Democrats and Donors:
Studying Democratization in Africa

Donors, NGOs, and the Liberal Agenda in Africa Tim Kelsall and Jim Igoe, eds.
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Since the late 1980s, political scientists, donors, and development workers in East and Southern Africa have devoted much time and resources to the question of 'democratization'. Yet, it is not clear how this concept of 'democratization' has helped us to understand African politics or if donor support for 'democratization' has been successful. There are both methodological and conceptual problems with the way democratization is used to explain processes as varied as the de-racialization of South Africa, the post-civil war effort to rebuild Mozambique, and the different patterns of change to multi-party politics in Kenya, Zambia and Malawi.

Many accounts of these processes of democratizations are ahistorical, or decontextualised from the historical and cultural situations. Secondly, institutions which are thought to enable democratizations – like churches and NGOs – are poorly understood and little studied. Assumptions, rather than empirical evidence, dominate. Such partial understandings of the societies and institutions under observation leads to inappropriate policy responses by bilateral and multi-lateral donors eager to support 'democratization'.

In this paper, I explore the ways in which the development industry has adopted and used political science concepts of 'democratization' and 'civil society' and the problems inherent with this process. I focus on the role of local or 'indigenous' NGOs as recipients of donor aid and potential agents of democratization. In order to understand why NGOs are assumed to contribute to a process of 'democratization' we need to examine both what donors think NGOs are, and their relationship with the state, as well as how this plays out in practice. In particular, we need to examine the changes that have resulted from the increased resources made available to the NGO sector. A case study of a prominent Zimbabwean Human Rights NGO, ZimRights, will be used to illustrate the problems caused by growth and expansion. First however, I want to examine the methodology and conceptualization of 'democracy' as used by donors.

I. Methodological Issues

Studies of NGOs in Africa are usually based on interview research focussing on a wide number of organizations within a particular sector.[2] Zimbabwean NGOs are amongst the

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[1] This chapter is based on material included in my DPhil thesis "Inclusion and Exclusion: NGOs and Politics in Zimbabwe" (Oxford, 2001). The argument benefited from presentation to Development Studies MPhil Core Course at Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford in 1999 and 2002, and on-going discussions with Tim Kelsall, Gavin Williams, Tina West and Tom Young.

[2] On Uganda see: Susan Dicklitch, *The Elusive Promise of NGOs in Africa* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998) and Christy Cannon Lorgen, "Non-Governmental Organisations in Transition in Uganda: A Study of the Health Sector" Unpublished D.Phil University of Oxford, 1998. On Tanzania see: Andrew S Kiondo, "Structural Adjustment and NGOs in Tanzania" in Peter Gibbon, ed. *Social Change and Economic Reform in Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1993) and Aili Mari Tripp, "Local Organizations, Participation and the State in Urban Tanzania" in Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton, *Governance and Politics in Africa* (Lynne Rienner: Boulder, 1992). On East Africa more generally: Joseph Semboja and Ole Therkildsen eds. *Service Provision under Stress in East Africa: The State, NGOs and People's Organizations in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda* (CDR: Copenhagen, 1995). On Egypt: Maha Abdelrahman, *State-Civil Society Relations: the Politics*

most studied, but these studies still conform to this tendency.[3] This method prevents detailed study of individual NGOs. It becomes less easy to interrogate certain aspects of NGO behaviour, such as internal decision-making. Neither the history of the NGO, how it interacts with the history of the country or region, nor the people within the NGO are examined, except as background detail. Thick description of how NGOs functioned is sidelined in the interest of labelling and categorizing them.

Methodology has to some extent been dictated by the research agenda of donors and international institutions. In the 1980s, official aid was increasingly channelled not to bilateral partners, but through northern NGOs to local communities or local NGOs.[4] Local NGOs were seen in the 1980s and 1990s as 'apolitical' development organizations. As a result of this emphasis, most early studies of NGOs were undertaken for donors with particular sets of questions, such as how well NGOs 'fit' demands set before them, with respect to their efficiency, participation levels, and transparency, although Tvedt argues that these values are actually rarely measured.[5] Within this agenda, NGOs were understood to be engaged in technical development practices such as health provision, rural development or poverty-reduction.[6] The interview methodology, with its emphasis on data collection, met the donor's need to assess their expenditures. It failed to position NGOs within a more political or historical setting, and to explain how they relate to the state, donors, and each other.

This decontextualization became problematic as donors and researchers took on the idea that NGOs might also contribute to expanding good governance and democratization. The landmark 1989 World Bank report, *Sub-Saharan Africa: from crisis to sustainable growth* called for economic reforms to "go hand-in-hand with good governance."[7] As part of what came to be known as the 'governance agenda,' NGOs were expected to go beyond being service providers and become active participants in policy-making.[8] NGOs and civil

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of Egyptian NGOs, DPhil Thesis, Institute of Social Studies, the Hague, 2001 and Amani Kandil, "The Non-Profit Sector in Egypt" in Helmut K Anheier, and Lester M Salamon, eds. *The nonprofit sector in the developing world* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

[3] The most comprehensive study of Zimbabwean NGOs is Sam Moyo, John Makumbe and Brian Raftopoulos, *NGOs, the State and Politics in Zimbabwe* (Harare: SAPES, 2000). Shorter, earlier studies include: Sam Moyo, *Non-governmental Organisations in Zimbabwe: Context, Role and Relationships* Working Paper December 1990; Sam Moyo, NGO Advocacy in Zimbabwe: Systematising an Old Function or Inventing a New Role? (Harare: ZERO, 1992); Ann Muir with additional material by Roger C Riddell, *Evaluating the Impact of NGOs in rural poverty alleviation,* ODI Working paper 52 (London: ODI, 1992); Diana Conyers, "Report of a study of existing NGO activity in Zimbabwe" November 1991 [study undertaken for ODA and the British High Commission in Zimbabwe]; Marleen Dekker, "NGOs in Zimbabwe: Developments and Changes since 1990" Livelihood and Environment Working Paper, August 1994; Andrew Green and Ann Matthias, *NGOs and health in developing countries* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997) see esp. Chapter 7: Zimbabwe: a country case study, 110-123.

[4] Two good discussions of the rising importance of NGOs in development assistance are: Ian Smillie, "At sea in a sieve? Trends and issues in the relationship between Northern NGOs and Northern Governments" in Ian Smillie and Henny Helmich, with Tony German and Judith Randel, *Stakeholders: Government-NGO Partnerships for International Development* (London: OECD and Earthscan, 1999), 7-35 and Olav Stokke, "Foreign Aid: What Now?" in Olav Stokke, ed. *Foreign Aid Towards the Year 2000: Experiences and Challenges* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), esp. 99-100.

[5] Terje Tvedt, *Angels of mercy or development diplomats?* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), 128-165.

[6] See for examples of studies of individual Zimbabwean NGOs, Sjef Theunis, *Non-Governmental Development Organizations of Developing Countries: And the South Smiles* (Dordrecht: Novib/Nijhoff, 1992), chapter 21: ORAP, 265-276; Kate Wellard and James G Copestake, eds.*NGOs and the State in Africa: Rethinking roles in sustainable agricultural development* (London: Routledge, 1993), Part I: Zimbabwe, 15-86.

[7] World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: from crisis to sustainable growth* (Washington: World Bank, 1989) see esp. xii, 6–61.

[8] Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton eds, *Governance and Politics in Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992), esp. chapters 1, 2 and 12.

society were integrated into previously apolitical conceptions of human development.[9] Development organizations were to be 'turned into' activist or advocacy organizations: "financing NGOs in Africa as potential agents of democracy should be at the top of donor agendas in the 1990s."[10] While interview and survey-based research helps explore *what* NGOs are doing, it is less useful in explaining *why* or *how* they become (or don't become) involved in democratization-related activities.[11] In order to do this, I propose that we need to study NGOs from *inside,* using techniques such as participant-observation that enable us to create detailed, descriptive case studies. This methodology has the benefit of positioning NGOs more clearly against the political backdrop of the country and the institutional history of the organization studied.

II. Democratization = Civil Society = NGOs?
The dominant thinking about democratization in Africa – and especially that which has contributed to policy and aid decisions by western donors – has focused around what Gordon White called a "developmental panacea" – the issue of "strengthening civil society."[12] Civil society is cited as the "missing key to sustained political reform"[13] and is often operationalized as non-governmental organizations. Thomas Carothers' useful account of American promotion of democracy abroad notes that:

> the current keen interest in this... almost forgotten concept was stimulated by the dissident movements in Eastern Europe in the 1980s [which] fostered the appealing idea of civil society as a domain that is nonviolent but powerful, nonpartisan yet prodemocratic, and that emerges from the essence of particular societies, yet is nonetheless universal.[14]

Civil society is understood as formally organized groups, ideally with democratic structures and pro-democratic norms.[15] For aid bureaucrats, supporting civil society was a low-cost alternative to unsuccessful and expensive attempts to reform state institutions.[16] The practical difficulties of funding grass-roots organizations means that most donor-support goes to "...professionalized NGOs dedicated to advocacy or civic education."[17] These groups are visible and accessible. With university educated staff, it is relatively easy for them to interact with donors and provide the desired skills of accounting and report-writing.

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[9] UNDP. Human Development Report 1992 ((New York: OUP, 1992), 26-27.

[10] Alan Fowler, "The role of NGOs in Changing State-society relations: perspectives from Eastern and South Africa" *Development Policy Review* 9 (1991), 53-84.

[11] For example, Sam Moyo, *Non-governmental Organisations in Zimbabwe: Context, Role and Relationships* Working Paper December 1990; Sam Moyo, *NGO Advocacy in Zimbabwe: Systematising an Old Function or Inventing a New Role?* Harare: ZERO, 1992; Sam Moyo, "Towards and Understanding of Zimbabwean NGOs" Paper prepared for the NANGO/MWENGO Self-Understanding Workshop, November 1995; Alan Thomas, "Does Democracy Matter? Pointers from a comparison of NGOs influence on environmental policies in Zimbabwe and Botswana" Open University DPP Working paper 31; GECOU Working paper 4. June 1995.

[12] Gordon White, "Civil society, democratization and development" in Robin Luckham and Gordon White, *Democratization in the south: the jagged wave* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

[13] John W Harbeson, "Civil Society and Political Renaissance in Africa" in John W Harbeson, Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan eds. *Civil Society and the State in Africa*(Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 1-2.

[14] Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, DC: Carnegie, 1999), 207.

[15] Nelson Kasfir, "The conventional notion of civil society: a critique" *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 36, 2 (1998), 6-7 .

[16] Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*, 157-206.

[17] Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, "The Burgeoning World of Civil Society Aid" in Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers eds. *Funding Virtue: civil society and democracy promotion* (Washington, DC: Carnegie, 2000), 11; See also, Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad,* 210-211.

Normatively and programmatically, civil society is advocated by the development community and donors who propose that funding civil society (*i.e.* support to non-state sectors) is both an end in itself and a means to an end of democratic governance. Carothers and Ottaway's critical examination of donor funding states:

> In the eyes of many donors and recipients, and even of many democratic theorists, the idea that civil society is always a positive force for democracy, indeed even the most important one, is unassailable. An active – 'vibrant' is the adjective of choice – civil society is both the force that can hold governments accountable and the base upon which a truly democratic culture can be built. There follows from this assumption the related idea that promoting civil society development is key to democracy-building.[18]

The Ford Foundation, for example, has a unit dedicated to "Governance and Civil Society" whose goal is "to strengthen the civic and political participation of people and groups in charting the future of their societies."[19] The official American development agency, USAID, funds "civil society organizations" as one of its four democracy sectors because:

> The hallmark of a free society is the ability of individuals to associate with like-minded individuals, express their views publicly, openly debate public policy, and petition their government. 'Civil society' is an increasingly accepted term which best describes the non-governmental, not-for-profit, independent nature of this segment of society.[20]

Similarly, Sweden's International Development Agency explicitly states that Sweden funds NGOs because of:

> ....its aim of contributing to democratic development of society. A large number of organisations which, between them, represent various interests and parties is viewed as a guarantee of democracy.[21]

Activists in the developing and developed world echo this usage and there has been a remarkable consensus within development and aid circles across sectors and ideologies:

> Neo-populist development theorists and practitioners extol the virtues of grass-roots non-governmental organizations....Economic liberals [emphasize] how these policies contribute to the emergence of business interests to counter-balance and discipline way-ward states. Treasury-based cost-cutters see devolution of government finance to voluntary organisations as an ideologically palatable way of reducing state expenditure. Conservative thinkers see it as a way of preserving traditional social solidarities...Radical socialists zero in on the potential role of social organizations...in transforming society.[22]

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[18] Carothers and Ottaway, "The Burgeoning World" 4.
[19] http://www.fordfound.org
[20] http://www.usaid.gov
[21] http://www.sida.se
[22] White, "Civil society, democratization and development" 180-181.

However, it also became clear to academics and practitioners that NGOs may lack the capacity to 'bring democratization', carry out advocacy activities, or 'build civil society' and tend instead towards 'gapfilling' or supplementing the state's agenda. On one level, this merely recognizes that most NGOs in developing countries are dedicated to the provision of development goods, often in co-operation with government ministries. NGOs are encouraged to go beyond this sort of gap-filling, to "...take a more pro-active, empowerment role towards democracy and development in Africa."[23] "Strengthening civil society" is declared to be a " deliberately designed and targeted activity of aid."[24] As a result, development NGOs are increasingly funded to 'network' and 'develop civil society' in addition to their more mundane development tasks.

These 'capacity critiques' propose that while NGOs don't do advocacy very well, they can be funded to do so. Donors assume that the problem is how to programme, fund, organize or otherwise catalyze democratic or participatory structures. The ready-made assumption is that NGOs want to engage in advocacy work, but merely lack the resources to do so. Questions of attitude or viability are rarely raised.

Like welfare organizations, churches, and informal markets, NGOs were 'discovered' by academics and donors disenchanted with the state in the 1980s.[25] In a rush of enthusiasm, the origins of these non-state organizations or what influences accounted for their formation, their policy goals, their activities were little studied. As Kassimir notes in relation to churches, civil society approaches "decid[ed] in advance that civil organisations are principally independent variables and assign[ed] them a role rather than analysing it."[26] This holds also for NGOs. Clark, for instance, talks of NGOs "overcoming their inhibitions and seeking closer collaboration with their governments."[27] NGOs which get too close to their own states are 'co-opted'— no longer 'real' NGOs nor part of civil society but 'defined out' because they do not fit pre-defined notions.[28] In proposing that we must distinguish between 'true' and 'false' NGOs, Clark demands that organizations fit the definitions of donors and researchers, rather than *vice-versa*.[29] Our research should instead ask questions such as: Who works for NGOs? Why? What ideological or moral convictions do they have?

The NGO literature seems to assume that NGOs spring into being fully-formed and without political ties or links, unless they are run by civil servants, MPs or Presidential wives in which case they are pathologized as Government-NGOs (GONGOs). Yet, in reality, NGO-state relations are better understood as a continuum. NGOs may have cabinet ministers as board members; staff members may be related to government officials; the President or first-lady may be a patron. NGOs which challenge the state at the local level may have excellent relations at the centre, or *vice-versa*. Linkages exist between all NGOs and power-brokers which change over time, and differing relations may exist with different levels of the state.

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[23] Susan Dicklitch *The Elusive Promise of NGOs in Africa : lessons from Uganda* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 176.

[24] Alan Fowler, "The Role of NGOs in Changing State-Society Relations: Perspectives from Eastern and Southern Africa" *Development Policy Review* 9 (1991), 78.

[25] See for example, Victor Azarya, "Civil Society and Disengagement in Africa" in John W Harbeson, Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan eds. *Civil Society and the State in Africa.* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 83-100.

[26] Ronald Kassimir, "The Social Power of Religious Organisation and Civil Society: the Catholic Church in Uganda" in *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* vol 36 no. 2 (1998), 57.

[27] John Clark, "The State, Popular Participation, and the Voluntary Sector" in Hulme and Edwards, *NGOs, States and Donors*, 47.

[28] Björn Beckman "Explaining democratization: notes on the concept of civil society" in Elisabeth Özdalga and Sune Persson eds. *Civil Society, Democracy, and the Muslim World* ([Istanbul] : Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 1997).

[29] John Clark, *Democratising Development: the role of voluntary organisations* (London: Earthscan, 1991).

These linkages are often enhanced by material but also by cultural and social connections between élites, as NGO staff often come from or seek to join the same relatively small bourgeoisie. NGOs may use their personal connections with politicians and civil servants to increase their profile and enhance their ability to accomplish their goals. School ties, church adherence, and time spent in exile, in the liberation movements, or in prison may all link NGO staff and politicians. They may also receive or be keen to receive funding from the state.[30]

III. Problematizing Voluntarism and Professionalization

The NGO sector is presumed to be based on the Tocquevillean principles of voluntary action and charitable assistance. However, the majority of NGOs do not operate on voluntary principles. Indeed, 'voluntary association' as the term was originally used to describe African colonial-era institutions was based on a distinction between traditional ascriptive associations and new, often urban, organizations which included churches, savings groups, burial societies, and sports clubs. As Wallerstein noted, they are "'voluntary' in that no one's membership was fore-ordained at birth, or automatic."[31]

Donors and policy-makers are rarely explicit about how exactly the 'voluntary sector' promotes democracy. Michael Bratton has elucidated these points in some detail. At the risk of making a straw-person of his argument, I will take his contribution to the influential Carter Centre report on Governance to illustrate ideas that often remain implicit in donor discourses.

On an institutional level, it is assumed that encouraging NGOs to do advocacy and policy-related work strengthens 'civil society' by providing "alternative structures to the monopolies of the state.....voluntary organizations can empower like-minded members to articulate a collective interest and take collective action."[32]   A more 'indirect' route to democracy-enhancement presumes that the interactions of the voluntary sector lead to the natural development of a vocal society, in what Carothers has called "the benevolent Tocquevillean vision underlying US assistance to civil society...."[33] To quote Bratton again, "voluntary organizations can promote a democratic political culture....they offer a training ground for democratic practices of governance."[34]   These ideas were further reinforced by the publicity surrounding the 1993 publication of Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* which advocated the importance of 'civic' associations for the consolidation of democracy.[35]

Civil society theory, as implemented by donors, is predicated on the assumption that voluntary organizations have the capacity and desire to both *mobilize* and *socialize* their members and the wider society.[36] Voluntary organizations are reified in this construction because their voluntary nature is the key to socialization, while their membership is presumed to be available for mobilization. Donors and others endeavouring to strengthen civil society have increasingly used this justification for channelling funds into the NGO sector.

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[30] Jessica Vivian and Gladys Maseko, *NGOs, Participation and Rural Development* Discussion Paper 49 (Geneva: UNRISD, 1994), 34.

[31] Wallerstein, "Voluntary Associations," 322.

[32] Michael Bratton, "Enabling the voluntary sector in Africa: the policy context" in Carter Centre, *African Governance in the 1990s* (Atlanta, Carter Centre, 1990) 104.

[33] Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad,* 222.

[34] Bratton, "Voluntary sector" 104.

[35] Robert Putnam with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Nanetti. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); See for instance, "Pro bono publico – Civics lessons" *Economist* 6 February 1993.

[36] Ronald Kassimir, "The Social Power of Religious Organisation and Civil Society: the Catholic Church in Uganda" in *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 36, 2 (1998), 56.

But is it really this straight-forward? Are NGOs necessarily based on voluntary action? The increased funding, in particular, further complicates these assumptions. With access to large amounts of donor funding NGOs become 'professionalized,' functioning instead as implementing agencies:

> With increased funding has come increased demands for accountability, professionalism, and demonstrated impact of activities. As a result, many NGOs have begun to transform themselves, reducing the voluntary part of their activities in favour of staff being trained as professionals and having explicit professional qualifications.[37]

The implications of this shift from voluntary to professional staff can be profound, but has not yet been taken account of by donor agencies and mainstream researchers. An ODA report which engages specifically with the issue of the impact of external funding and professionalization on local NGOs considers only half of the problem. The researchers recognize that NGOs are particularly vulnerable to internal crisis and personnel turn-over after their first tranche of major funding. In this case, professionalization is a trend in which older, volunteer members are replaced by younger, professional staff.[38] However, professionalization also occurs when members *become* the professionalized staff, a particularly volatile combination where both the government and private sectors are less attractive career options. This group of staff not only feels 'ownership' of the organization, but they are also seen as 'professional' experts – a potent and heady combination.

Impact of professionalization and growth on ZimRights

In the case of ZimRights, the growth of the organization and the steady progression of members becoming staff led to very serious organizational conflicts, and the collapse of the NGO. An examination of the broader history, impact of donor funding and organizational development of ZimRights helps us to understand the organization's vulnerability to external and internal challenges.

ZimRights was founded in 1992 by a group of prominent professionals and activists.[39] It was Zimbabwe's only significant NGO dedicated explicitly to human rights issues. As such, it was perhaps inevitable that ZimRights was both visible and controversial within Zimbabwean politics. Indeed, since its founding ZimRights has rarely been out of the headlines, ironically, most often providing the story itself, rather than uncovering human rights abuses.

ZimRights was both a membership organization and a professionally-run NGO. Its offices provided membership services and co-ordinated donor-funded programmes. The latter included projects run by the Education, Information and Legal departments. The Education department organized civic education workshops in peri-urban and rural areas. The Information office, staffed by a steady stream of foreign interns, mainly issued press releases and published the membership newsletters. The Legal Desk, which came into being in May 1996, gave legal advice to members and clients, as well as the organization. The grass-roots of ZimRights were its estimated 14 000 members. Membership gave ZimRights a particular cachet with donors, who want to work with grass-roots organizations. Further,

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[37] Henrik Secher Marcussen, "NGOs, the State and Civil Society" *Review of African Political Economy* 69 (1996), 415.

[38] ODA, " The Impact of External funding on the capacity of Local NGOs." Final Report Number R5968 N.D, *see especially 40-52*. See also the less detailed article based on this research, Mick Moore and Sheelagh Stewart, "Corporate Governance for NGOs" in *Development in Practice*, 8, 3 (1998).

[39] "New Human rights organisation formed" *Herald* 22 May 1992.

the existence of ZimRights' members gave a certain weight to its pronouncements in the press. Yet a membership survey which I carried out in 1997 suggested that most members felt they had neither been adequately informed nor involved in the organization.[40] Indeed, membership lists, which would enable members to at least receive newsletters, have tended to be sketchy and addresses frequently incorrect. Relatively few members ever actually received the publications of the information desk. The Gweru chair claimed that none of the 300 plus members of his branch ever received a ZimRights publication.[41]

In contrast, ZimRights' élite is the Advisory Board — composed of well-known public figures who lend prestige to the organization, such as Sir Garfield Todd, the former Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, Enoch Dumbutshena, a former Chief Justice, Chenjerai Hove, the award-winning author, and Morgan Tsvangirai, the trade unionist. Members were represented through a structure of regional committees, known as Regional Councils, the chairs of which were automatically members of the National Council, the main policy-making body, to which others were also elected at the AGM. Councils did not exist consistently in all provinces, but have tended to reflect the existence of donor-funded projects, which catalyze membership and organization. Some regional councils were quite actively involved in nationally-driven activities such as workshops and election-monitoring, while others pursued local human rights cases brought to their attention. In rural areas, some regional council members were involved in complaints relating to land tenure, for instance attempts to remove squatters, disputes over land ownership or water usage rights. More recently, they also supported communities displaced by political violence.

In between the membership and the Advisory Board is the National Council which used to oversee much of the day-to-day management of the organization, but since 1994 the Executive Director and staff took on increased responsibilities and the Council met less frequently. This was a matter of regret for some older members who remembered the old 'activist' days fondly. Inevitably there was been conflict between Council and staff, as many of the older members believe that they had more commitment to the issues than the new, younger, staff.   Council members, especially those based in Harare or Bulawayo, did continue to exercise some authority until 1996, as they sat on committees which supervised particular areas or programmes. However, these 'activist' council members tended to demand input into day to day management, leading to staff complaints of interference. In reaction, committees were abolished, except on an 'ad-hoc' basis, further reinforcing staff control over decision-making.[42]

Many older council members – those who recall the 'good old days' – suggested that the people employed by ZimRights were not 'activists' like those who started the organization. The current staff were thought to be influenced by 'nine-to-fiveism' and expected to be paid for the time they put in outside regular office hours, although this reflects a wider attitude in the Zimbabwean NGO community, reinforced by the dire economic situations of many. However, ZimRights did not see a simple withering of the Council. Former Council members formed the backbone of the secretariat as well — of the twenty-four employees in 1997, six were former National Council members, and these were often in particularly powerful positions within the organization.

As more staff were hired divisions between staff and membership became blurred. When ZimRights was formed, all the staff of ZimRights were volunteers, who were paid allowances and eventually given salaries.   Subsequently, ZimRights has expanded immensely, moving from two part-time staff in 1993, to three full-time staff members in

[40] ZimRights, "Self-evaluation report" March 1997.
[41] Memo from the Gweru Chair of ZimRights to the National Director, 16 December 1996.
[42] Issues raised at Institutional Development Workshop, 5-6 April, 1997, see Thoko Ruzvidzo and Alice Zinyemba, *Report on ZimRights Institutional Development Workshop*, 5-6 April, 1997, n.d. esp. pp. 18-19.

1994, to eight in 1995, eleven in 1996, twenty-four in 1997, and forty in 1998. External evaluators in 1997 recommended the decentralization of the secretariat which resulted in the opening of regional offices all requiring their own staff. This might have contributed to ZimRights strengthening its membership base and diminishing the power of the Harare central office, but at the same time it strengthened the Secretariat.

In addition to the six former National Council members who became staff members, other positions were filled by ZimRights members and/or volunteers who turned voluntary positions into paid ones. While it is difficult to be conclusive, my research suggests that at least half the secretariat from 1996 onwards were members or volunteers who had fundraised and created full-time jobs for themselves.

Indeed, for some, being active in an NGO like ZimRights is only possible when unemployed, but it is also seen as a 'job' in so far as it occupies one's time, inspires respect in the community, and brings in some remuneration. It is not insignificant, perhaps, that a listing of National Council members for 1999-2001 identifies 8 out of 20 as 'unemployed' – although some of them might dispute this label, preferring to be described as self-employed or retired.[43] The saliency of this issue is most strongly revealed in the dependence on 'per diems' given to members for attending meetings. Theoretically, per diems cover out-of-pocket expenses, recognizing that receipts are rarely available on informal-sector transport. In reality, though, the money is an incentive to attend, or at least a reward for attending. For Harare based participants, 1997 AGM transport expenses were unlikely to have been higher than ZWD 30 (USD3), for transport from most suburbs to the city centre, where transport was organized to take delegates to the conference centre in an outlying suburb. However, all delegates received ZWD100.00 (USD10.00) attendance allowances per diem, which grew to ZWD200 in later years.

Most ZimRights' activities were organized by the staff and not the membership. They tended not to emphasize human rights *per se* – instead they resembled civic education and legal aid projects run by other NGOs throughout the country. While the membership structures did channel some grass-roots concerns to the national level, most staff were occupied with relatively uncontroversial donor-funded 'projects'. Occasionally, the ZimRights information office responded to current political events by issuing press releases. While many of these were picked up by the government and independent media, reference to particularly sensitive incidents provoked attack from the ruling party.

Within a month of its formation, ZimRights was forced to defend the inclusion on its board of former Chief Justice Enoch Dumbutshena, denying any link with Dumbutshena's Forum for Democratic Reform Trust, which went on to become the Forum Party.[44] And then, at the official launch, Garfield Todd, the former Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister, attacked the state press, comparing their editors to the three monkeys who see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil. In the racially charged environment, this was interpreted in the worst possible way by the state-controlled *Sunday Mail*: "Zimpapers editors are monkeys."[45] And, in the same speech, he also criticized the decision to promote Perence Shiri, former commander of 5 Brigade, to Air Force Commander, which led to another acrimonious exchange in the media, in which Defence Minister Moven Mahachi challenged Todd's record on human rights while Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia.[46] ZimRights was again targeted in the official media in November 1995, in the aftermath of a rally protesting police brutality. While pursuing petty criminals, police officers accidentally shot and killed three

[43] ZimRights. "ZimRights National Council, 1999-2001 April".

[44] "We are not Political, says ZimRights" *Weekend Gazette*, 5 June 1992, 5.

[45] "Zimpaper editors are monkeys, says Todd" *Sunday Mail*, 30 August, 1992, 1.

[46] "Fifth Brigade – Mahachi replies Todd" *Sunday Mail*, 6 September 1992, 1; "Don't point accusing finger – ZimRights" *Herald* 9 September 1992, 3.

by-standers. The protest march organized by ZimRights, degenerated into rioting and looting. In an inflammatory speech, President Mugabe labeled ZimRights "ZimLooters" and a "gangster organization." ZimRights denied that the rioting and looting had any link at all to their protest, suggesting that the march had concluded and dispersed long before the riots, and that ZANU(PF) youths were responsible for the violence.[47]

In 1996, ZimRights also came under attack in the government-controlled media, for their support for a sustained and damaging strike by doctors and nurses. ZimRights provided the striking workers with sanctuary and access to telephones and faxes. On their own front, ZimRights issued several press releases to the media about the need to resolve the strike issue, and in particular, appealed to MPs to find a solution, which led to a very critical discussion of the issue in Parliament.[48] ZimRights was attacked for this very visible and public support of the nurses and doctors in both a *Herald* news story and an editorial, which claimed that the strike was 'hardly normal' and alleged outside interference. The editorial claimed that ZimRights had been used as a conduit to transfer ZWD 2 million from 'foreign well-wishers' to the nurses and doctors, although this was firmly denied.[49]

A more pro-active project was undertaken in 1996 when it was proposed that ZimRights conduct research on the controversial and little-known human rights abuses in Matabeleland with the intention of publishing a book. Although donor funding was forthcoming, and the ZimRights leadership supported the book project, it was bogged down in in-fighting and turf-disputes. The text was finalized by December 1996 by May 1997, the book was ready to go to the printers. Publication was delayed for two years after the election of a new National Council which demanded to read and consider the draft. Those with personal knowledge of the Matabeleland conflict wanted their experiences included and were concerned that it missed events they considered significant. Eventually, the text was judged to conform with the demands of the National Council, giving them a sense of ownership over the project. In February 1999, the book was again deemed ready for printing. Publication was delayed until October, however, because of controversies between staff and council members about the title of the book and responsibility for the foreword. In the end, the Executive Director wrote a foreword and the book was released in October 1999 nearly two years after its text was finalized.[50] By this time, discussion of the Matabeleland conflict had become less sensitive owing to widespread media discussion and the acceptance of culpability by some party and army officials.

The Matabeleland book was probably the most controversial project undertaken by ZimRights between 1992 and 1999. The book was both a product and a victim of ZimRights' organizational culture. The informality of ZimRights' office life allowed an American intern to get approval for the book from the Executive Director and Chairman:

> Chimhini [the director] was initially very supportive because he wanted the organization to be seen to be doing 'serious work' like other NGOs that publish books and document abuses ... Matchaba-Hove [the chairman] appeared to be most concerned about what the donors would think and how

[47] Cris Chanaka, "Mugabe labels Zimbabwe human rights activists gangsters" *Reuters* 13 December 1995.

[48] ZimRights Information Dept, "Junior Doctors and Nurses Strike: Report to ZimRights Advisory Board and Council" 6 December 1996.

[49] "Fired Nurses await pledged cash" *Herald* 24 December 1996, 1; "Editorial: Nurses and doctors strike was hardly normal" *Herald* 25 December 1996, 4; ZimRights Press release, "The Herald Xmas day comment" 27 December 1996.

[50] ZimRights, *Choosing the Path to Peace and Development*: Coming to terms with Human Rights Violations of the 1982-1987 Conflict in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces (Harare: ZimRights, 1999); "ZimRights releases report on '80s atrocities" *Financial Gazette*, November 11, 1999; "ZimRights launches book on civil strife" *Herald* 5 November 1999.

they would react...he did not want the project to jeopardise funding for the organization by being too controversial, but once the donors lined up with funding, then he showed some support.[51]

However, their commitment to the project was passive, because there were more potential costs than benefits to such a controversial project and publication was easily delayed once the newly elected Council members expressed concern. The book's eventual publication, with which staff members credit Director David Chimhini, was probably influenced by donors who wanted the organization to account for the expenditure of their funding.

As this account suggests, ZimRights did come under attack from the state and its intelligence operatives, but it suffered more grievously from internal, personalized conflicts arising from the blurred distinction between members and staff. To date, these have been little considered in accounts of ZimRights' troubled history, which either ignore ZimRights problems, or blame them all on malicious infiltration.[52]

ZimRights' first Secretary-General was the former director of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) Nick Ndebele, who, it is widely believed, had been forced to resign from the CCJP in 1991 owing to accusations of financial mismanagement.[53] These allegations made Ndebele an ambiguous figure, but many continued to respect his championing the cause of those tortured and brutalized in Matabeleland in the 1980s. Ndebele "...with no thought for his own safety, had traveled through the troubled areas of Matabeleland and the Midlands interviewing people who had been the victims of atrocities."[54] He did not escape unscathed. As previously discussed, Ndebele was arrested and detained under the Rhodesian-era Law and Order Maintenance Act. He and his family were also been traumatized during the conflict, in which several relatives were detained, tortured or killed.[55]

In 1992, after serving as Secretary-General of ZimRights for only a few months, Ndebele was replaced by Ozias Tungwarara, after further accusations of financial irregularity – charges he always strenuously denied, but which were lodged by the highly respected Zimbabwe Project, which had been providing offices and access to phones for ZimRights, as well as 'banking' their monies. They claimed that cash advances had been requested by Ndebele, of which the Council had remained unaware.[56] Ndebele later claimed that his dismissal was because in 1992 he had again highlighted issues around the Matabeleland massacres— alleging that human remains found near a CIO building were linked to the Matabeleland disappearances.[57]   Nevertheless, as a member of the organization, Ndebele continued as chair of the human rights education committee, and, as we shall see, was given a full-time job organizing human rights education in 1994.

After this initial controversy, ZimRights grew gradually and relatively smoothly from 1993 until 1995 under Tungwarara's leadership. Programmes and budgets had expanded and

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[51] Personal Communication, Charles Cater, 7 August 2001.

[52] See for instance, Sarah Helen Chiumbu, *Democracy, Human rights and the Media* Masters Thesis University of Oslo, Dept of Media and Communication 1997; David Jamali, "How to sustain a human rights organisation in the face of challenges and sabotage: a case of ZimRights - Zimbabwe" unpublished paper, Coady International Institute, 2000.

[53] "Catholic Commission director quits" *Sunday Mail*, 31 March 1991, 3.

[54] Auret, *Reaching for Justice*, 162.

[55]   Auret*, Reaching for Justice* 161-2; ZimRights, *Choosing the path to Peace and development*, (Harare: ZimRights, 1999) section 4.3; Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Zimbabwe: Wages of War* (New York, Lawyers Committee)*,* 28.

[56] Anonymous National Council Member, "A case study of ZimRights" 8; "ZimRights man replaced" *Herald* 4 November 1992, 1; Interview, Nick Ndebele 27 November 1996; Interview, Nick Ndebele 27 September 199

[57] Interview, Nick Ndebele 27 September 1999.

ZimRights acquired new staff members and moved in 1995, from cramped city-centre offices to a spacious, if somewhat run-down, house on the outskirts of the Central Business District. In the tenser political environment of 1995, which was an election year, ZimRights began to feel they were being targeted by a 'destabilization' campaign, typified by Mugabe's labelling them "ZimLooters."[58] This feeling of attack intensified in late 1995 when a document was circulated accusing Tungawarara of sexual misbehaviour. ZimRights has always claimed that this was planted by the CIO. Despite support within the organization, he left soon afterwards. He was replaced by David Chimhini, a ZimRights member and former employee of the Zimbabwe Teachers Association.

Despite his dismissal as Secretary-General, Nick Ndebele had remained a member of ZimRights, and he had returned as a paid employee of ZimRights, in 1994, working as education officer until 1996. When Tungwarara left, Ndebele applied for his job: "as the second most senior employee" Ndebele felt that he was the "obvious" successor to Tungwarara.[59] However, when asked in his interview how ZimRights should relate to the CIO, Ndebele says he answered that it was best to make information available to the CIO, so as to "clear misunderstandings."[60] Soon after this, a story appeared in the respected weekly *Financial Gazette* saying that Ndebele had admitted to being a CIO agent, and the job went to David Chimhini.

Ndebele lost his job as Education Officer with ZimRights the next year, when Ford Foundation funding for the project expired. But soon after, a new department for civic education for community theatre, funded by Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) was opened and therefore the new civic education officers were hired, who had both worked in the Zimbabwe Association of Community Theatre (ZACT).[61] Ndebele claimed that the new director, David Chimhini, had manufactured the move from Ford Foundation funding to the NPA project as an excuse to get rid of him. The claims that Ndebele was a CIO informant continue to reverberate, despite an apology made by Reginald Matchaba-Hove for the rumour at the 1997 AGM.[62] Many of Ndebele's former close associates steered clear of him and concerted efforts were made within the organization to prevent him holding an elected office at either regional or national levels, though these proved unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, despite these internal conflicts, ZimRights grew even more rapidly under Chimhini's guidance. The numbers of staff more than doubled between 1996 and 1997, and then doubled again between 1997 and 1998. Similarly, membership doubled from a claimed 3000 in both October 1995[63] and April 1996,[64] to 6 000 in May 1997,[65] to 10 000 in 1997, and 14 000 in 1998.[66] This growth served to exacerbate internal tensions further. Unemployed, and smarting from rejections, Nick Ndebele had made no attempt to hide his interest in either the Directorship or the Chairmanship. He was unsuccessful in his bid to win control of the Harare Regional Council in 1997 but was subsequently elected to represent Harare on the National Council.[67] In 1999, he was unexpectedly elected Chair of the

[58] ZimRights, "Minutes of the ZimRights 3rd AGM, 27-28 April 1996", 4.
[59] Interview, Nick Ndebele, 27 September 1999.
[60] Interview, Nick Ndebele, 27 September 1999; This is, I suspect, standard practice for most NGOs in Zimbabwe. See for instance, Peggy Watson, *Determined to Act: the first 15 years of the Women's Action Group*, pp. 40-41, which notes that WAG had always invited the CIO to their workshops and provided them with copies of workshop reports. Many other Zimbabwean NGOs report similar relations to the CIO.
[61] Interview, Emma Chiseya and Cousin Zilala, 8 October 1996.
[62] Research notes, ZimRights AGM, Adelaide Acres, 10 May 1997.
[63] ZimRights, Director's report to the 2nd AGM October 1995, 1.
[64] ZimRights, Report of the 3rd AGM, 27-28 April 1996, 8.
[65] ZimRights, National chairman's report to the 4th AGM, 10 May 1997, 2.
[66] ZimRights, 1998 Annual Report, 18.
[67] Research Notes, ZimRights Harare Regional Council AGM, 19 April 1997.

Council. When Reginald Matchaba-Hove resigned the Chair in 1999, the anti-Ndebele faction felt sure that they had guaranteed the election of academic Charles Nhachi as Chair and Paul Nyathi as Vice-Chair.[68] Indeed, they have accused Ndebele of unfairly influencing 'naive, rural' voters into voting for him as an anti-élite candidate.[69]

It was clear from the outset that, despite protestations to the contrary, David Chimhini, who had presided over Ndebele's departure as education officer, would be unable to work with Ndebele, and *vice-versa*. Ndebele began to articulate political positions which were very much at odds with the attitudes of most other NGO élites. Influenced by a particular strain of radical Africanism, he wrote a letter of support to President Mugabe over Zimbabwe's intervention into the Congo War.[70] Similarly, he backed campaigns against the white judges, who Mugabe was also attacking.[71] He later tried to pull ZimRights out of the National Constitutional Assembly framework, just as it was squaring up to the government.[72] At a time when politics in Zimbabwe was becoming more and more polarized, the closeness of policy between ZimRights and the President's pet projects was interpreted by observers as complicity. Council members might not agree with statements being issued by Ndebele, but they had no formal sanction. They were dispersed across the country and communication with them was not always possible, nor was it feasible to arrange *ad-hoc* meetings. Unlike Matchaba-Hove, who was on the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Zimbabwe and kept up a profitable private practice, Ndebele was unemployed or periodically self-employed and quite prepared to become a full-time Chair.

Over the next months, the conflict between Ndebele and Chimhini degenerated into rival allegations of sexual, financial and administrative misdeeds, carried out through the press and the courts, as Ndebele first stage-managed Chimhini's dismissal, and was later forced to resign himself.[73] The toll of this conflict was to be extremely damaging for ZimRights, the organization. Staff members, caught in the middle of this conflict, fled to more stable jobs. Donors began removing their financial support soon after Ndebele's election as Chair, in response to letters from Chimhini.[74] Lack of donor funds, and court costs, forced ZimRights to sell its headquarters to settle its debts.[75]

Understanding ZimRights' Collapse

ZimRight's demise had a number of causes. These included: a protracted and unequal confrontation with the Zimbabwean state, the internal dynamics of the organization in a setting where NGOs become a preferred source of employment for their ostensibly 'volunteer' members and the funds with which donors supplied it. All of these factors should lead us to be skeptical that NGOs – by virtue of their 'voluntary' nature – represent a panacea

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[68] Much of the following is based on interviews with: Munyaradzi Bhidi, Acting Director 13 September 1999; Peter Maregare, Legal Officer, 13 September 1999; Paul Themba Nyathi, former National Council Member, 16 September 1999; Weston Kwete (member) and Never Gadaga, former Information Officer, 24 September 1999; David Chimhini, [Former] Director, 4 October 1999; Interview, Reginald Matchaba-Hove, Zimbabwe Human Rights Association, 8 October 1999.

[69] Interview, Paul Themba Nyathi, Zimbabwe Human Rights Association, 16 September 1999; Interview, Reginald Matchaba-Hove, Zimbabwe Human Rights Association, 8 October 1999.

[70] Basildon Peta, "ZimRights fumes over chairman Ndebele's praise letter to Mugabe" *Daily News,* 11 May 1999.

[71] Interview, Nick Ndebele, 27 September 1999. See also, "Ndebele's fate in the balance", *Standard* 23 May 1999; "Gubbay, ZimRights boss clash over alleged racism" *Financial Gazette*, 6 January 2000.

[72] "ZimRights unhappy with NCA decision" *Chronicle*, 26 July 1999, 9.

[73] For an attempt to untangle this web of allegations, see Sara Rich Dorman, 'Inclusion and Exclusion: NGOs and Politics in Zimbabwe' (University of Oxford, 2001), Chapter 5, esp. 123-164.

[74] Interview, Clare Morris and Hilary MacKay, Westminister Foundation, London, 30 January 2001; Letter from David Chimhini to unspecified donors, dated 10 September 1999.

[75] Collin Chiwanza, "ZimRights puts office on sale" *Daily News* 10 August 2001.

for donors trying to foster grass-roots advocacy as part of some larger governance or civil-society project.

Even if one discounts assertions that ZimRights was the victim of CIO machinations, the organization was in an isolated position throughout its brief existence. Without the protection of a larger body grounded in Zimbabwean society – the CCJP, for example, was bolstered by its position within the Catholic Church – it had little protection when singled out for attack. ZimRights was also one of the only NGOs in Zimbabwe which occasionally used Moyo's oppositional tactics by issuing press releases and organizing demonstrations. No other Zimbabwean organization was so regularly attacked in the media by President Mugabe and such pressures contributed to internal tensions and suspicions. Yet, at the same time, ZimRights' only pro-active attempt to document human right abuses – the Matabeleland book – was initiated and carried through almost entirely by volunteer interns from the US, Canada, and Sweden.

Perhaps even more crucially, the resources to which ZimRights had access made it a site of even more determined contestation. Its objectives as an advocacy organization were undermined by the job-creating and resource-distributing functions it came to serve. For example, one of the issues of conflict between David Chimhini and Nick Ndebele in 1999 was a proposal to remove sitting allowances for Council members and staff to attend meetings. This was a particular threat to those councilors who were unemployed, many of whom were allied to, or sympathetic to the position of, Ndebele who played a populist card against the 'élite'.

The intra-organizational divisions are on one level merely a fight between two disparate personalities and their factions, exacerbated by both sides' willingness to use the press to press their points. Ndebele's relation, Weston Kwete, became a reporter for the explicitly pro-ZANU *Sunday Mail* and leaked many of the anti-Chimhini stories. On the other hand, the independent press did publish a vituperative exchange between Chimhini and Matchaba-Hove on the one side versus Ndebele and the former ZimRights' information officer, with the dubious, but high-profile, backing of Jonathan Moyo.[76]

However, while this reveals the dangers implicit in hiring councillors as staff it also reflects the ability of a large, professionalized secretariat to alienate membership. Ndebele has always described himself as the founder of ZimRights and feels that he deserved more respect from the organization. ZimRights under Chimhini's leadership had gained a high profile and large increases in donor funds, all of which had merely led to the organization distancing itself from its roots. Donors developed particularly good relations with Chimhini, who is articulate and speaks their language well.

This conflict between advocacy and employment was, ironically, aggravated by the donor funding, upon which ZimRights came to depend. Many donor-dependent organizations go through similar explosive spurts of growth, often accompanied by crisis. ZimRights was clearly a case of the 'flavour of the month' syndrome in that it was so popular it rapidly raised money from multiple sources. While Oxfam is reported to have a rule that an annual budget increase of more than 25% is likely to lead to organizational difficulties,[77] ZimRights, in just one of the years studied, is reported to have multiplied its budget nearly five-fold.[78]

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[76] Never Gadaga, "ZimRights infighting open's a Pandora's box" *Independent* 21 May 1999; David Chimhini, "Gadaga's ramblings on ZimRights complete lies" Letter to the Editor *Independent* 4 June 1999; Reginald Matchaba-Hove, "Attack on ZimRights reveals wider covert strategy" *Independent* 4 June 1999; "ZimRights breaks all the tenets of democracy- Ndebele"*Independent* 11 June 1999; Jonathan Moyo, 'ZimRights leader's stooping too low" *Independent* 11 June 1999.

[77] Moore and Stewart, "Corporate Governance" End-note, 3.

[78] ZimRights. Executive Director's Report to the Fourth Annual General Meeting. 10 May 1997, 2.

Whether or not NGOs are 'naturally' voluntary, the increased funding throughout the 1990s has made this claim less and less relevant. The collapse of ZimRights, at a time when human rights observers were particularly needed is an extreme example. The people who have lost out are the Zimbabweans, especially those displaced by the recent violence, who have need of both documentation of their rights and protection from those abusing them. ZimRights members too, still have great faith and hope in their organization. Donors, on the other hand, have merely transferred their funds to other, perhaps equally vulnerable, organizations.

IV. Pragmatic Decision-making

We can now turn to the implications of these multiple misunderstandings of how NGOs function and how they relate to the state. NGOs derive diverse benefits from their newly increased roles. While sceptics point to the material benefits of NGO careers – and these are not insubstantial – we should not ignore the 'immaterial' yet substantive benefits which churches and mosques have long recognized when they have gained converts through the provision of health or education services.[79] NGOs, like any organization, take pride in their growth and high-profiles locally and internationally and senior positions in NGOs may bring with them considerable public recognition. There is also a potential down-side to the 'profitability' of the non-profit sector. Entrepreneurs may also form NGOs to provide employment, prestige and connections to the well-resourced development sector, rather than for any commitment to abstract ideals advocated by donors.

In Zimbabwe, it is widely accepted that NGOs use non-confrontational tactics, variously defined as entryism and inclusion, to influence various levels of state and party apparatus.[80] My research has focussed on the efforts of a few 'activist' NGOs to mobilize their colleagues to lobby the government over three policy issues: economic structural adjustment, legislation brought in to control the NGOs, and the Constitution. In every one of these cases, the activist NGOs met substantial obstacles. Other NGOs were not interested, were suspicious of their intentions, and preferred to use 'non-confrontational' methods or to work through government-approved channels for expressing discontent.[81]

Although the 'beneficiaries' of NGOs are often defined simply as those whom the programmes are designed to benefit, the term should probably include the entire network that relies upon NGO funding, such as employees and consultants.[82] In some cases, this wider group is seen as merely part of societal patronage networks. Leaders of NGOs are thought to seek to enhance their own prestige, rent-seeking potential, and client base.[83] Such analyses pathologize these NGOs for abandoning the voluntarist, altruistic goals of 'real' NGOs. It

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[79] Helmut K. Anheier and Lester M. Salamon, *Defining the nonprofit sector : a cross_national analysis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 366-367.

[80] Sam Moyo, *NGO Advocacy in Zimbabwe: Systematising an Old Function or Inventing a New Role?* (Harare: ZERO, 1992); Stephen Burgess, "NGOs and the State in Africa: Competition and Conflict Avoidance in rural Zimbabwe" Paper presented to the African Studies Association Annual Meeting, Toronto, Ont. Canada, 3-6 November 1994, 20.

[81] S. R. Dorman, "'Rocking The Boat?' Church-Ngos And Democratization In Zimbabwe" *African Affairs*, January 2002 Volume 101, Issue 402, Pp. 75-92; S. R. Dorman 'NGOs And State In Zimbabwe: Implications For Civil Society Theory' In B. Beckman, E. Hansson And A. Sjögren (Eds.), *Civil Society And Authoritarianism In The Third World* (Stockholm, Podsu, 2001); Sara Rich Dorman "From The Politics Of Inclusion To The Politics Of Exclusion: State And Society In Zimbabwe, 1997-2000" paper presented to the International Research Seminar On 'Rethinking Land, State And Citizenship Through The Zimbabwe Crisis', Copenhagen, 4-5 September 2001.

[82] Sheelagh Stewart, 'Happily ever after in the market-place" NGOs and uncivil society" *Review of African Political Economy* 71 (1997), 24.

[83] Michael Bratton, "Micro-democracy? The merger of farmer unions in Zimbabwe' *African Studies Review* 37, 1 (1994), 12.

seems more important to think critically about the political implications of such motivations on the part of NGO staff, leaders and hangers-on. How do the incentives to work for and gain office in NGOs, the increased stakes in doing so, and the personal motivations of office-holders influence the way in which NGOs and interest organizations interact with the state?

Where the state remains relatively administratively competent, typically, all the 'sticks' — closure, deregistration, investigation and co-ordination — and 'carrots' — tax exemption, access to policy-makers and public funding — are seen as emanating from the state, while the NGOs have little, if any bargaining power.[84] NGOs may therefore seek access to the state to influence its policies as well as to avoid conflict or secure protection.[85] As Fowler noted in his well-grounded study of Kenyan NGOs, "it appears that more can be achieved by appearing to support, respect, and improve prevailing systems, rather than openly agitating against them."[86] NGOs often initiate these interactions with states – and are not always 'co-opted' by the state. As development organizations, NGOs exercise strategic pragmatism in order to ensure that their clients continue to benefit from the 'goods' they bring. Fowler's thesis extends this point and emphasizes that "providing welfare services can be an important factor allowing other, more politically sensitive, work to take place."[87] The Undugu Society in Kenya, which both provides services to street-children and advocates for policy reform, "pursues an emancipatory agenda through a managed mix of macro and micro activities designed to reinforce each other so exploiting the limited development space that exists and the opportunities which arise within it."[88] NGOs, therefore, may refrain from political activity in order not to risk their primary goal but, at the same time, their role as development organizations also enables them to press for certain policy changes. NGOs have good reason to value harmonious relations with the state and cultural élites. At the same time, as NGOs become more professionalized, and are run by large staffs rather than by volunteers, the interests of the staff may begin to predominate over those of the membership. Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy' operates in NGOs as well as political parties.[89]

V. Conclusion: Pathologizing *versus* Romanticizing
My critique of the romanticization of NGOs in Africa has been one of several similar projects. Amongst a plethora of writing on NGOs, a few significant studies which have emerged from research based mostly in East Africa, deserve serious consideration. Jim Igoe and Greg Cameron, studying pastoralist NGOs in Tanzania, emphasize the ways in which donor agendas shape NGOs, and the multiple ways in which NGOs become little more than new patronage vehicles for 'big men' in rural communities.[90] In contrast, Tim Kelsall's study of NGO operations in north-eastern Tanzania, is more interested in the attempts of NGOs to enhance communities' abilities to undertake collective action. Kelsall is profoundly critical of the liberal development agenda of NGOs, but also questions the extent to which they accomplish their ends. In his account, the NGOs are unsuccessful in fostering participation, accountability or democracy within the community because of the way in

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[84] David Hulme and Michael Edwards eds , *NGOs, States and Donors: too close for comfort?* (London: Macmillan and Save the Children, 1997), 13.

[85] Beckman "Explaining democratization: notes on the concept of civil society" 5.

[86] Alan F Fowler, "Non-governmental organisations and the promotion of democracy in Kenya" (DPhil Thesis, Sussex, 1994), 293.

[87] Fowler, "Non-governmental organisations and the promotion of democracy in Kenya," 288.

[88] Fowler, "Non-governmental organisations and the promotion of democracy in Kenya," 291

[89] Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy* Trans. Eden and Cedar Paul. (New York: Free Press, 1962).

[90] Greg Cameron, "Taking stock in Tanzania: Pastoralist NGOs and the Indigenous Question" paper presented to the Association for the Study of Anthropology, 2000; James Igoe, Ethnicity, Civil Society, and the Tanzanian Pastoral NGO Movement. Unpublished PhD Thesis Boston University, 2000.

which they impose their agendas.[91]   Also concerned about 'liberal development', David MacDermott Hughes' very different methodology enables him to examine the interaction of NGOs with local people in remote areas of Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Hughes effectively identifies not only the ways in which NGO-led participatory workshops marginalize local peoples, but also their potential to eat away at land and resource entitlements of rural groups.[92]

   All of these recent studies suggest that we are right to be critical of claims and assertions about NGO abilities: "there is no magic bullet."[93] Not only is there little evidence that NGOs are either more efficient or more participatory than other development schemes, but the exact opposite may be true.[94]   What Stewart calls the "NGOs do it cheaper, better faster" argument seems to have little evidence backing it up.[95]   However, there is a new danger of donors and academics falling out of love with NGOs and descending instead into an equally problematic discourse which pathologizes NGOs, suggesting that they are nothing more than new power resources for élites. In the words of a recent, iconoclastic approach to African Politics, NGOs are:

> ... a successful adaptation to the conditions laid down by foreign donors on the part of local political actors who seek in this way to gain access to new resources....NGOs are often nothing other than the new 'structures' with which Africans can seek to establish an instrumentally profitable position within the existing system of neo-patrimonialism....The use of NGO resources can today serve the strategic interests of the classical entrepreneurial Big man just as well as access to state coffer did in the past.[96]

While such an account may provide a useful balance to earlier effusions, its reluctance to take NGO activists seriously betrays an equally limited approach. The authors dismiss NGOs summarily as merely saying what the donors want to hear,[97] which is more of an *ad-hominem* attack than analytical reasoning or empirical evidence. While the romanticization of NGOs needs reconsideration, so do approaches which conclude that they fail in all capacities. Instead, NGOs need to be understood as organizations bound up in power relations on various levels.

   Studying both the organizational encumbrances of NGOs and their position within the ideological sphere or political culture may help us explain their inter- and intra-organizational decisions. Situating NGOs within their political context and considering internal processes avoids both the romanticization and the more recent pathologizing of NGOs which dominate the literature. Considering the continued weight placed upon NGOs in donor discourses and funding, such an approach is not only timely, but necessary.

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[91]   Tim Kelsall, "Subjectivity, Collective Action, and the Governance Agenda in Tanzania" unpublished Ph.D. thesis , School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London 2000; for a more concise account of his argument see also, "Subjectivity, Collective Action and the Governance Agenda in Arumeru East" QEH Working Paper 42, June 2000.

[92]   David McDermott Hughes, "Rezoned for Business: How Eco-tourism Unlocked Black Farmland in Eastern Zimbabwe", *Journal of Agrarian Change,* Vol.1 No.4,October 2001, 575 –599.

[93]   Jessica Vivian, "NGOs and Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe: No Magic Bullets." *Development and Change,* 25 (1994), 167-193.

[94]   Terje Tvedt, *Angels of mercy or development diplomats?* (1998),137-157; Henrik Secher Marccusen, "Comparative advantage of NGOs: Myths and realities" in Olav Stokke, ed. *Foreign aid towards the year 2000: experiences and challenges*, 259-285.

[95]   Stewart, "Happily ever after" 13.

[96]   Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), 22.

[97]   Chabal and Daloz,   *Africa Works,* 117.

Participant-observer research is a particularly valuable way of avoiding such pathologizations. After reading a particularly controversial case study – involving allegations of sexual harassment, financial mismanagement, and government infiltration – one of my informants said,

> Your characterization of ZimRights seems on target...a few things are left vague and unanswered, but maybe that is best after all.…..It is OK not to have all the answers. In some ways it really confirms the need to take a very close look and use 'thick description'. If you had done an organizational analysis from a macro perspective, none of these scandals would even come up on the radar screen – and they really tell a big part of the story as far as ZimRights is concerned.[98]

Understanding intra- and inter-organizational dynamics as a participant-observer enables the researcher to make sense out of apparently incongruous evidence and guards against tendencies to romanticization and pathologization of NGOs.

This suggests a need to reconsider the methodological and theoretical basis of 'democratization' . The understanding of democratization as a re-configuration of state and society relations in a series of very different and complex post-colonial societies should affect our choice of research techniques. Whitehead notes in a significant re-assessment of the interaction between theory and empirical research on democratization: "the best and perhaps the only, way to grasp the dynamics of a long-term open-ended process is through narrative-construction."[99] If we conceptualize democratization "as a complex, dynamic, long-term and open-ended process...then the type of theory-building and hypothesis-testing that would be possible and appropriate...would be interpretative rather than demonstrative."[100] This brings us back to a more Weberian social science, where the purpose of research is " interpretative understanding of social action...and causal explanation of its course and consequences."[101]

Complex and dynamic processes are best studied using a multiplicity of methodological tools. Interview research, participant-observation, and documentary evidence reinforce each other and reflect different aspects of the process under study. Organizations like NGOs benefit from being studied from the 'inside' so as to generate 'thick description' and capture their internal decision-making processes. Documentary evidence enables the study of changes within discourses. Interview research is a necessary, if not sufficient, tool for clarifying information, and allowing the subjects of the study to speak directly to the topic. Together, these methods provide the material through which we can construct historical narratives that enable understanding and explanation.

We need to present a much more complex and historicized vision of the role played by NGOs and churches in state-society politics. Yet at the same time, we must avoid demonizing or otherwise dismissing as 'un-African' those political actors keen on reform or who work for NGOs. These are important lessons for academics and the donor fraternity, many of whom either accept at face value teleological narratives of democratization (and are then baffled by the lack of 'democracy' in post-transition societies), or see Africa's political cultures as irredeemably collapsing into chaos.

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[98] Personal communications, Charles Cater, 19 and 20 July 2001.

[99] Laurence Whitehead, "On Theory and Experience in Democratization Studies" draft chapter forthcoming in Laurence Whitehead, *Democratization: Theory and Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 10.

[100] Whitehead, "On Theory and Experience," 1, 2.

[101] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: an outline of interpretive sociology* ed. and trans. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, (New York, Bedminster, 1968), vol 1, 4.