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**Civil societies in Africa?
Forms of social self-organization between the
poles of globalization and local
socio-political order**

Dieter Neubert

Bayreuth African Studies Working Papers No. 12



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Bayreuth African Studies Working Papers

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Institute of African Studies

Executive Director: Ute Fendler

Vice Director: Ulrich Berner

Address:

Universität Bayreuth
Institute of African Studies
95440 Bayreuth
GERMANY
Phone: +49 (0)921 555161
Fax: +49 (0)921 555102
IAS@uni-bayreuth.de



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**Civil society in Africa?
Forms of social self-organization between the poles of
globalization and local socio-political order¹**

Dieter Neubert

Abstract

In the public political debate the existence of an African civil society is usually taken for granted. The great number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is regarded as evidence. While the first civil society organizations emerged during colonial times, the growing number of NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) today is mainly a result of the high level of support given to these organizations in global development politics since the 1980s. Other types of organization, such as trade unions, also emerged with the support of their globally acting partners. Nevertheless these organizations form the nucleus of an African civil society, with varying degrees of relevance and influence in different African countries. Aside from the organizations that match European patterns, there is a realm of societal self-organization which cannot be captured adequately with the concept of civil society. This includes local forms of political organization such as chiefs, councils of elders, local defence units, militia groups, militant social movements, or violence entrepreneurs, which are part of newly negotiated political arrangements. They are not simply relics of former traditions but local responses to globalized modernity. The concept of civil society with its strict normative standards is too narrow to cover all these complex African socio-political structures.

1 This working paper is an English version of the article: "Zivilgesellschaft in Afrika? Formen gesellschaftlicher Selbstorganisation im Spannungsfeld von Globalisierung und lokaler sozio-politischer Ordnung." First published in: Axel Paul, Alejandro Pelfini, Boike Rehbein (eds.), *Globalisierung Süd*, Special Issue of the Journal "Leviathan" 2011, 185-204. Translated by Ruth Schubert.

Introduction

The concept of civil society was rediscovered over twenty years ago (Michalski 1991) and has since then become firmly established as part of the conceptual framework of political sociology and the political sciences. Together with the democratization movement, it was carried from South America to Africa via eastern Europe, and was adapted in the African context. As a result, the concept of "civil society" has become part and parcel of the political discourse in Africa, and promoting it is one of the aims of international development organizations.

This global discursive spread of the concept is accompanied by the assumption that a "global civil society" exists. Thus, according to Martin Albrow (1998), societies are no longer organized in national "containers", and social ties function across formal political borders. International regimes, he argues, limit the regulatory competence of national governments. Thus, global civil society is understood as a kind of social counter-force to state control, in which citizens organize themselves and their interests across national boundaries. Examples are the World Social Forum or the World Women's Forum, which are today firmly established in the international conference scene (Frantz / Zimmer 2001, Kaldor 2003, Kößler / Melber 1993, Walk / Boehme 2002).

Global civil society, or belief in its existence, is a part of globalization. If we consider "globalization and the South", in other words the role of the South in the globalization process, we must also focus on the manifestations of civil society in the South. In the general debate, civil society in Africa is taken for granted (Bratton 1989, Chazan et al. 1993, Hyden et al. 2003, Lewis 2002, Lo 2006), and the great number of civil society organizations are seen as evidence of its existence. Yet civil society organizations and civil society are two different things. The question is justified whether and to what extent civil society organizations in Africa really do play the role implied by the accepted concept of civil society. And it must be asked to what extent the concept of civil society can be applied in socio-political analyses of African societies.

This scepticism arises from the contradictions inherent in the situation. It is obvious, for instance, that under Africa's authoritarian regimes civil society organizations have a very limited capacity to act. Even where they are unrestricted and the government welcomes the existence of such organizations, African non-governmental organizations (NGOs) rely as a rule on international support and external influences. On the other hand, it can be shown that there are forms of social self-organization in Africa which are not covered by the concept of civil society.

A further reservation is necessary: it is quite impossible to speak of a civil society that is the same all over Africa. The fifty-three states of Africa are extremely different culturally, socially and economically, and they cannot simply be bracketed together. The term Africa therefore needs to be qualified and in this article it will be used to refer to Africa south of the Sahara. Even then, it is not possible to take into account the special features of each individual country. It is only possible to identify some general facts, trends, typical manifestations and problems relating to existing African civil society organizations, and to discuss how far they fit into the normal definition of civil

society, without making any claim to general applicability. Rather, the findings presented here raise questions which can only be answered by means of studies carried out in concrete situations in different countries.

First I would like to briefly consider the established concept of civil society (1.). This is followed by a review of "classic" civil society organizations in Africa (2.). However, this perspective fails to take account of empirically existing alternative forms of local self-organization (3.) It is therefore necessary to examine the concept of civil society more critically (4.). And it is important to consider the historical context in which civil society organizations grew up and spread, in other words to consider the concept of civil society in the context of globalized modernity (5.).

1 Definition of civil society

Despite controversial debates over the concept of civil society in recent years (Hyden et al. 2003), there is nevertheless an undisputed core meaning:

"Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development nongovernmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups." (Whyte 2004)

The liberal concept of civil society originates from Tocqueville (1959)², who emphasizes people's autonomy and their ability to organize themselves and form associations (Taylor 1991, pp. 77f.). Another interpretation traces the concept back to Gramsci (Kebir 1991). Civil society is understood here as a space for social conflicts. Connected with this is the willingness and intention of the actors to articulate their political interests, and thus to influence both the political agenda and political decisions. The realization of these combinable ideas in social practice requires a minimum of civic freedom and political public life (Benhabib 1991, Habermas 1990). At the same time, civil society is closely linked to democracy and in systematic global comparisons the

2 See Tocqueville's discussion of community (Tocqueville 1959, vol. 1, part 1, ch. 5), voluntary associations (vol. 2, part 2, chs. 5-7), and "communal spirit" (*l'esprit communal*) or "civic spirit" (*l'esprit de cité*) (vol. 1, part 1, ch. 5, pp. 74, 99). The more recent debate on social capital proceeds from these ideas, e.g. Putnam (1993).

two are considered together.³ The question of typical civil society values is also subject to broad discussion. For Shils (1991), for instance, the existence of "civility" is a necessary condition for the existence of a civil society. By civility he means acting out of a concern for the common good and willingness to solve conflicts peacefully. In a similar vein, Dahrendorf (1990, p. 100) underlines the importance of the civic spirit. The debate implies that civil society organization consists of voluntary associations. Accordingly, in the definition quoted above only such organizations are mentioned as examples. Self-organization on the basis of ascribed features (like ethnic origin) is largely ignored. Yet in Africa precisely these forms of self-organization are of great social importance.

2 "Civil society" in Africa

Discussions of civil society in Africa usually centre around NGOs (on Africa in particular, see Chazan et al. 1993; Igoe / Kelsall 2005; Neubert 1997a, 1997b; 2003; for more general discussions, see Anheier / Salamon 1998; Edwards / Hulme 1996; Pinkney 2009; Salamon 2004). NGOs in the narrow sense offer social and development services on a non-profit basis, provide emergency aid, act as advocates for the rights of disadvantaged groups, or pursue wider goals for the common good (such as ecological goals).

Such NGOs have gained enormous importance in Africa since the 1980s. They are seen as representing cost-effective grassroots development initiatives. This is reflected in the fact that they enjoy a high level of international support and funding. Initially NGOs concentrated on providing social services, but over time they have greatly expanded their activities. Important new areas are the promotion of small businesses, rural development, advancement of women, ecological projects, and the field of conflict management and reconstruction. After the end of the cold war, NGOs were discovered as the political voice of the people by development politics. At the same time, human rights and civil rights issues came to the fore.

Because of their importance in the areas of welfare and development aid, their social embedment needs to be examined. According to Western ideas, NGOs have a social base consisting of members and supporters who ensure that they receive adequate financing and social recognition, and they have a distinct sphere of activity (Glagow 1990, p. 165; Neubert 1997b, pp. 74f.). Yet African NGOs often do not have any strong social backing. Moreover, a large part, and sometimes the greatest part, of their funding is provided by international donors. In countries like Rwanda, Mozambique or Malawi, the (secular) NGO sector grew up as the result of such foreign support, without which many of these organizations would not survive. Their membership as well

3 See Civil Society Index: <http://www.civicus.org/csi>; Freedomhouse Index: <http://www.freedomhouse.org>; World Governance Survey: <http://www.odi.org.uk/projects/00-07-world-governance-assessment/Findings.html>; The Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project: <http://www.ccss.jhu.edu/> (alle 06/04/2010)

as the number of supporters is correspondingly small. NGOs with no social base often behave like (non-profit) consulting firms that depend on receiving orders from development organizations in the North (Neubert 1997b, pp. 324-339). This is sometimes perceived as a new form of imperialism (for instance in Hearn 2007; Hudock 1999).

Yet even if a similar pattern can be found all over Africa (and in other parts of the world), there are countries like Kenya or South Africa (and at one time Zimbabwe) in which a limited number of national welfare, development and advocacy organizations have their own social backing and create sufficient social resonance to have a political influence. During the democratization phase in many African countries, for instance, NGOs were involved in the transition process and, together with the trade unions, often represented "civil society" (Pinkney 2005). However, their political influence must not be overestimated (Robinson / Friedman 2005).

The churches occupy a special position. The Catholic and the Protestant churches with close links to their European and North American counterparts profit, like other NGOs, from their international partners who provide funding for their welfare and development activities, and access to the international public sphere in the case of conflicts with the government. But unlike non-profit consulting firms, the churches have their own social base (Neubert 1997b). Especially Pentecostal and other charismatic churches can rely on a highly committed body of followers and are often able to finance themselves and the services they provide for their members from their own resources, without international support; in some cases they run well managed businesses to broaden their financial base (Bornstein 2005).

In countries with a Muslim population, Islamic religious communities have gained social importance. They form active social movements and are or were supported by Saudi Arabia, Libya and, in the case of the Ismailis, by the Aga Khan Foundation (Kaiser 1996, Renders 2002, Weiss 2002).

On the one hand, the social and development services provided by religious and secular NGOs, such as creating social infrastructures, initiating mediation processes in conflict situations, or organizing refugee camps, relieve the government of responsibility. But on the other hand, there is a risk that the government will be slowly delegitimized, since it is justifiable to ask what the government does for its citizens (Neubert 1997b, pp. 382-386). In crisis situations, NGOs can play an important role in providing help for the suffering population. This was the case during the civil war in Mozambique, when CARE was in charge of managing the entire food aid and was thus able to dictate conditions that deliberately subverted the socialist policies of the Mozambican government (Hanlon 1991). Refugee camps can also attain a considerable degree of autonomy, so that in unstable areas the camp becomes a separate legal space where authority is almost entirely in the hands of development organizations and/or the UNHCR, which is formally responsible (Neubert 2009, p. 47). In a war it is also possible that humanitarian aid organizations become involved in the conflict, since their aid is a coveted strategic resource (de Waal 2000).

At the same time NGOs are also subject to state control. An important means of restricting the freedom to act of NGOs is compulsory registration, and they are often only granted approval for a limited period. Authoritarian governments try to ensure the depoliticization of NGOs, in order to prevent them from becoming a political springboard. These strategies can be effective even where there is formal recognition of civil freedoms, as seen in Kenya after the period of one-party rule, when the unpopular President Moi succeeded in winning free elections despite considerable public opposition (Neubert 1997b, pp. 386-393, Peters 1996).

The work of NGOs is closely linked to that of community-based organizations (CBOs). These mainly consist of different forms of self-help, such as small infrastructure projects, so-called income-generating projects, rotating funds or local traders' and craftsmen's associations. Even if NGOs like to suggest that such community-based organizations are a continuation of indigenous traditions, they usually reflect successful appropriation of the ideas of development organizations (Neubert 2000). The neighbourhood committees in South Africa ('civics'), which are a form of local self-administration, correspond best to the idea of a community-based organization (Adler / Steinberg 2000).

Besides the NGOs that dominate in development politics, there is also a broad spectrum of organizations that represent various interest groups. There are trade unions in practically all African countries, although their size and status varies greatly, depending on the size of the formal sector. With the exception of South Africa, the number of industrial workers is very low in all African countries, mainly miners in South Africa, Botswana and Zambia, oil workers in Nigeria, Angola and other oil-producing countries, and a large number of organized agricultural workers in Mauritius.

It is remarkable that, again with the exception of South Africa, in the past twenty years very few studies on trade unions have been published (Kester 2007, Kester / Sidibé 1997, Kraus 2007b). To a certain extent, the trade unions were involved in the anti-colonial liberation struggle. On independence, they were integrated into the political system and were closely associated with the government or the single party (Kester 2007, pp. 16f.). In the 1980s, some trade unions became emancipated and began to organize strikes when, as a result of the structural adjustment programmes, state enterprises were privatized and living conditions worsened. In the democratization movement, the trade unions played an important role in some countries. They were invited to participate in national conferences, and the Zambian opposition leader came from the trade union movement. The trade unions gained more freedom to act, but lost the support of the state, and had to fight for members. In some cases they moved into new fields of activity, such as poverty alleviation (Mwamadzingo / Saleshando 2003), or tried to establish themselves as promoters of the small business sector (Heidenreich 2007).

South Africa is the only country with a well organized trade union movement. The trade unions successfully defend the interests of the workers in industrial disputes, and were a mainstay of the anti-apartheid movement. They currently regard themselves as representing the interests of the poor in general. At the same time it is not easy for

them to evade the influence of the government which is led by former comrades-in-arms (Webster / Buhlungu 2004). In Ghana and Nigeria there are also active trade union movements that play an important role (Kraus 2007a, p. 282).

There is an even greater dearth of information about employers' associations or chambers of industry and commerce. In the single-party regimes they, too, were closely linked to the government. Today they are said to be partners in the struggle against corruption and sometimes present themselves as promoters of small businesses. Only in South Africa do industrial associations act as effective representatives of business interests.

The public sphere is very important for civil society activities. Media such as newspapers, radio and television exist in all African countries, but there are great differences regarding the degree of freedom of the press or informal restrictions on reporting. Dynamic developments in this field are seen wherever privately owned radio stations are able to establish themselves on the national and local levels and reach almost the whole population. The media have played, and still play, an important role in processes of democratization, as well as in social conflicts (Fardon / Furniss 2000, Nyamnjoh 2005). However, such freedoms can also be exploited to aggravate conflicts. The hate propaganda in Rwanda before the genocide is a typical example (Chrétien 2002 [1995]).

3 Alternative forms of self-organization

In addition to these organizations which correspond to the common idea of civil society, there are in Africa a large number of other types of self-organization which are often neglected in the civil society debate. These forms of organization cover a broad spectrum, ranging from local political organizations, institutions like chiefdoms, councils of elders and local defence communities, to vigilante or militia groups, militant social movements, so-called youth organizations and violence entrepreneurs.

Local forms of political self-organization are usually historically anchored. The colonial state in Africa was imposed on well-structured societies with very different political "constitutions". Roughly speaking, these were either local chiefdoms that were more or less integrated into kingdoms, in other words forms of central rule (Mair 1977), or they were acephalous societies with small local units led by councils of elders and no central government institutions (Middleton / Tait 1958, Sigrist 1979). The councils of elders were responsible for political leadership and administration of justice, and they controlled the distribution of local resources. In some cases local leaders were integrated on the lowest level of the colonial administration, and sometimes they were given a more informal role. But formal structures for local administration were introduced in every case, which led to a situation where state institutions existed alongside local forms of rule. It was assumed that traditional forms of rule would gradually disappear. This obviously did not happen, for all over Africa they still flourish (Bellagamba / Klute 2008, McIntosh 1999)

Regardless of whether these local forms of political organization are based on precolonial institutions or were introduced later (as in the case of the *regulos* in the Portuguese colonial administration), they cannot be dismissed as historical relics; rather, they are a part of current political arrangements. They have in common that, independently of their integration in the modern political system, they refer to "tradition" as an important source of legitimation. They are local actors in traditional garb, and for this reason one should speak of neo-traditional forms of local political organization.⁴

Closely connected with these local political structures are local defence communities of young warriors, which protect the group and are responsible to the elders or the chief. During the colonial period, these were often agents of resistance to the modern colonial system and the values communicated by it, and were initially perceived as backward-looking revivalist movements (Mühlmann 1961).⁵ Especially among pastoral groups these local defence communities still play an important role today. They protect their own cattle and at the same time are prepared to steal cattle from neighbouring groups. However, with easy access to automatic weapons, these conflicts have become increasingly violent. In civil war areas this protective function is particularly important. Such defence communities may also become involved in regional and national conflicts, often as ethnic militias. Examples are the Congo conflict (Jourdan 2004, Tull 2003), or the violence in Kenya following the 2008 parliamentary elections (Médard 2008). In both cases local religious conceptions played a significant role. Where the combatants are rooted in local structures, neo-traditional leaders can motivate them to make peace, as in the case of the conflict between the Tuareg and the government of Mali, and between different Tuareg groups (Klute / Trotha 2000). However, there is no clear-cut distinction between them and marauding rebel groups.

Warriors can also function as local law-enforcement agencies. With reference to the north of Côte d'Ivoire, Till Förster observes that warriors from Senufo secret societies or hunters' societies act as local police, deriving their authority from magical powers that are linked to the obligation to behave with integrity (Förster 2009, pp. 331-340). While these groups gain their legitimacy from traditional systems of authority, there are also groups that have no traditional basis. In the Nigerian town of Aba traders engaged a group of young men, the Bakassi Boys, who acted *de facto* as local law-enforcement agents where the police had failed. They prosecuted criminals and practitioners of witchcraft, administered their own justice, and imposed a brutal regime. They acted in accordance with local conceptions of justice, outside state jurisdiction (Harnischfeger 2003, Meagher 2007). In the South African town of Port Elizabeth a similar vigilante group was formed during the anti-apartheid struggle. In this case, their activity was stopped by the police of democratic South Africa (Buur 2006). Baker describes a militia group made up of former combatants in Liberia that acts highly arbitrarily. In some urban regions of Uganda, on the other hand, the state has established local security

4 Bellagamba / Klute 2008

5 The interpretation of social movements differed greatly, however, depending on the point of view of the observer. On religious protest movements, see also Ranger (1986).

committees, whose activity is subject to legal rules (Baker 2006).

At the end of the spectrum are marauding "rebel groups". In some cases these developed out of political youth organizations, like the notorious Interahamwe in Rwanda, which was heavily involved in the genocide. In the case of the conflicts in Darfur or the Congo, the rebel groups have names referring to political goals such as freedom and democracy, regardless of whether these goals are really pursued. Other groups claim to be religiously motivated, such as the "Lord's Resistance Army" in Uganda (Dunn 2007). These groups cover a spectrum between the pursuance of political goals and the use of violence for the sake of economic gain (Elwert 1999).⁶

Violence entrepreneurs and marauding rebel groups are generally perceived as a security problem because they cause suffering among the civil population. And there are very controversial assessments of neo-traditional forms of political organization like chiefs, councils of elders and local defence communities. From the perspective of the modern liberal democratic state, they are regarded as indicating incomplete state formation or disintegration of the state, and as a threat to democracy. Other voices in anthropology describe these local political organizations as an alternative to the weak state in Africa (Skalník 2004).

4 Scope of the concept of civil society

This tentative and incomplete list of forms of self-organization other than "classic" civil society, risks being arbitrary. However, all the forms listed have in common that they are related to specific local contexts and are involved in local dynamics of self-organization, without corresponding to the common image of civil society organizations. The main difference in the case of some of these organizations is their attitude to violence. Contrary to the notion of civility, violence entrepreneurs, rebel organizations, local defence communities and militia groups are all prepared to use violence. Another difference is of a constitutional nature. Chiefs and local defence communities do not see themselves as acting on a voluntary basis. Rather, they are acting in accordance with tradition, and with a form of belonging commonly believed to be constituted by being born into the group. Belonging to a group is determined by ascribed features, and is in principle no longer voluntary.⁷ Thus, these organizations have nothing in common with the Western concept of liberal democracy.

However, despite these obvious differences, there are certain ways in which these forms of self-organization are close to the concept of civil society. All the above-mentioned types of organization can be understood as forms of collective action grouped around shared interests, goals and values, or as expressions of the desire of people to determine their affairs themselves. Thus it is clear that important criteria

6 On the various types of violent actors, see Neubert (2004a) or Miklaucic (2009).

7 For this reason Naomi Chazan (1992, p. 282) rightly excludes these parochial organizations from her definition of civil society.

which we use to identify collective actors as part of civil society also apply to other organizations which do not fit so well into our idea of civil society.

This discrepancy is particularly clear in the case of violence entrepreneurs or armed rebel groups. For both, violence is an important means of attaining their goal, whether this is economic gain or political power. More difficult to assess are vigilante groups and local defence communities, which also use violence but understand this as self-defence in the absence of an effective police force. In a way, they close the gap that is left open by the state in the exercising of its monopoly on violence. On the local level, the traditionally legitimated authorities, like chiefs or councils of elders, claim regulatory authority with regard to justice and administration, and see themselves as representing the local population in interactions with the state. They occupy political spaces left open by the state, and may see themselves as institutional alternatives to a system of centralized power.

Political autonomy is claimed in respect of local self-defence or local police powers, and in respect of local self-administration as required and practised by traditionally legitimated authorities. This kind of self-organization is similar to that which Tocqueville described in the case of America (Tocqueville 1959, esp. vol. 1, part 1, ch. 5). In the early period of the modern North American territorial state, local autonomy was a part of the US-American self-image, and it is still important today. It differs from the African forms of local self-organization in its legitimation. In the USA of the 19th century the local authorities were democratically elected and controlled by formalized law. In the above-mentioned African examples, this is not the case, at least not to the same extent. Local defence communities are legitimated by tradition, but act as a rule outside the laws and are, at most, tolerated. There are only a few countries where militia groups act within a legal framework, and then they are mostly restricted to police activities. All other militia groups are ultimately illegal. In some countries the traditional authority of chiefs is recognized in special regulations, but falls within the jurisdiction of customary law, outside the formal laws.

Even if the formal statutory provisions vary considerably from case to case, it is clear that in Africa local forms of self-organization serve a function which is fulfilled in Western countries either by civil society organizations, or by the state, or by subsidiary forms of local self-administration. The Western concept of civil society is too narrow and too normative to capture the realities of the situation in Africa: the label civil society is given to "good" forms of self-organization, while other, locally developed, forms are "bad" and do not fit into the category of civil society.

If we want to understand social dynamics, it is not sufficient to look only at "good" kinds of civil society. Analyses must include all forms of self-organization. Moreover, it is open to what extent civil society forms of self-organization play a significant role in African societies. This does not imply that classic forms of civil society are not important in Africa. Despite considerable differences between the African countries, classic civil society organizations, often with international support, do play a role. These organizations are also a part of African reality.

5 Forms of self-organization in Africa in the context of globalized modernity

In order to assess these findings, it is necessary to consider the development of the forms of self-organization presented here. Colonization led to an important turn in the development of African societies. The colonial states, as a vehicle of "modernity", caused a radical restructuring of Africa's socio-political and economic systems.

In development research, the concept of modernity was long equated with the deterministic modernization theories of the 1960s, and was therefore considered unsuitable for analysing processes of change. But this meant there was no means of access to the structural changes in African societies. More recent concepts of modernity, such as that proposed by Giddens (1990), proved helpful in closing the gap. Giddens understands by modernity: "modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence" (*ibid.*, p. 1).

For Giddens an important feature of modernity is the development of new institutions, such as the "nation-state, the wholesale dependence of production upon inanimate power sources, or the thoroughgoing commodification of products and wage labour" (*ibid.*, p. 6).⁸ He distinguishes four institutional dimensions of modernity (*ibid.*, pp. 55-78): industrial production, capitalism, rational administration and organizations for the controlled use of violence. Modernity is two-edged: it means progress, but it also threatens creativity and local originality. Thus, Giddens expressly does not connect modernity with any particular political system. Western democracy, and the whole emancipatory project that grew up in Western Europe and North America together with modernity (Wittrock 2000), is only one possible social answer to its challenges. Modernity takes on many different forms (Eisenstadt 2000). At the same time it leads to more complex social conditions, and, with the modern territorial state, to comparatively large socio-political units that are highly regulated and controlled. Modernity is linked to the separation of state and society, and a rebuilding of the social structure resulting from capitalism, involving the formation of a middle class, a working class and farmers who produce for the market.

At the same time, modernity paves the way for globalization (Giddens 1991, pp. 84-102), understood as the "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa." (*ibid.*, p. 85). Globalization leads to radical change and opens up new forms of communication, transport and trade, which grow out of modernity, but are not determined by it. Globalization is thus more than just an expansion of modernity (Macamo / Neubert 2008, p. 276).

8 Giddens uses the established term 'nation state'. I prefer the term 'territorial state' because it avoids the idea of nation as a constitutive element.

With colonization, globalized modernity spread to Africa. Three main forces combined to shape Africa's colonial and post-colonial societies: the influence of modernity as represented by the colonial state, developing global entanglements, and existing local structures. The process of the spread of modernity to Africa and the resulting rapid changes have not yet come to an end. State-building has proved to be a complicated process. In Africa the state has to cope with a multitude of decentral socio-political structures which show great persistence and adaptability in everyday life. Moreover, establishing a rational administration and enforcing the state's monopoly on violence are obviously difficult and accompanied by many setbacks.

The capitalist structures of globalized modernity have affected almost all parts of Africa, but without completely penetrating the African economy and society. On the one hand a middle class is gradually growing up, and the commodification of labour is increasing. On the other hand, there is still a high level of non-market subsistence production in all African countries. There is hardly any African country that is characterized by industrial labour. With certain exceptions (South Africa, and to some extent for instance Zambia or Mauritius), there is no large, socially relevant working class. Rather, small businesses, rural subsistence and market production, and wage labour in small enterprises are closely intertwined.⁹

Against this backdrop, the first civil society organizations in Africa were formed during the colonial period. The start was made by mission societies, the churches that grew out of them, newly founded African churches, and other religious communities (Muslims, immigrant Hindus). To these were added trade unions and trade associations founded on the model and with the support of the colonial powers, and – primarily in the British colonies – a few scattered welfare organizations. Simultaneously, a dynamic and typically African sphere of self-organization was formed by migrant associations based on ascribed ethnic origins, and local trade and craft organizations (Little 1965; Meillassoux 1968; Neubert 1997b, pp. 102-137). Moreover, Africans took up the idea of democracy and political self-organization, and founded their own political organizations; here, the experiences of the few Africans who studied in Europe and North America played an important role (Grohs 1967).

These early African organizations are located in the field between state, market and family, and are the result of both targeted promotion and the independent use of new possibilities of organization. All these voluntary associations can be regarded as the first expression of a slowly forming civil society in Africa. Nevertheless, its social significance must not be overestimated. In particular the political organizations and trade unions only involved a small, but politically active, group. Most people continued to be integrated in local, traditionally legitimated structures.

With independence, the leaders of the independence movements took over the government or participated in political power struggles, and thus left the field of civil

9 This intertwining was described in the 1980s in the "Bielefelder Verflechtungsansatz" (Evers 1987). These patterns are still found today.

society self-organization.¹⁰ After independence, besides churches and other religious organizations, a socially active and significant civil society modelled on the European and North American pattern, mainly in the form of welfare organizations and certain special interest groups, grew up only in a minority of African states (for instance in South Africa, Kenya, and to some extent also Ghana). This situation changed from the 1980s onwards, when development politics started to promote African NGOs and encourage self-help through local community-based organizations (CBOs). The assistance provided helped to create dependence on international donors.

The processes sketched above were the result of interaction between advancing modernity which created the social base for classic civil society organizations, and global interrelations which made civil society organization models available, even where the endogenous base was still very fragile. Thus, we can speak of the globalization of an organization model (Neubert 2001). However, this model is appropriated by people in their local situation in specific ways, whether in the form of non-profit consulting businesses, or local self-help groups founded in order to obtain support in the name of development aid, which has led to a high degree of international influence.

Contrary to what is assumed in development politics, these forms of self-help are not an expression of locally developed forms of self-organization, or only marginally so. The latter have their own distinctive structures and include traditionally legitimated authorities, communal village activities, defence communities and militia groups. These locally anchored organizations are found almost everywhere in Africa.¹¹ Even in South Africa, which is certainly the country most deeply influenced by modernity, locally rooted forms of authority (like chiefs) still exist. However, they must be understood in terms of a fundamentally altered context. In pre-colonial times, chiefs, warriors and other regional forms of political and sometimes military organization were autonomous and restricted to a particular local space. Today, they exist within a territorial state which claims a monopoly on violence and sets up legal rules to limit the scope of self-organization. Even if these forms of organization relate to the people's own culture and tradition, and draw their legitimacy from this fact, they are confronted with other formal and legal structures. In many cases this leads to political arrangements between local forms of organization and the state. Some of the African governments which had initially relieved local chiefs (or councils of elders) of their role in the state administration, have granted them ceremonial duties and often also entrusted them with the administration of justice on the local level, within the framework of new constitutions (Buur / Kyed 2006, Nsibambi 1995, Bennett 1999, Lang 2004). Lund speaks of "twilight" institutions which have become established and which compete for public authority with the state. He explicitly criticizes the highly normative concept of civil society, which implies a strict separation between public and private (Lund 2006, pp. 677f. and passim).

10 See Stepan's discussion of the distinction between civil society and political society (Stepan 1988, pp. 3-12).

11 A possible exception is Rwanda, where the state has largely replaced local political structures.

This points at the same time to the importance of the state, and of the idea of the state, for social reality in Africa. It is the existence of the state that makes twilight institutions possible. There are cases where the state is scarcely more than a fading memory – as for instance on the territory of the former Somalia or in the north of Côte d'Ivoire – yet local socio-political forms relate nevertheless to the idea of the state (Förster 2009, pp. 344f.). This points to the fact that local structures are not replaced of necessity. The traditionally legitimated local leaders act as intermediaries and can form part of a society that is differently constituted from Europe and North America. They exist, as it were, beside the state's local administration and civil society forms of self-organization. Even when the existing social distinction permits the development of a Western-style civil society, there is no automatism that produces a civil society which completely fills the space between state, market and private life.

At present this field in Africa is occupied both by a burgeoning civil society committed to liberal ideas, and by alternative forms of self-organization. Their co-existence is usually more or less accepted by both sides. However, the different forms of self-organization cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy between civil society and traditionalism. The groups formed on the basis of common descent and a common reference to traditionally legitimated values claim the right to cultural independence (Bennett 1999). They claim this gives them the right to manage local affairs independently within the framework of modern ideas of state and justice, even if these ideas do not have their unconditional support. Their autonomy relates especially to the local administration of justice, which is anchored to some degree in the legal systems of the African states in a situation of legal pluralism (Woodman 1996). The scope of local jurisdiction varies, depending on the strength of the state and the effectiveness of its organs: the more fragile the state's monopoly on violence, the more far-reaching is local self-rule, with local defence communities and militia groups.¹²

Even where the state is present and effectively claims its monopoly on violence, there may be considerable friction with the state system. A good example is the question of land rights.¹³ In pre-colonial times, local authorities had the power to decide over use of the land, and this right is still claimed today in the framework of legal pluralism. As long as they stay on the level of locally introduced land use and land distribution patterns, conflicts can be settled by referring to local legal traditions. However, the problems often go beyond the scope of the traditional system. On the one hand, in large parts of Africa there is migration, including from one rural area to another. As long as there was enough land, this was no serious problem. Immigrants could be integrated into the local communities or were at least tolerated. But where land is scarce their status is precarious. Established groups claim land rights based on autochthony, heightened by the concept of belonging (Chabal 2009, pp. 43-64). Conflict

12 This self-rule has limitations, especially when conflicts break out between local groups with different legal traditions (Neubert 2011).

13 On this topic, see also the articles by Klute / Fernandes 2011 and Eckert 2011.

easily arises between local land allocation practices and formally acquired land rights where land has been officially registered.

Today this pattern is exploited as a political strategy. Where the logic of majority decisions prevails, the size of opposing groups is a decisive factor. Expulsions and ethnic cleansing result from conceptions of autochthony and allow the creation of majorities within a region. On the national level, this is reflected in the exclusion from citizenship of immigrants, who often, as in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, have been recognized as citizens since the colonial period. In such a situation, political majorities are possible only through the dominance of one group, or ethnic coalitions.

The notion of collective rights on the basis of origin and descent is contrary to the individualistic liberalism on which the concept of civil society is based. Here, there is a conflict between civil society and democracy. Social self-organization can obviously serve very different purposes (Neubert 2004b).

How this conflict develops, whether it escalates and which social solutions are found, depends on the different local constellations. Particularly interesting are countries where there is at least a small middle-class base for a Western-type civil society. The protagonists of a Western civil society can rely on international support. However, this does not automatically lead to the dominance of a liberal conception of civil society. Particularly in these countries debates are carried on, which in South Africa have led to an integration of traditionally legitimated authorities into the political system. In Kenya, a conflict on the national level between two regional and ethnic political blocs over possible election rigging led to bloody clashes in rural areas on the basis of conceptions of autochthony. In both cases, there is a blurring of the apparently clear distinction between individualistic liberalism on the one hand, and traditional collective systems in the process of reconstitution on the other.

6 Conclusion

This overview of civil society in Africa shows that the West is deceived in several respects. The existence of nuclei of a civil society based on the Western model is not simply evidence of "catch-up" development, but a product of targeted intervention in these societies. The formation of trade unions during the colonial period, and especially the founding of many NGOs since the 1980s, are essentially the result of massive development aid. Nevertheless civil society organizations exist today in Africa as a social reality, even if they have differing degrees of effectiveness and independence. But the civil society which they constitute is more fragile than generally supposed. Whether the export of Western organization models will be successful in the long run is still an open question.

Even if the Western model of civil society is attractive for certain parts of African societies, and democracy movements easily relate to them, we must acknowledge that the socio-political structures in Africa are highly complex, and the space between state,

family and market is characterized by an extremely great variety of forms of organization which cannot be adequately described by the concept of civil society. There are obviously local models of social organization and order which compete with the model of civil society and are based on the people's own cultural roots. These models are not just relics of traditional local organization and authority, but are responses to modernity, just like the widely approved Western-type civil society. How the conflict between these different types of self-organization will develop is open. There are clear signs that where civil society has a comparatively strong base, compromises and forms of co-existence are negotiated and tested. Asking about the existence of African civil societies, or the search for civil society organizations in Africa, involves the risk of overlooking a more important and more fundamental question: In order to gain an understanding of the development of African societies, it is necessary to ask how Africa has responded to the challenges of globalized modernity. This means describing the changes in African societies. One aspect of the description is a study of the political sociology of Africa, which, in addition to the question of how political power is exercised, also includes forms of social self-organization. The concept of civil society with its rigid normative standards is too narrow for this purpose and allows the description of only parts of these processes. Moreover, it is difficult to integrate the different findings on a level involving all sections of society, for there is a lack of sound social structure analyses that could offer a framework for this. Sociology as a general discipline has never paid much attention to the Third World and especially Africa, with the result that there are real challenges waiting in the global South. For this reason we need to sharpen our conceptual instruments within political sociology. We must conceptualize the new social figurations which are being formed in Africa in a sociologically adequate way.

Within development politics it has been recognized that there is a need to face the challenge of competing conceptions of social self-organization. On the one hand, it would be naive to assume that civil society organizations will displace the alternative forms of social self-organization. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that accepting and supporting local forms of self-organization means taking sides in favour of a particular social model.

Thus, development politics is inevitably involved in the social conflicts of African states.¹⁴

14 My thanks to Artur Bogner and the editors of "Globalisierung Süd" for their critical comments.

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