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# Civil Society, Everyday Life and the Possibilities for Development Studies

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## Abstract

Civil society is one of the most contentious terms in political thought. There is considerable, and highly significant, difference between academic debate about the meaning of ‘civil society’ and the way the term is mobilized in international development discourse. In particular, narratives of civil society in international development are often dominated by reference to organizational descriptions and measurability. But I would like to suggest here that the term should be reclaimed as a way of giving meaning to the stories of the everyday lives of the people who create, shape and embody civil society. Used in this way, the idea of civil society can be understood as intersecting emotions, discourses and practices and can add to the body of scholarly work that nurtures and values everyday life as a lens through which to view wider social processes. Paying attention to the everyday life of civil society may have implications for that way the civil society is engaged with academically, and also has the potential to refresh how civil society is thought about in development practice.

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## Introduction

### CIVIL SOCIETY: DIVERSE ENGAGEMENTS

The essential aims of life are present naturally in every person. In everyone there is some longing for humanity’s rightful dignity, for moral integrity, for free expression of being... (Vaclav Havel 1978 VI)

The anti-World Cup protests in Brazil, the pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong and Thailand and the ‘die-ins’ staged across America are a few of the more visible manifestations of the desire of people to have their say about how the world works. Civil society, as a concept, utilized across the ideological spectrum has perhaps become fatigued, often reified and de-humanized. This paper aims to add to the body of work that believes it is time to explore the stories of the people who make up civil society, and it is through their everyday lives that civil society can be understood.

Often represented as one of the most elastic, ambiguous and debated terms within political thought (Alapagga 2004; Edwards 2014; Hall 1995; Khilnani 2001), conceptual engagement with civil society has often traversed Euro-centric chronological narratives set in changing socio-economic conditions (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999; Ehrenberg 2011). This ‘*neo-modern myth*’ that forms (part of) the historiography of civil society tries to conceptualize very particular European and North Atlantic experiences (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999 p.4; Perez-Diaz 1995). Cicero envisioned civil society as public power allied to justice, an idea echoed later by the Scots thinkers, who understood civil society as protection for personal freedoms against state power (Edwards 2014; Ehrenberg 2011).

Theorizing civil society within a capitalist framework, Hegel differentiated between civil society and the state (Khilnani 2001), with Marx seeing civil society as an extension of the bourgeoisie. Gramscian civil society is a space for debate, where a variety of organizations can both challenge and further the interests of the dominant few (Femia 2001; Gramsci 1971; Lewis 2002). Contrasting this, De Tocqueville (1998 [1840]) and later Putnam (1993; 2000) idealize civil society as associational life, with voluntary associations necessary for social capital and an effective democracy (Ehrenberg 2011).

Typically described as the space(s) between the market, the state and the family (Edwards 2014), more recent interpretations associate civil society with the rise or survival of liberal democracy<sup>1</sup> (Putnam 1993; Wank 1995). Driven by the Eastern European transition (Hardt 1995; Howard 2011), the overthrow of authoritarianism in Latin America (Chandhoke 2007) and Putnam's (1993) work on democracy in post-communist Italy, civil society began to be seen as the solution to drive democratic transitions and enliven existing democracies (Edwards 2014; Encarnación 2003). The controversies of this remedy are evident, with for example, Putnam's (1993) Tocquevillian comparative analysis of the causal relations between Italian voluntary associations and democratic tendencies questioned through his neglect of the importance of political institutions in building democracy (Encarnación 2003), the underestimation of the role of pre-existing political structures (Tarrow 1996) and the exclusion of more hidden manifestations of collective action (Watson 2004). The idea of global civil society(s) also gained traction in the 1990s, reflecting transnational interest in human rights and social, economic and environmental justice and the complex networks of assemblies, groups and states involved in global governance (Kaldor 2003).

The Euro-centricity of many of these civil society narratives led to attempts to understand civil society away from these more dominant Western<sup>2</sup> roots (Lewis 2002; Obadare 2009; 2011; 2012). There are significant bodies of work exploring the idea of civil society in various contexts, exemplifying the limitations of Euro-centric narratives and articulating the diversity of the idea of civil society around the world. Examples from Latin America detail Bolivian social movements (Zibechi 2010), participatory mechanisms in Brazil (Avritzer 2002) and the influence of global processes on civil society in the region (Oxhorn 2004). Forment (2007), for example, traces the disregard of political society in favour of a territorially rooted civil society in Buenos Aires. This contrasts with Chatterjee's (2004) opinions on civil society in India, which he sees as a sphere for the elite, and contends that it is through political society that marginalized groups gain most. Scholars of African civil society challenge Western concepts of associational life, arguing that ethno-regional ties are neglected in many civil society theories and that dominant discourses fail to address the intricacies of African civil society (Adekson 2004; Konings 2009; Lewis 2002). More informal articulations of civil society are seen through examples of humour in Nigeria (Obadare 2009), kinship ties in Cameroon (Konings 2009) and the media (Willems 2014).

This varied conceptual engagement contrasts with the construction of civil society that dominates international development discourse. Civil society reflects normative ideals within development processes, such as 'decentralization... participation, empowerment and democratization' (McIlwaine 1998 p.415). Although there is not one agreed conceptualization of civil society in Western thought, it can be argued that there are a number of assumptions that dominate the development discourse on civil society, particularly a focus on associational activity, civility and deepening democracy, often imagined through terms such as voice and participation (McIlwaine 1998; Obadare 2012). Within much development discourse, civil society is regularly associated with civil society organizations and the positive role these organizations can play in development processes, recently exemplified by Justine Greening, the UK's International Development Secretary:

We couldn't do the work we want to do at the Department for International Development (DFID)... without civil society organisations from across the world... Last year almost a fifth of DFID's bilateral budget was spent through civil society organisations... I want to create a relationship with civil society which is much more strategic than it is at the moment, has more depth to it – and is more efficient – so we can deliver even more for the world's poorest. (Greening 2015)

Civil society is viewed as an important channel through which development can happen, through various discursive avenues including democratic strengthening, pro-poor agendas and rights-based approaches. Critical institutional assessments often dominate, for example, considering the role of civil society in improving democracy and civility (Kamstra & Knippenberg 2014), measuring the strength or attempting to quantify civil society (Fowler 2012) or evaluating the impact of donor funding on the sector (Henderson 2002). Analyses of the effectiveness of civil society organizations to realize development goals such as reducing poverty (Banks & Hulme 2012), engaging in policy (Court et al. 2006) and enacting child rights (Fontana & Grugel 2015) show both achievements and ongoing challenges for the sector. One area of particular concern is the increasing 'NGOization' of civil society, where NGOs are the primary component of civil society and act primarily as service providers (Dagnino 2011; Obadare 2011; 2012). This is seen by some to reflect an adaptation to international aid and by others to represent the depoliticization of civil society (Banks & Hulme 2012; Chandhoke 2007; Harsh 2014; Mercer & Green 2013) and has led to calls for a broadening of the discourse to incorporate a wider range of organizations and versions of collective action (Banks & Hulme 2012).

Analysis of the effectiveness of international support to strengthen civil society has highlighted the complexity of building civil society 'from the outside', with the outcome of donor funding not always resulting in the type of civil society or forms of activity that were expected (Mercer & Green 2013; Mohan 2002). Concerns include the development of patron-client ties between civil society organizations and donors (Henderson 2002), the need to be accountable to donors (Gabay 2014; Hearn 2007; Korolczuk 2014) and the separation of formal organizations from the communities they work with (Fagan 2005; Mercer & Green 2013). Despite the hegemonic feel of these Western development agendas, it must also be recognized that this terminology and associated resources have often been embraced by organizations in the Global South (Mercer & Green 2013). This highlights disparity within the development sector between conceptual models, normative ideals and what happens empirically on the ground (Edwards 2014).

### *Reframing Civil Society*

It is important to differentiate between the myth of civil society, its use in international development discourse and the opportunity to use civil society as a term that may be 'useful to think with' because it helps make sense of a diverse array of collective opportunities (Lewis 2002 p.584). Using the term in this way views civil society underpinned by intrinsic human desires, such as the desire to participate, the value of collective action and the importance of communication, whilst still acknowledging the contextual nature of forms of civil society (Lewis 2002; Sass & Dryzek 2014; Springer 2011). The civil society literature highlights the difficulty of searching for a fixed definition of such an ambiguous concept, but there are fundamental aspects that emerge from the literature that provide a guide as to what might constitute civil society. Notions of associational life and collective action, of opportunities for developing a 'good (or better) society', of platforms for marginalized voices and of societal activity that is distinct from the state resonate throughout much of these wide and diverse literatures (Edwards 2014).

Civil society could therefore be understood as the story of the many spaces that nurture the opportunity for ordinary people to engage with ideas of living together, primarily through their relationships with each other and where values and beliefs are debated (Edwards 2014; Fagan 2005).

Conceptual disagreements or critical institutional assessments dominate the civil society literature, but shifting away from this body of work is emerging scholarship that pays greater attention to the lives of the people that create, shape and embody civil society (Obadare 2011). Work (life) history studies highlight the shifting nature of the cosmopolitan practices of NGO workers in India (Baillie Smith & Jenkins 2012a) and the blurring of boundaries between working in civil society and government employment in the Philippines (Lewis 2013). These two examples demonstrate how a life history approach enables understanding of the development of certain practices, for example, policy-making (Lewis 2013) and how knowledge and practice are constructed through particular experiences and relations (Baillie Smith & Jenkins 2012a). As well as the personal, this focus on individual narratives can also explore how thoughts, values and practices circulate (Bebbington & Kothari 2006).

Ethnographic engagement with civil society challenges assumptions about the isolation, clarity and detachment of civil society organizations, highlighting that organizations are an open-ended process shaped by global, local and national complexities, challenging the notion that all civil society organizations operate in similar ways (Hilhorst 2003). Kuzmanovic (2012) highlights the difference between the civil society conceptualized in national and international policy documents and the one she experienced in Turkey, exemplifying the variety of contexts through which civil society is created and evolves. Ethnographic work also articulates the complexities of civil society, such as its changing forms and sometimes-contradictory values (Hilhorst 2003) and the role of administrative realities in NGO practices (Höhn 2013).

These approaches endorse an understanding of civil society organizations that emphasizes a move away from an institutional account of their effectiveness in relation to normative ideals, their strength or quantity or their role in policy dialogue, to a narrative about the people who are part of these organizations and their everyday practices (Baillie Smith & Jenkins 2012a; Jenkins 2015; Long 2001; Obadare 2011). It is the experiences of the people who create, shape and embody civil society that are the focus (Obadare 2011), accentuating ideas of hiddenness (Havel 1978), context (Clark & Jones 2013), multiplicity (Fraser 1990; Willems 2014), connectivity (Featherstone 2012), contestation (Fraser 1990) and fluidity (Howell et al. 2008). This resonates with the idea of using civil society as something ‘...to think with’ (Lewis 2002 p.584) and privileges the idea of searching for civil society in its ‘actual formation, rather than as a promised agenda for change’ (Mamdani 1996 p19).

This paper adds to the body of work that places greater emphasis on actor-focused accounts of what it is like to be part of civil society organizations, with a particular emphasis on peoples’ everyday practices,<sup>3</sup> considering what theories of everyday life could add to understandings of civil society. This is guided by two specific calls, about NGOs and activism respectively, but which can be extended and have relevance for thinking about civil society. Firstly, by Baillie Smith & Jenkins (2012 p.643) who conceptualize ‘NGOs as made up of individuals, with... histories, commitments and allegiances’ and secondly, Chatterton & Pickerill (2010 p.481) who advocate for ‘detailed empirical accounts of the messy, gritty and real everyday rhythms as activists...enact life beyond the capitalist status quo’. Using these conceptualizations could assist in revealing intricate, colourful and contextual pictures of associational life(s) that are not overshadowed by a Western/non-Western binary or constructions of civil society currently dominating international development discourse.

In reasserting the notion that civil society is about people, for the remainder of this paper, I am referring to the everyday life of those who give civil society shape, through their roles as

activists, workers or volunteers with self-defined civil society organizations.<sup>4</sup> Following this line of thought, this paper continues with a review of the conceptual aspects associated with the everydayness of civil society, followed by discussions highlighting five theoretical positions connecting civil society and everyday life. These positions are then considered through particular examples that review how structures, discourses and modes of production influence the everyday life of civil society activists, the relational and contextual nature of civil society, the hidden emotional spaces of civil society and finally the potency of subjectivities used by civil society actors. For ease of writing, these areas are addressed separately, but it is understood that there is no such division in 'real life', and everyday life is found at the crossroads of these (and other) elements (Highmore 2011). These discussions come together to ask: What are the everyday experiences of those who shape civil society? The final section of the paper draws together some conclusions on what an understanding of civil society rooted in the everyday may add to academic thought and international development practice.

### *The Everydayness<sup>5</sup> of Civil Society*

In arguing for an understanding of civil society that is rooted in everyday life, it is first important to explore notions of the everyday and its various meanings in more detail. This is not an attempt to contest the theoretical manifestations of these concepts, rather this paper aims to make a claim about the usefulness of the idea of everyday life in the study of civil society, in doing so drawing on elements from across the theoretical spectrum that appear to resonate with the ideas of civil society discussed previously. In bringing together ideas of civil society and the everyday, the term everyday life is used here in its broadest form, following for example Katz (2004), who considers work, chores and play in children's everyday lives in the context of global economic restructuring.

Scholars in varying disciplines have recognized that everyday life is more than mundane and repetitive, articulating it as a realm of interest, activity and potential.<sup>6</sup> Lukacs (1971[1923]) and Lefebvre (2006 [1981]) contend that the everyday life of the worker was consumed by capitalism, and only through this everyday life could a deeper understanding of this system be achieved (Goonewardena 2008). This resonates with the near complete infiltration of totalitarianism into everyday life described by Havel (1978), and his articulation that it is only through attention to the everyday lives of ordinary people (citing the greengrocer) that the ideological domination of this philosophy could be understood. Ideas of everyday life also circulate within critiques of capitalism centred on ideas of social reproduction and the embodiment of capitalism in the social sphere (Katz 2004; 2008). Lefebvre (2006 [1981]) articulates that everyday life, as well as potentially embodying the rigours of capitalism, is not benign and is also a field for the growth of what he termed the 'non-everyday' ('higher' activities such as revolution). In the context of a capitalist mode of production, everyday life is therefore seen as an ample arena for social change and as a space that reflects how people live. Lefebvre himself (2006 [1981] p.2) asks: 'can a critical analysis of everyday life serve as a guiding thread for a knowledge of society as a whole?'

Everyday life can also be described as the accumulation of various activities, for example, washing, playing or working (Lefebvre 2006 [1981]), with each of these activities an intersection of desires and routines, inseparable from each other (Highmore 2011). Everyday life is not made up of isolated acts, and should be seen in the context of the social relations in which it occurs, and understood through the deep social structures within it (Scott 2009). Engaging with everyday life is integral to comprehending the wider social world (Scott 2009), and although studies of everyday life may focus on practices that are often considered private (for example, domestic chores), the habits and attitudes of these concealed spaces reflect deeper social processes (Pink 2004). The potentially negative connotations associated with everyday life,



the repetition, the stasis and the dullness have been challenged (Bennett & Watson 2002), and feminist and post-colonial scholars in particular have highlighted the potential of the everyday lives of women in diverse situations (Bennett 2011; Hume 2004; Pink 2004) to articulate the dominance of certain knowledge claims and complex power relations (Nayak & Jeffrey 2013). Geographical engagement with everyday life has traversed various domains, including but not limited to, citizenship (Staeheli et al. 2012), encounters with difference (Valentine & Waite 2012), geopolitics (Dittmer & Gray 2010; Sidaway 2009) and activism (Halvorsen 2015). These examples demonstrate the applicability and usefulness of the everyday as a conceptual framework for exploring the interplay between structure and agency, how facets of everyday life shape certain spaces and discourses and as lens through which to view wider social processes.

From these discussions, it is possible to summarize five theoretical positions of everyday life, which may be relevant to an understanding of everyday life and civil society: (i) Everyday life reflects, shapes and is shaped by overarching structures and discourses (Lefebvre 2006 [1981]; Scott 2009); (ii) Everyday life can (unevenly) embody, maintain and reproduce modes of production (Katz 2004; 2008); (iii) Everyday life is relational and contextual (Jordan 2002; Rustin 2013); (iv) Everyday life has the potential to reveal hidden power structures, spaces for engagement and forces behind particular knowledge claims (Hume 2004; Nayak & Jeffrey 2013; Staeheli et al. 2012); and (v) Everyday life is potent and a potential arena for change, resistance and struggle (de Certeau (1984); Halvorsen (2015); Lefebvre 2006 [1981]). A study of the everyday lives and practices of civil society actors may demonstrate the relevance of these theoretical positions, and this paper will now move on to provide brief examples of the theoretical positions highlighted above. These literatures, although not always directly drawn from studies of civil society, are useful to help guide us to potential areas of interest when exploring the everyday life of those who are part of civil society. As mentioned previously, these areas are not distinct or exhaustive, and everyday life as it plays out is the accumulation of many intersecting forces (Highmore 2011).

### *The Everyday Life of Civil Society*

#### EVERYDAY LIFE REFLECTS, SHAPES AND IS SHAPED BY OVERARCHING STRUCTURES AND DISCOURSES

There are numerous examples of the role of structures and discourses on everyday lives, from studies on the structural nature of violence (Rodgers & O'Neill 2012; Moser & McIlwaine 2014) to 'new' forms of governance that encourage certain modes of engagement (Johnston 2012). Discourses of terror will be used here as an example to open up the idea of an experience of civil society that is influenced by 'grander' narratives, but also an understanding of the everyday implications of such structures: how they are felt and embodied and how people respond to them.

Following Foucault, a social discourse can refer to the way that knowledge is produced, together with social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations, which shape society, normalize certain ways of being and encourage or repress spaces of engagement (Hilhorst 2003; Miraftab & Wills 2005; O'Tuathail 2002). On a global scale and in the current geopolitical context, discourses of fear and terror point to the interconnectedness of the global and the everyday (Pain et al. 2010). Reviewing civil society in the context of the global war on terror, Howell et al. (2008) describe the observable suppression of civil society in Uzbekistan and Russia (amongst others) and a more subtle form of regulatory control of civil society organizations by international donors and anti-terror legislation. This shows how geopolitical events and their associated discourses may change the everyday workings of civil society, for example, through changes in regulatory bureaucracy, funding arrangements and restrictions on certain

activities. Howell et al. (2008) go on to give examples of how civil society is using these discourses to re-shape their own activities, for example, in Kenya where civil society opposed the suppression of terrorism bill in 2003. These examples exemplify how the everyday workings of civil society show the interplay between structure and agency, how everyday lives and practices are bound up with 'bigger' discourses, but that the influences of these discourses on everyday life can be unpredictable, uneven and unforeseen.

#### EVERYDAY LIFE CAN (UNEVENLY) EMBODY, MAINTAIN AND REPRODUCE MODES OF PRODUCTION

Neoliberalism can be described as an 'umbrella term for the diverse ideologies, policies and practices associated with liberalizing global markets and expanding...capitalist power relations into areas of social, political and biophysical life' (Sparke 2005 p.1). This extension of neoliberalism from a purely economic model to a mode of being is demonstrated by studies on the way neoliberalism has permeated many aspects of everyday life, from the acceptance of certain emotional subjectivities (D'Aoust 2014) to understandings of feminist ideology (Baillie Smith & Jenkins 2012a), although the effects of neoliberalism are also acknowledged as geographically varied, unforeseen and uneven (Bondi & Laurie 2005). Neoliberalism as a mode of production can be seen in the growth of the neoliberal professional within the development sector.<sup>7</sup>) This neoliberal professionalism can be viewed with particular reference to the ideological traits of the minimalist state, decentralized activity and the self-governing citizen (Bondi & Laurie 2005 p.396; Kothari 2005) and the ways these are embodied in the everyday lives of civil society actors. The retreat of the state inevitably leaves a vacuum for other institutions, and civil society is often connected with the provision of services, for example, the construction of toilet blocks in informal settlements in India (McFarlane 2012). The style of this service provision, and other civil society activities, may be governed by the institutional norms of state and non-state funders, for example, in the development field, Höhn (2013) demonstrates the importance placed on certain tasks to secure funding and Dolhinow (2005) articulates concerns about NGOs operating through forms of neoliberal governmentality. Despite a potentially hegemonic feel, those who are part of civil society also engage with issues of professionalization in uneven and unexpected ways (Jenkins 2005).

#### EVERYDAY LIFE IS CONTEXTUAL AND RELATIONAL

Theories of place and space demonstrate the contextual and relational nature of civil society and how these play out in the everyday lives of civil society actors. Both can be understood as uneven forms of social relations, expressions of global processes, as well as sites of everyday practices (Crossa 2013; Mcfarlane 2012; Watson 2004). Theories of place and space offer opportunities for exploring the varied nature of civil society and perhaps obtusely for such terminologically abstract concepts; ideas of place and space also offer ways of understanding the people who are part of civil society and their everyday lives and practices.

The geographies of place have the potential to shape the everyday lives of civil society actors, with the close attachment to certain places stimulating the political activities and everyday practices of many different groups, with the importance of place-based affinity demonstrated and symbolically reproduced in anti-mining activities in Peru (Jenkins 2015), vendors' street protests in Mexico (Crossa 2013) and resistance to the construction of wind farms in the UK (Cass & Walker 2009). The importance of place to the experience of political activity is also seen in how everyday knowledge of a particular place can influence the types of activities undertaken (Halvorsen 2015). Contextual geographies of place can therefore create, drive and determine political identity and everyday activities (Crossa 2013).



Places are also articulations of social relations, imaginations and discourses that stretch beyond their geographical boundaries. These articulations also guide the everyday. Using the example of post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jeffrey (2007p.251) demonstrates how places are thought about 'creates political and spatial realities' and influences how NGOs operate day-to-day. The way places are imagined can privilege certain types of political activity, but civil society activism also has the opportunity to change the way places are imagined. Mcfarlane (2012), in his analysis of recently built slum toilet blocks in Mumbai, demonstrates how perceptions of slums as unhygienic places are challenged by everyday acts of an entrepreneurial civil society, encouraging an imaginary of a place full of useful knowledge and skills. Civil society can therefore be understood as embedded in and emerging from place, and the contextual geographies of place can be seen as part of civil society, often interacting in a number of, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, ways.

Despite the importance of a place-based understanding of the everyday life of civil society articulated in the previous two paragraphs, it is also important to consider how the everyday life of civil society may also challenge the boundaries of place. Although studies of everyday life have often highlighted the social practices that help form specific spaces, such as the home, the workplace or the pub (Hemmings et al. 2002) studies based in Geography, in particular, have used the analytical idea of space to think about how everyday practices may extend beyond something that exists in a particular place, to a focus on the intertwined and often unequal influences that configure different places and the lives of people living in geographically disparate places (Featherstone & Painter 2013; Katz 2004; Massey 2005; Massey et al. 2009; Wills 2013). Spatial perspectives can help to see the more 'hidden' aspects of political action and understand how everyday activities can be part of wider processes of social change that extend beyond place-based boundaries (Kothari 2012). Recent examples of the more interstitial spaces of political activity often incorporate the use of technology and social media, whilst recognizing the fluidity of the boundary between the virtual/real worlds (Hammett 2014; Meek 2012).

Spatial perspectives also help connect everyday actions in disparate places. Featherstone (2012) argues that local politics is shaped and sustained by relations across space, enabling a diverse array of practices to develop and forging new political landscapes. This perspective resonates with development, with examples including increased NGO regulation following the 'long war on terror' (Howell et al. 2008), the delegitimizing of Western-funded NGOs in Russia (Ljubownikow & Crotty 2014) and the contextualizing of global rights-based discourses (Fontana & Grugel 2015). The changes these arrangements have on the day-to-day practices of civil society activists all demonstrate the processes by which everyday political activities are remade and how local civil society action may be connected to global processes (Springer 2011). Spatial analytics<sup>8</sup> therefore seem to be important for understanding the experiences of people involved in civil society, and how their everyday may (unevenly) be part of wider social processes.

EVERYDAY LIFE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO REVEAL HIDDEN POWER STRUCTURES, SPACES FOR ENGAGEMENT AND FORCES BEHIND PARTICULAR KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS

Finally, the concept of everyday life has the potential to guide us to an exploration of the hidden spaces of engagement that are part of civil society action: here, I am going to examine the emotional spaces of civil society action. Without being drawn into the theoretical debates around disparities (or lack of) between emotional, affectual and psychoanalytic geographies (see Pile 2010), all of these theoretical positions demonstrate, to put it crudely, that emotions are part of the world we live in. Although emotions can be understood as internalized feelings, feminist theories of emotional geography seek to understand emotions through socio-spatial

relations, as something that, although fluid, is made between people and their environments (Bondi 2005; Bondi et al. 2005; Davidson & Milligan 2004). Emotions are therefore integral to understanding everyday life, with examples including emotions and drinking and drunkenness (Jayne et al. 2010) and emotional engagement with photos of motherhood (Rose 2004). This inevitably raises questions about how emotions can be represented and, firstly, how we engage with ideas of everyday emotional life without a sole focus on subjective experience detached from wider social trends and, secondly, how emotional accounts can be understood (Thrift 2004; Bondi 2005; Pile 2010).

In the context of civil society, emotion can be considered as something that shapes what happens in the everyday, the actions taken and decisions made. Brown & Pickerill (2009) argue that different types of emotional engagement are key factors in sustaining individual and collective resistance and are essential for maintaining long-term activist networks. Emotions can therefore be understood as circulating between people and environments to form, sustain and challenge social relations (D'Aoust 2014), but they can also be repressed and irrational (Brown & Pickerill 2009). If emotions are understood as myriad and shifting (Brown & Pickerill 2009), in considering emotions as part of civil society, pertinent questions might be: What emotions maintain particular discourses and social relations (Brown & Pickerill 2009)? What emotions are part of and reflected in civil society practices? In the context of rights-based groups engaged with sex workers in Latin America Hardy (2012) asks, how does the emotional hue of an organization influence how it operates? An engagement with the affective aspect of everyday civil society practices therefore seems key to understanding how civil society operates, but this does not deny the difficulty of exploring this aspect of civil society without objectifying and rationalizing emotions.

#### EVERYDAY LIFE IS POTENT AND A POTENTIAL ARENA FOR CHANGE, RESISTANCE AND STRUGGLE

Moving on from the challenges of representing emotions, this final paragraph on the everydayness of civil society aims to explore everyday practices and performances of subjectivity that contribute to change, resistance and struggle. The body of work on activist subjectivities demonstrates that activist identities and performances are ingrained in everyday practices and often used selectively and strategically as a form of resistance and change (Jenkins 2015). Women protesting mining in Peru, for example, express particular aspects of femininity, using water, Mother Earth and concern for future generations to articulate their role in the anti-mining campaign (Jenkins 2015). The use of strategic subjectivities is also exemplified by Baillie Smith and Jenkins (2012a), who in their work with activists in India articulate a form of 'instrumental cosmopolitanism', where activists simultaneously engage with the spaces of neoliberal global development and critique its limitations (Baillie Smith & Jenkins 2012a). A focus on the practices of the everyday workings of political activity reveals the subjective and strategic nature of being an activist, and that the use of different identities is likely to be a routine and usual aspect of being part of civil society, often mobilized to achieve desired outcomes (Chatterton & Pickerill 2010).

#### *Conclusion*

This paper has argued for an understanding of civil society that emphasizes a move away from institutional descriptions to a story of the people who embody civil society and their everyday lives, contending that a focus on the everyday has the potential to refresh ideas of civil society (Baillie Smith & Jenkins 2012; Jenkins 2015; Obadare 2011). It is the everyday that gives civil society its meaning and the everyday that is shaped by and also reflects wider social structures and discourses, the geographical imaginaries of place and space and the emotions and specific practices of civil society. Engaging with the everyday has implications for both academic

thought and development practice in relation to civil society. A sharper focus on the everyday life of civil society in the academic arena has the potential to contribute to the bridging of the western/non-western schools of thought that have so often dominated civil society thinking.<sup>9</sup> It also brings out the possibility for a more interdisciplinary framing of civil society,<sup>10</sup> and mediates finding ways, as commented on by Ishkanian (2014), of bringing disciplines such as international development and social policy into dialogue with each other. An everyday understanding of civil society also resonates with recent scholarly work in the international development field that calls for a (re) turn to aspects of emotions in understanding development processes (Baillie Smith & Jenkins 2012a; Kapoor 2014; 2014a). These literatures perhaps highlight that there is a desire to delve a little deeper into the development arena and explore what it really means to be part of our world, as Kapoor (2014 p.1117) articulates there is a desire to 'explain the gap between development's scientific commitments and its irrational practices'. Whilst acknowledging that emotions are not easily researched, an emphasis on the everyday life of civil society fits with ethnographically informed methodologies that accentuate the importance of life experiences within the political sphere, adding to the work done by, for example, Jones et al. (2013) on the anthropology of the state policies, Megoran (2006) through an ethnographic account of border controls in the Ferghana Valley or Lazar (2013) with Argentinean trade unions. This everyday focus also resonates with Flyvbjerg's (2001) methodological guidelines for phronetic research in the social sciences.

It is only possible to speculate on what an understanding of the everyday nature of civil society might bring to development practice and policy-making, but based on contentions of this paper, an everyday understanding could reaffirm the unexpected and unpredictable nature of how development policies play out on the ground. The everyday may accentuate how development discourse unfolds in different places, through space and across scale, and it highlights the need to consider emotions, idiosyncrasies, irrationalities and informalities in every aspect of development practice. Civil society cannot necessarily be modelled and replicated around the globe; it is something much richer than that, and the everyday may encourage an understanding of the multiple spaces of civil society that may be hidden, fluid, contextual and contested. This paper has argued the everyday of civil society can serve as a space for challenging ideas about what it means to live together and can also provide a theoretical framework for nurturing an understanding of civil society in its 'actual formation' (Mamdani 1996 p. 19).

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### *Notes*

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<sup>1</sup> This was exemplified by Barack Obama in his speech in Kenya in July 2015: 'And we saw the strength of Kenya's civil society in the last election, when groups collected reports of incitement so that violence could be stopped before it spun out of control. And the ability of citizens to organize and advocate for change – that's the oxygen upon which democracy depends' (Obama 2015).

- <sup>2</sup> The use of the terms West and Western (after Hulme 2009 p.6) implies the influence of the Western Enlightenment rationality, where attempts were made to standardize and quantify the world, as well as the geographical location of such thinking.
- <sup>3</sup> See Höhn (2013), for example, of an everyday practice associated with civil society – the role of documents in activist work in Namibia.
- <sup>4</sup> Obadare (2012) discourages this concentration on civil society organizations. Here engagement with organizations is articulated as one, but not the only, way of searching for stories about the people who shape civil society.
- <sup>5</sup> Lefebvre distinguishes between everydayness and the everyday with the former used to infer routine and the latter a site for transformation (Goonewardena 2008). Here, however, I use the term everydayness to describe something that is part of the everyday.
- <sup>6</sup> Outside of the directly political sphere, Freud's early work included analysing everyday parapraxes as representative of the unconscious. Examples of parapraxes are 'slips of the tongue' or 'slips of the pen', coining the colloquial 'Freudian slip' (Freud 1973 [1916]).
- <sup>7</sup> This is distinguished from professionalization, which may be more associated with the processes of rationalization (Ritzer 1975).
- <sup>8</sup> The lived experience of time has also been discussed in relation to local politics, for example, Lazar (2014).
- <sup>9</sup> See also Edwards (2014); Lewis (2002); Obadare (2009).
- <sup>10</sup> The term civil society is often used in international development literature and practice, with concepts such as the third sector or voluntary sector more usual in social policy discourse (Ishkanian 2014).

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