom . . . For modern individuals, Hegelian freedom cannot exist unless there is room for freedom in the ordinary sense’ (emphasis added in final instance).

6. Hegel (1821/1991: §246, §248) was explicit about it: ‘This inner dialectic of civil society drives it . . . to go beyond its own confines and look for consumers, and hence the means it requires for subsistence, in other nations which lack those means of which it has a surplus or which generally lag behind in creativity, etc.’. Thus, ‘civil society is driven to establish colonies’. Indeed, in this truly remarkable anticipation of Marx and ‘globalization’, Hegel was not only critically superior to classical political economists but also prophetically ahead of some ‘postcolonial’ critics when he added to the latter passage (Hegel, 1821/1991: §248) the following words: ‘The liberation of colonies itself proves to be of the greatest advantage to the mother state, just as the emancipation of slaves is of the greatest advantage to the master’.
7. For an explication of ‘absolute freedom’, see note 6 above.
8. ‘The abstraction of the *state as such* was not born until the modern world because the abstraction of private life was not created until modern times’ (Marx, 1843/1975b: 90).
9. The most spectacular postmodern version of this error can be found in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s (2000: 324–32) celebrated book *Empire*, wherein the alleged ‘withering of civil society’ and the concomitant ‘smoothing of the striation of modern social space’ give way to not only ‘the networks of the society of control’ (à la Gilles Deleuze), but also a novel *conflation* of ‘modern state sovereignty’ with ‘capitalist society’. The latter in particular, in our opinion, is utterly wishful, if not dreadful. For if ‘in the terms of [Hardt and Negri’s] conceptual framework . . . civil society was the terrain of the becoming-immanent of modern state sovereignty (down to capitalist society) and at the same time inversely the becoming-transcendent of capitalist society (up to the state)’, then the ‘withering of civil society’ they see ‘everywhere’ amounts, in the more audacious passages of *Empire*, to an unprecedented union of transcendence (state) and immanence (capital) devoid of mediation (civil society). Paraphrasing the American literary critic and Italian philosopher, we may say that the condition of Empire amounts to an ‘immanent transcendence’ as much as a ‘transcendental immanence’. Stripped of philosophical jargon, this claim essentially means that now – after the end of civil society – state and society are effectively one. For a lucid presentation of the theoretical and historical conception of civil society informing *Empire*, see Hardt’s (1995) article ‘The Withering of Civil Society’. For critical reviews of

Empire, see the volume edited by Gopal Balakrishnan (2003), *Debating Empire*.

10. When Sandercock (1998b: 179) proposes that ‘the state has been the missing ingredient so far in . . . radical planning’ and that ‘it may be . . . misleading to think that radical planning can do without the state’ at the end of an historical survey of planning thought that has its happy end in postmodern multiculturalism, she is of course reiterating a point that has been common sense for people on the left for well over a hundred years – not least Marxists, who are quickly dismissed by her for not having ‘a new definition of what it is that planners can do’ (p. 173).
11. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx (1852/1963: 16) wrote: ‘Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living’.
12. This argument would still hold, even if society were to be divided three ways into the state, economy and civil society, according to a habit favored by some US scholars who follow the lead of De Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. More on De Tocqueville’s ‘postmodern’ legacy later.
13. The radicalism of ‘participatory budgeting’ gets obfuscated, however, when this kind of ‘case study’ is lumped together rather indiscriminately with other examples of ‘postmodern’ planning for ‘difference’ that barely call into question the anti-*democratic* divide between politics and economics (Sandercock, 1998a). For an appreciation of the socialist legacy of ‘participatory budgeting’ and its roots in the Brazilian Worker’s Party (PT), see Emir Sader’s (2002) article ‘Beyond Civil Society: The Left after Porto Alegre’.
14. For Marxist theorizations of the concept of ‘everyday life’, see Debord (1961/1981), Debord et al. (1962/1981) and Lefebvre (1947/1958/1991).
15. Marx is quoting here from Gustave de Beaumont, *Marie ou l’esclavage aux États-Unis*, Paris, 1835. De Beaumont was co-investigator with De Tocqueville in the study of the American prison system that yielded *Du système pénitentiaire aux États-Unis et de son application en France*, which was published in 1833, two years before the first volume of *Democracy in America* (see Thomas Bender, 1995).
16. De Beaumont, for his part, wrote even more graphically than did Marx on how the De Tocquevillean ‘voluntary association’ of the church was so thoroughly embedded in the capitalist economy: ‘The man you see at the head of a respectable congregation started out as a businessman; his business failed so he became a minister; the other started out as a priest, but as soon as he saved some money he left the pulpit for business. In many people’s eyes the religious ministry is a veritable industrial career’ (quoted in Marx, 1843/1975a: 238).
17. Gramsci’s conception of civil society differs significantly from both Marx’s and Hegel’s, as expertly explained by Norberto Bobbio (1979/1987: 139–61) in his classic essay ‘Gramsci and the Conception of Civil Society’ (see also Anderson, 1976/1977).

18. This 'political community' bears a superficial resemblance to what Habermas (1962/1989) influentially theorized as the *public sphere*, but Friedmann makes no reference here to this vital concept or its considerable influence in planning theory, primarily through the works of John Forester (1989, 1993, 1999). As Thomas McCarthy explains in his introduction to *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas identifies the public sphere 'between civil society and the state', as a political space 'in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed'; he also notes how the public sphere 'took shape in the specific historical circumstances of a developing market economy' (Habermas, 1962/1989: xi, emphasis added). As is well known, in this book Habermas charted not only the emergence and partial consolidation of the public sphere in early capitalism, but also its decline in the conditions of late capitalism.
19. For a diagram of this model, see Friedmann (1992: 27).
20. In '[t]he transition from the family to civil society', writes Hegel (1821/1991: §181), '[t]he family disintegrates, in a natural manner and essentially through the principle of personality, into a plurality of families whose relation to one another is in general that of self-sufficient concrete persons and consequently of an external kind'.
21. National Volunteer Corps.
22. This problem is highlighted in the critiques of civil society provided by Abu-Lughod (1998) and Storper (1998) in the final chapters of *Cities for Citizens*. We should also note that this volume includes several valuable chapters surveying the diversity of contemporary 'social movements' – along with the forces confronting them – which make it indispensable for critical planners (Abers, 1998; Douglass, 1998; Keil, 1998; Lehrer and Friedmann, 1998; Sabatini, 1998). For a spirited theoretical defense of multicultural politics that avoids the postmodern aporias of Friedmann and Sandercock, see Satya Mohanty's (1997) critique of relativism and articulation of a (post-positivist) realist epistemology in *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity and Multicultural Politics*.
23. Terry Eagleton (1996: 223) explains it as follows: 'Marx does indeed possess an "absolute" moral criterion: the unquestionable virtue of a rich, all-round expansion of capacities for each individual'. For him '[i]t is from this standpoint that any social formation is to be assessed – either in its current ability to allow for such self-realization, or in its potential contribution to such a condition in the future' (see also Lefebvre, 1947/1958/1991: 175).
24. Cited in Abu-Lughod (1998: 227–37), emphasis is Friedmann's.
25. No one can complain if the kind of 'civil society' politics advocated by Friedmann or Sandercock were labelled as *liberal*, rather than 'radical' or 'insurgent'.
26. See also David McNally's (2002) excellent book, *Another World Is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism* for a refreshing alternative to the civil society discourse. In this context, David Graeber's (2002) article 'The New Anarchists' provides a lucid analysis of the radical-democratic and anti-neoliberal dimension of the so-called 'anti-globalization' movement from an anarchist perspective; and Naomi Klein's (2002) *Fences and Windows*

contains an insightful survey of this anti-neoliberal movement, especially in her chapter on the Zapatistas and Subcommandante Marcos.

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