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# **Developing a ‘civil’ society in partial democracies: In/civility and a critical public sphere in Uganda and Singapore**

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## Abstract

The fostering of a critically engaged citizenry and robust civil society are championed as cornerstones of democratisation and development, particularly in partially free or unfree democracies. The role, dispositions and practices expected of both citizens and civil society organisations are often contested, demonstrating differing approaches towards and understandings of public participation in political life and the public sphere. This paper explores the social and normative construction of civility as a tool of governmentality. Drawing upon evidence regarding the role, functioning, and challenges facing civil society in efforts to entrench an open public sphere and engaged citizenry in two partial democracies, Uganda and Singapore, we reflect upon the ways in which such efforts respond to – and are shaped by – the developmental state model, and how discourses of in/civility are deployed to constrain more critical interventions and enactments of citizenship and civil society.

## Introduction

Nation-building agendas inherently involve efforts to construct and inculcate expected practices and dispositions of citizenship. Linked to these efforts are policies and practices that determine the availability of – and rules relating to the use of – a (critical) public sphere and the role and functioning of civil society therein. Integral to these practices, key values and behaviours are instilled through practices of governmentality and expressed through particular vocabularies (Staeheli and Hammett, 2010). Such endeavours are intended to develop and underpin specific, contextually-grounded understandings and manifestations of national identity, ‘good’ and ‘active’ citizenship, economic growth, and democratisation. Although typically driven by national governments, these agendas are informed by negotiations of global geopolitical agendas and interventions including agendas for good governance, democratisation and a civilizational geopolitics (Jeffrey, 2008).

Reflecting on the politics of democratisation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jeffrey (2008) locates the discourse of civility at the heart of interventionist agendas and efforts to forge a nation within a post-conflict environment. Such practices have historical precedence; from colonial ‘civilising missions’ to the present, ideals of development and modernisation locate those living outside the laws of the state as uncivilised, in contrast with those citizens who are active and law-abiding participants, and thus deemed as being civilised (Flint, 2009; Scott, 2009; White, 2006). These efforts demonstrate how normative approaches to civility provide for contextually-rooted definitions that form “a set of principles and assumptions relating to social [and political] behaviour set out by elite arbiters” and which underpin a relational dynamic determining and valorising desired political and social behaviours that are situated in opposition to unacceptable or uncivil practices (Jeffrey, 2008: 741).

Socio-economic and political conditions, historical experience and memory frame these understandings which are, in turn, expressed through discursive and pedagogical practices including legislation, educational content, political rhetoric and the actions of the institutions of government. Civility, therefore, becomes a tool of governmentality deployed within pedagogies of citizenship and efforts to promote and delineate ‘good’ citizenship and civil society (Jeffrey and Staeheli, 2015; Pathak, 2013; Pykett, 2010; Scott, 2009). The reception

of these ideals, however, provides moments of tension as normative expectations are questioned, adapted or rejected (Hammett, 2008; Jeffrey and Staeheli, 2015). Such moments allow us to think about civility as a “lens for political critique” (Jeffrey 2008: 741). However, whereas Jeffrey (2008: 741) argues that “the question is no longer what does it mean to be civil but rather how do judgements of civility shape political life in any given locality”, we examine how contestations of the meanings *and* judgements of civility intersect as tools of governmentality. Of specific concern is how meanings and adjudications of civility are used to monitor, control and curtail the promotion and development of civil society in hybrid political systems.

International development agencies locate civil society as essential for socio-economic development, a vital space for citizen participation within a critical public sphere, and both a marker *and* constituent element of the entrenchment of accountable, democratic governance (Friedman, 2010). Good governance and neoliberal development agendas have positioned civil society as a key development partner and funding recipient to promote democratisation *and* act as a service delivery and development project partner (Rombouts, 2006). Simultaneously, governments seek to manage, co-opt or marginalise civil society to minimise their potentially oppositional and critical nature, with such practices illustrating competing understandings of what civil society ‘is’ or ‘should be’, what it ‘does’ and ‘how it does’ its function as civil society. Against this backdrop, we pick up on Jeffrey’s (2008) provocation and ask whether civil society must be civil in what it does? Some argue that it must, placing civility (and its etymological roots relating to courteousness and good citizenship) and associated public behaviour and progressive social relations at the heart of the concept. However, such an approach risks ignoring dominant power relations and control of the public sphere in determining what is or is not civil. In this article we examine how civility is deployed as a tool of governmentality by states in (de)legitimising which groups are recognised as civil society *and* the activities and strategies they can use to mobilise, advocate and engage. The article begins with a critical reflection on the nature and purpose of civil society in non-Western socio-political contexts. The next section builds an understanding of the concept of civility and the potential use of this notion as a tool of governmentality. We then detail the empirical underpinning to this paper, outlining the politico-legal contexts of civil society in two hybrid political systems: Singapore and Uganda. Drawing upon interviews with civil society activists we examine how discourses (understood here as a form

of power which constitutes knowledge and understanding within a social field) of civility and incivility are deployed as tools of governmentality over civil society, and civil society's responses to these.

### **Civil Society in Non-Western Contexts**

Civil society is positioned as a key space *for* and *of* development and democracy within which citizens interact, debate and seek to hold governing elites accountable (Friedman, 2010; Paffenholz and Spurk, 2006; Robinson and Friedman, 2007). Civil society organisations (CSOs) have emerged as vital implementing partners for development projects and interventions, viewed by the UNDP as “facilitator, watchdog, catalyst, and policy advocate in implementing national development agendas” (UNDP, 2008: 3). In 2015, the UK's Department for International Development distributed roughly 20% of their bi-lateral aid budget through CSOs (DfID, 2016). Despite such privileging, CSOs often face challenges from governments seeking to marginalise their activities and constrain the critical public sphere (Dorman, 2006; Lewis, 2001; Young, 2004).

Critics, however, caution that efforts to promote the role of CSOs in development and democratisation have been used to promote “narrow neoliberal agendas to developing countries, rather than exploring and supporting alternative forms of social democracy” (Hickey, 2002: 842; also Volpi, 2008). Others have gone further, questioning the relevance and applicability of Western notions of ‘civil society’ to non-Western contexts (see discussion in Hammett, 2013), notably in relation to the blurring of boundaries in organisational life with the state, market and family (see Chabal and Daloz 1990). Meanwhile, De Heredia (2012) suggests African civil society functions as an ambiguous space both supporting and resisting state-building efforts. Despite these reservations, continued impetus for the development of civil society has culminated in a ‘paradigm of civil society participation’ (Rambouts, 2006) and rapid proliferation of CSOs across the global south. This prioritising of civil society for development and democratisation in non-Western contexts means it is vital to understand how these organisations are able to function to promote democratic development (within hybrid political systems wherein multiple forms of

overt and covert disciplining power are deployed to curtail the spaces of and activities within the critical public sphere), the limits placed upon them and their responses to these

In light of these debates, the extent to which CSOs are able live up to the expected ideal of civil society, as being the “realm in which the promise of democratic participation becomes a reality... the organisations that citizens form in order to enjoy a say, and to try and ensure that government responds to their needs and is accountable to them” (Friedman, 2010: 119), warrants critical reflection. Thus, our concern is to think about civil society as a space of governmentality, as both a concept and space shot through with discursive power that frames not only the meaning of civil (society), civility and civilised but also associated practices and dispositions. Such practices are evident in how major development donors define who constitutes civil society and what activities (and involving whom) they will fund (see Staeheli et al., 2014), as well as the myriad ways national governments seek to co-opt or restrict civil society’s functioning through both legal acts defining civil society *and* the use of bureaucratic procedures as tools of governmentality (as are explored below).

These often competing agendas have significant implications for who is recognised as civil society, what they can do, with whom, and how (see Staeheli et al., 2014). Thus, while ideas of civil society are often rooted in ideas of civility and civic duty (often related to ideals of ‘good’ citizenship (Staeheli and Hammett, 2013)) the partiality and discursive power of these terms means CSOs may act and/or be labelled as acting in ways that are (simultaneously) civil and/or uncivil (Lynch and Crawford, 2011; also Obadare, 2009). Achieving consensus on ‘what’ or ‘who’ is civil society remains challenging, not least given the ways in which practices of governmentality are deployed to produce a politics of contingency intended to impose a view of the expected behaviours, dispositions and practices – the ‘civility’ of both citizens and civil society – intended to underpin modernisation agendas and Western-style liberal and neoliberal values (Hammett, 2013; Naqvi and Subadevan, 2017; Volpi, 2008).

## **Civility and Civil Society**

Jeffrey and Staeheli (2015: 481) argue that the promotion of citizenship often emphasizes “behaviors [that] are associated with civility”. Such efforts seek to promote both a ‘civil’ society (a set of behaviours and dispositions expected of good citizens (Staeheli and Hammett, 2013) which may be associated with a focus on elements of a ‘good society’ and associational life grounded in ideas and practices of altruism (Yeung, 2006)) and a ‘civil society’ (an arena of civic participation). Given that civil society can be “identified with everything from multi-party systems and the rights of citizenship to individual voluntarism and the spirit of community” (Seligman, 1997: 5) we need to address the etymology of the term civil/civility and its relationship with civil society.

Within colonial practices, discourses of civility and incivility were used to differentiate civilised settlers from uncivil indigenous populations and justify oppressive policies (Terreni Brown, 2014). Civility emerged as a key discursive tool of governmentality; ordering society and delimiting un/acceptable behaviours linked to a sought-after body politic, and promoting self-government and conditional forms of citizenship (Flint, 2009; Friedman, 2004; Pathak, 2013; Scott, 2009; Turner, 2008). These practices continue to be used to govern citizens and CSOs and inscribe limits to (political) debate (for instance, President Lee Kuan Yew’s (2011: 185) “laying down of out-of-bound markers” for media engagements with politics in Singapore).

Within Western political thinking, the notion of civility has been linked to liberal democratic thinking, the centralisation of sovereign power and evolution of expected behaviours of the public (Volpi, 2011; White, 2006). Thus, many approaches to civility draw from the term’s linguistic roots (from Old French *civilite* and the Latin *cititatem*, *civitas* and *civilis* and, more recently, in relation to good citizenship or the state and behaviour of being civilized) to frame civility in relation to courteousness behaviour towards others and a sense of identity and commonality beyond kith, kin and other hierarchical social relations (Calhoun, 2000; Davetian, 2009; Volpi, 2008). This etymology, Forni (2002: 12, 14) states, “reminds us that they are also supposed to be good citizens and good neighbours” who “do the right thing by others”. Going further we see how expectations of civility extend to the practices and dispositions of ‘good citizenship’ and carrying out expected ‘actions’ of citizenship (Calhoun, 2000; Isin, 2008). Balibar (2001) advances this, suggesting civility should be conceptualised

as a ‘cosmopolitics of human rights’, used to (re)build unity and achieve progressive change through political actions for ‘antiviolence’ aimed at securing emancipation and democratisation from below (Balibar, 2015). Cohen (1992), meanwhile, suggests civil society needs to be understood as including both *civil life* (non-governmental social life) and *civility* (defined as actions taken on behalf of other individuals that take the welfare and well-being of others into account). However, as Obadare (2009: 245) outlines, the literal reading has tended to dominate leading to a focus on “civil society ‘behaving well’ – promoting democracy, civil rights and good governance – as opposed to ‘behaving badly’” and “civil society [being] reduced to ‘manners’, ‘distinction’, even ‘class’” (252). This concern asks us to question the assumption that there is a single ‘right thing’ to do by others, and to reflect on both the implicit and explicit power structures which determine who defines the meanings and dispositions of civility in the local context.

Thus, the reductive approach outlined above can be seen as a formal rather than substantive engagement, focussing on the ‘civilities’ of daily life (Boyd, 2006) or the ‘anatomy of civility’ (Davetian, 2009). This thinking is pervasive, underpinning popular academic engagements including the Johns Hopkins Civility Project, P.M. Forni’s (2002) *Choosing Civility*, and Kent Weeks’ (2011) *In Search of Civility*, as well as government responses to antisocial behaviour (see Bannister and O’Sullivan, 2013; Gaskell, 2008; Galdon-Calvell, 2015). The emphasis in these texts is ‘common’ or ‘everyday’ civility as efforts to counter the ‘coarsening’ of society (Forni, 2002) through reciprocal relations and enactments of “manners, courtesy, politeness, and a general awareness of the rights, wishes, concerns and feelings of others” (Weeks 2011: 6). Similarly, Forni (2002: 5) positions civility as a “code of behaviour based on respect, restraint and responsibility” which allows us to connect with others in thoughtful ways. Building on this, Weeks’ (2011) argues that deference to others – notable those in power – should also be understood as a component of civility (the resonance of this approach with understandings of differing forms and practices of ‘respect’ lie beyond the scope of this paper, but see Hammett, 2008). This approach risks providing a framework for engagement which “authorizes certain forms of dialogue at the expense of others and as a mechanism of pacification whereby constraints are placed on dialogue to give voice to the marginalised” (White, 2006: 445). Thus, a critical reading of civility highlights its potential power as a tool of governmentality.



Reductive approaches to civility are critiqued as providing a veneer of tolerance and acceptance deployed to manage or govern public(s) behaviour and conduct, rather than to create genuine spaces of/for meaningful interaction (Flint, 2009; Valentine, 2008). Instead, civility may be used as a governmental tool to restrict and prevent critical dissent and discussion, exclude others and maintain social, economic or political privilege (Papacharissi, 2004; Volpi, 2011). Thus, governmentality may be achieved through various mechanisms, including privileging manners and etiquette over heated debate or the strategic deployment of discourses of civility to delegitimize critical voices and curtail the critical public sphere. In such contexts, we witness how “civility has evolved as a vehicle and an effect of power” (White, 2006: 446), confining the public sphere to dominant, privileged voices who adhere to the ‘rules’ of civility (often cast as ‘politeness’) in public debate (Papacharissi, 2004; but see Jackson and Valentine (2014) on how incivility can close down online debate).

### **Civility, governmentality and enforcement**

Discourses of civility are overtly and covertly deployed as a tool of governmentality to foster particular types and practices of citizenship and civil society. As Jeffrey and Staeheli (2015: 494-5) outline, “concepts of civility may discipline individuals to comport themselves in ways that are conducive to particular social norms”. Going further, Scott (2009) argues that notions of civility are formed in the image of power-holders, requiring the adoption and adherence to specific practices, departments and dispositions as subjects of the state. Civility is thus often prioritised over justice, transparency, debate and accountability. Indeed, Boyd (2006: 864) cautions that civility can be used regressively, as “a conservative or elitist disposition connected with the preservation of inequality and the status quo” (also Jeffrey and Staeheli, 2015). In such situations – where civility is used to foreclose the critical public sphere – questions remain as to whether citizens and civil society should engage in uncivil practices or subvert the ‘civil limits’ placed upon them?

Various scholars would argue that when the goals of justice and self-respect differ from dominant social conditions it may be necessary to disrupt dominant ideas and norms of civility, overriding conceptions of civility-as-‘law-abidingness’ (Calhoun, 2000; Forni, 2002: 166). Thus civility can be seen as a “*communicative* form of moral conduct” (Calhoun, 2000: 260) reliant upon a shared understanding of civil interactions, behaviours and performance.

Therefore if a group feels they are denied (the conditions of) civility then the reciprocal obligations to demonstrate the demanded or expected forms of civility may be disputed (see Bannister and O’Sullivan, 2013; Boyd, 2006; Hammett, 2008). Thus, reciprocity is key (Weeks, 2011): I will display civility towards you if you display civility towards me. However, challenges arise from differing conceptions of what is civil (Volpi, 2011), and when civility becomes a hierarchical concept through which elites and power-holders assume and demand civility-as-deference.

These concerns may be particularly pronounced in the global south where Dorman (2006) identifies how post-liberation politics are often beset by tensions between rights and democracy, loyalty and critical political participation. In such contexts, states often curtail the critical public sphere and activities of civil society in order to promote a hegemonic discourse of nationhood, belonging and citizenship. Such conditions may often result in the need to “pay out to dominant groups larger measures of respect, tolerance and considerateness” while disadvantaged groups are marginalised and treated contemptuously “because they [elites] interpret such contempt as civilly displaying the appropriate measure of respect” (Calhoun, 2000: 266). Thus, discourses of civility are strategically used to demarcate and marginalise uncivil groupings while being mobilised to justify (uncivil) uncivil excesses of power to maintain the status quo (Volpi, 2011: 30; also Altan-Olcay, 2012). In extreme situations, these practices situate any dissenting political debate or activity designed to promote substantive democracy, and governmental transparency and accountability as being uncivil. Thus, while “political contestation is not necessarily inconsistent with civility” (Jeffrey and Staeheli, 2015: 12) limitations to a critical public sphere may result in all such acts being deemed uncivil and embody a lack of formal or substantive civility (Bannister and O’Sullivan, 2013). Therefore, we see how discourses of civility can be deployed as a tool of governmentality to delegitimise civil society and suppress dissent (Boyd, 2006).

Contra to this, Sparks (1997: 75) argues for the importance of ‘dissident citizenship’ as a set of “oppositional democratic practices that augment or replace institutionalized channels of democratic opposition when those channels are inadequate or unavailable”, which may be disruptive but are “creative oppositional practices of citizens who... contest current arrangements of power from the margins of the polity”. Similarly, Boyd (2006: 863) argues

against the use of discourses of civility as a regressive tool to stifle social change, instead calling for civility to “be understood as democratic, pluralistic and premised on a sense of moral equality” and for recognition of forms of ‘uncivil behaviour’ as “assertions of freedom and individuality in the face of the objective or disciplining force of urban life” (Boyd, 2006: 870). However, such practices risk being delegitimised for being reflective of ‘uncivil society’ and labelled as anti-democratic and “discursively exclusionist, undemocratic or violent” (Ruzza, 2009: 87).

The distinction between civil and uncivil society is thus far from clear cut. Obadare (2009: 251; see also De Heredia, 2012; Hammett, 2013) argues we should critically reflect on uncivil society as the activities used to “articulate the discontinuities in the social system, and to create a sort of ‘profane’ public sphere” in contexts lacking a critical public sphere. This understanding of uncivil society encompasses everyday forms of resistance which may be deemed as uncivil because they “undermine and demythologise hegemonic power and create certain kinds of truth while also contesting the politics of belonging” (Hammett, 2013: 135) and may be met with efforts to strictly curtail and delimit what practices, languages and (forms of) criticism are permitted: witness efforts in Zimbabwe to outlaw derogatory references to cheap, poor-quality Chinese imports as *zhingzhong* (Fontein, 2009) and clamp down on critical depictions of leading politicians (Hammett, 2011), and court cases and extrajudicial pressures against cartoonists in Nigeria and South Africa (Hammett, 2010; Obadare, 2009). In conditions where formal, invited spaces of civil participation are non-viable, marginalised groups may adopt strategic practices of in/civility to create invented, informal spaces of participation as a response to “the otherwise laudable requirement to treat others civilly... plac[ing] a disproportionate burden on groups in society who [then] have to shout or behave in ways that are deemed uncivil in order to be heard” (Boyd, 2006: 873). Going further, Boyd (2006: 874) suggests that it can “add insult to injury to expect groups that are themselves regularly disrespected or ignored to subject themselves to standards of civility. Why should they be obliged to behave with respect and politeness to others when they are regularly treated with contempt and disrespect—oftentimes by these very same people?” (Boyd, 2006: 874). The rest of this paper addresses how discourses of civility are encountered as tools of governmentality which strain the relations and practices of civil society. To this end, we draw upon investigations into the practice of in/civility amongst CSOs in Uganda and Singapore.

## **Researching civil society in Uganda and Singapore**

Former British colonies, Singapore and Uganda have endured differing post-colonial state- and nation-building projects framed by regional economic and geopolitical concerns and contrasting levels of domestic political stability. They are both marked by hybrid political systems, with a concentration of political power amongst a dominant political party pursuing developmental state ideals while seeking to minimise internal ethnic divisions.

Historical ethnic differences and growing geographical inequalities mark the Ugandan political landscape and complicate nation-building efforts. Singapore's efforts to overcome communalistic sentiments and develop a highly cosmopolitan society reflect a complex socio-cultural population which includes historical diasporic populations and high proportions of temporary residents and work-permit holders (Kong and Yeoh, 2003: 193). Since independence from Britain (1963) and Malaysia (1965), the Singaporean state has been controlled by the PAP (People's Action Party), allowing the entrenchment of a strong developmental state approach to national unity and development – a development approach subsequently adopted by the Ugandan government. While this model has contributed to tremendous economic development in Singapore, this has enforced a paternalistic narrative of obedience to centrally-dictated national development agendas and strict regulation of political activities.

Uganda's post-colonial political history demonstrates far less stability, characterised by ethnically-rooted conflicts and violent transitions of power. The 1986 ascent to power of the National Revolutionary Movement (NRM) brought a period of greater political stability (at the expense of political plurality through the introduction of a 'no party' political system which, in reality, meant a 'hegemonic party system' (Hickey, 2005: 998) until the reintroduction of multi-party politics in 2006). Throughout this period, the NRM sought to decentralise government and increase local political participation, while at the same time curtailing the political sphere and space for civil society to operate. The civil society sector in Uganda is, therefore, relatively young but rapidly growing, from less than 200 registered NGOs in 1986 there were 12,500 registered NGOs by the end of 2013 (Uganda NGO Forum, 2015: 2).

These practices indicate a historical resistance to critical civil society and efforts to co-opt this sector to support national developmental policies. In Singapore outright resistance to civil society in the 1980s gave way to a strategic co-opting and directing of civil society and active citizens during the 1990s. This policy shift reflected a sense among PAP leaders of the importance of state oversight of

this sector to ensure there was a positive “mutually reinforcing relationship between the state and society” with state oversight to prevent “civic organisations [being] plagued by internal disputes. There are deep cultural reasons for this. The separation of powers is not a tradition in Asian society. Without central leadership, many Asian societies do not hold together naturally...” (George Yeo, Minister for Trade and Industry, 2003).

Speaking in 2004, the then Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong, argued for Government to be guided by “the community with regard to morality and decency issues”, encouraging civil participation but cautioning that any criticism which undermined the government would be rebutted (Loong, 2004). This delimiting of the space and role of civil society reflects a longer history of efforts to curtail and co-opt civil society through tight control over acceptable limits to the practices and engagements of civil society in daily and political life, including ordinances to “rein in the early activist tendencies of the trade unions” in 1968, a tightening of control over media freedoms and introduction of ‘out of bounds’ markers for political topics in popular debate, as well as increase restrictions on the funding and activities of CSOs.

These restrictions are underpinned by three ordinances. The Societies Act (1967) utilises the notion of public order to restrict and control societies and freedom of association by requiring most organisations of more than 10 people to register with – and be approved by – the government; only registered associations may engage in organised political activity, thereby restricting free speech and assembly. The Sedition Act (1985), Public Entertainments and Meetings Act (2001) and Public Order Act (2012) further limits the freedoms of civil society as well as of assembly and speech, justified as necessary to prevent “protest, criticism and expression culminat[ing] in nuisance or something even more serious”<sup>1</sup>. These ordinances link ideas of public order to notions of peace, safety and tranquillity- or, put another way, an embodiment of civility-as-public-order, enforced through controls (and punishment) over the generating of loud noise in public places and regulation over the times and places of public discussion. Thus, while Speakers’ Corner was established in Hom Ling Park in 2000 as a space allowing greater freedoms of (political) speech and assembly for citizens (but denied to those without this status) within a clearly demarcated space, significant limitations over the use of and extensive surveillance of this space remain in place. The need to pre-register to use this space, as well as continued limits to free speech and assembly under Articles 14(1)(a) and (b) of the Constitution of Singapore in order to protect security and public order have meant many CSOs have criticised Speaker’s Corner as an ineffective ‘token gesture’.

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<sup>1</sup> Chee Siok Chin v. Minister for Home Affairs [2005] SGHC 216, [2006] S.L.R.(R.) [Singapore Law Reports (Reissue)] 582, High Court (Singapore).

Thus, despite this (partial) opening up a specific space to permit more freedom of debate, The Societies Act continues to restrict the scope of civil society on the grounds of public order interest. The Act requires all organisations (not already lawfully registered under other statutes) comprising ten or more persons to be registered with and approved by the Registrar of Societies. Affected groupings include those representing or discussing issues relating to clan, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender and sexuality, political associations, organisations advocating or discussing civil or political rights (including animal, environmental and human rights), and groups discussing issues relating to how Singapore society is governed. This registration and approval process, coupled with continued reporting and monitoring activities, provides the Singaporean government with surveillance and control opportunities, and the ability to limit the existence, focus and activities of civil society organisations. Concomitantly, this means that many CSOs also exercise great care and are strategic in defining their direct aims and objectives, often seeking to tread a fine line between operating within the legal requirements of the Societies Act while continuing to engage in critical debate and to foster a critical public sphere.

At such moments tensions are evident between efforts within CSOs to develop an open space for civil society to engage in critical debate and practice, while the state seeks to retain control and purview over this sector – as George Yeo suggested in 1991, drawing on the Banyan tree as a metaphor, that it remains important for the state ‘prune judiciously’ in order to maintain control over and shape the development of civil society as civic society (as a manifestation of social life) (discussed in Devan 2017; vi). This emphasis on civic rather than civil society echoes the linking of (good) citizenship to familial obligations, social capital and national (economic) development, thus prioritising communal rather than liberal citizenship (Thompson, 2014). These moves embody centralised developmental narratives and provide powerful discourses to determine not only the issues with which civil society can engage, but also the activities and language they can utilise amidst broader efforts to resist increased citizen participation in governance (see Freidman, 2015). Consequently, Singaporean civil society is often located within a social rather than political arena, required to embody civil(ity) as being ‘respectful’ of laws and norms and ‘peaceful’ in activities while contributing to economic development goals and efforts to create racial and social harmony (as witnessed in the annual courtesy campaign, introduced in 1979, and focussed on encouraging citizens to be more courteous and to think of others on public transport, in everyday life, and to contribute towards an engaged and harmonious citizenry).

Similar conditions are evident in Uganda, where state oversight of civil society and the public sphere is rooted in restrictive legislation – such as the Public Order Management Act (POMA) (2013) and Non-Governmental Organisation Bill (2015) – as well as practices of state surveillance and

extra/judicial harassment of political opponents and civil society activists. As Robinson and Friedman (2007: 647) have observed, the Ugandan government has effectively used “constitutional provisions to control freedom of association and expression, inhibiting the functioning of civil society groups”. Human Rights Watch (2012) has identified how the civil society landscape in Uganda has been encouraged to develop to support and provide service delivery, while being discouraged and intimidated when seeking to engage with issues of political change, corruption and accountability. This framing of the space for civil society in Uganda is echoed in the opening justification for the Non-Governmental Organisations Act, 2016. When proposed as a Bill in 2015, this was prefaced with a clear view of what role civil society *should* play in Uganda, “It is well known that the Non-Governmental Organisations sector compliments Government service delivery through the provision of services like health, education and water among others. It has however been noted that the rapid growth of Non-Governmental Organisations has led to subversive methods of work and activities” (2015: 1). The preamble to the NGO Act (2016) reiterates this shaping of the civil society landscape by the state when stating that the Act was intended “to strengthen and promote the capacity of Non-Governmental Organisations and their *mutual partnership with Government*” (emphasis added). The content of this legislation, along with the POMA and Anti-Homosexuality Act have been described as “legislations [that] potentially create difficulty for the effective democratic engagement in the country. The government has created a clear systemic architecture for repression” (Chapter Four, 2015: 3) and displaying a “perceivable mistrust by the government towards the activities of NGOs” (Ibid, 3).

The measures outlined in this legislation mark a clear move towards increased state control over civil society but couched within a language of regulation that is worded in vague terms which, activists fear “open the door to the control and silencing of peaceful government critics and activists” (Chapter Four, 2015: 7). Crucially, the deployment of the concepts of ‘public interest’, ‘public order’, ‘non-partisan’, ‘interests of Uganda’ and ‘dignity of the people of Uganda’ are nebulous concepts which, as in Singapore, provide the government with a mechanism through which to limit civility on the topics and practices of popular political engagement. The NGO Act provides the foundations for the mechanisms of surveillance and control to enact these limiting practices. While the requirement for a member of the National NGO Board to have 10 years’ experience of security matters was removed between the Bill (2015) and Act (2016), there remains a requirement for internal security officers to sit on both District and Sub-County NGO Monitoring Committees. This presence, coupled with the requirement for NGOs working in a District or Sub-County to submit not only budgets and details on funding but also workplans to these Committees, provides the state with enhanced mechanisms for oversight and control through the providing, renewing or revoking of NGO permits based upon intelligence gained through these Committees.

Thus, while the NGO Bill (and latterly, Act) was presented as a means to “provide a conducive and enabling environment” for NGOs and civil society (2015: 1) the institution of increased and onerous

registration requirements, oversight and disciplinary indicates a move towards control and curtailment rather than enablement and support. These mechanisms, and continued reference with legislation towards ‘cooperation’, ‘mutual partnership’, ‘shared responsibility’ and service delivery clearly signpost the expectation that civil society would work to support the government’s development plans and policies, rather than functioning as a critical watchdog or operating as a sector independent of the State.

Civil society in both Uganda and Singapore faces multiple challenges, including state control and surveillance, political disengagement amongst citizens and difficulties in empowering communities and mobilising of rights-based discourses, and negotiations over their role (as providers of essential services, as a bridge between citizens and the government, as critical voices seeking to hold the state accountable). To explore how discourses of in/civility are deployed as tools of governmentality over civil society, as well as civil society’s responses to these efforts, we draw upon empirical research drawn from interviews with CSO actors and leaders in Uganda (10 interviews) and Singapore (5 interviews) plus observational methods in both countries. Interviews were conducted over a four-month period in 2015. These interviews were conducted in English, transcribed verbatim and analysed using NVivo software to highlight the role of civil society and how CSOs are (un)able to operate in each context and their negotiations of the boundaries of civility. Our discussion and analysis are not intended to present a comparative analysis of the two contexts, rather we draw upon these data to address the normative and social construction of civility as a tool of governmentality as part of agendas towards democratisation, development and a civilizational geopolitics (Jeffrey, 2008).

The linguistic contextuality of the terms civil, civility and civil society (noted above) delimit the argument of this paper. The discussions presented relate solely to Anglophone usages of these terms as do not engage with how these concepts are deployed in other languages –(or instance, civil society in French is referred to as *société des citoyens*, translated as ‘society of citizens’). As our argument is based solely on Anglophone uses of the terms civil, civility and civil society, it cannot be unquestioningly translated or transposed to other languages – including the vernacular languages used in both Singapore and Uganda. The continued privileging of English in both Uganda and Singapore as official languages, and their widespread use in official documents and communications means that it is possible to explore the use of civility as a tool of governmentality in these contexts.

### **Contesting the role of civil society in Uganda and Singapore**



Civil society in Uganda and Singapore faces various challenges in mediating what their role *is* and *should be*. In both contexts, CSOs are faced with mediating relations with a disinterested – but simultaneously – co-optive state, negotiating strict restrictions on their topics, practices, partners and spaces of engagement, achieving sustainability of funding and resourcing, and facilitating political participation amongst a disengaged public.

In the face of such challenges, many CSOs viewed their role as not simply being a bridge between citizens and the government, but as an agent of education and empowerment and a critical advocate for citizens in an inequitable context,

“representing people out there who don't have their voice, representing people who want to improve their lives and they can't do that on their own. We look at ourselves as a bridge between those who can't say anything to those who can do something about their situation. In this case we are looking at improving the life of the common person” (Uganda A)

“Civil society under the most normal of circumstances should be like a bridge between the people and the government... And I think in Uganda, civil society originally played a facilitation process but more and more is getting into the actual battle ground” (Uganda B)

The idea of civil society becoming a ‘battle ground’ reflected concerns over the introduction of restrictive legislation, perceptions of increased state surveillance and harassment, and continued efforts to delegitimise critical engagements by civil society aimed at promoting transparency and accountability (Boyd 2006). These concerns underpinned tensions over *what* civil society should do: activists in both Singapore and Uganda were concerned that government was seeking to control and co-opt civil society while demarcating acceptable boundaries of un/civil practice which depoliticised the terrain of civil society.

This sense of depoliticisation was also linked to pressures on CSOs to focus on service delivery and basic welfare provision (a drift in part linked to the civil society turn within international development policy and clearly indicated in the preamble to the NGO Bill (2015) in Uganda) through both overt and covert practices including the directing of funding streams, the deployment of out-of-bounds markers

surrounding political engagement and transparency, surveillance and intimidation of CSOs and activists, and government legislation. This drift in Uganda has been noted by Human Rights Watch (2012: 1-2), who identify how “government officials at both the national and local levels have deployed an array of tactics to intimidate and obstruct the work of NGOs...Some sectors enjoy significant latitude. For instance, groups focusing on small-scale development or service delivery programs have relative freedom to operate. These organizations are often promoted by government officials as examples to emulate... [while] those groups that advocate for change while documenting governance failures, mismanagement of public assets, and the ways that government officials profit from foreign investment at the expense of local communities are at the most risk of state interference.” Thus, to be civil, civil society is increasingly expected to meet the social, welfare and civic needs of communities, whereas efforts to challenge, question or critique the government – to embody and empower citizens’ political needs and rights – are increasingly suppressed and marginalised as being uncivil. Such practices clearly embody an understanding and discursive deployment of the etymology of civil society as a space for ‘doing good’ rather than a space for political action. Thus, those CSOs mobilising around political issues and rights are castigated and delegitimised as uncivil and acting with incivility, while those working on service provision and welfare support are deemed to be civil. In Singapore this has culminated in civil society being dominated by service delivery focussed organisations,

“We call it voluntary welfare organisation. A lot of these are providing welfare, providing services. These are handsomely funded by the government. I think that very few of these provide advocacy work, they don’t look at the issues causing this. If you want to look at the issues and you want to change things at the policy level. If you are doing that then you don’t have to solve a problem. But I think a lot of our VWOs are just happy doing philanthropic work and being seen to be helping people which is good but I think that is the gap in our civil society. It’s not orientated towards ‘let’s try to advocate for change’” (Singapore B).

This emphasis, in legislation and in practice, directing civil society away from activism and advocacy is indicative of efforts to impose a particular form of civility on to civil society; civility as focused on everyday or quotidian civics and civil

behaviour in a reductive manner – in other words, the routinized habits and expectations of politeness and normative social behaviours.<sup>2</sup> In framing these agendas and spaces, government positions CSOs are both service delivery partners but also implementers of broader policies promoting particular visions of citizenship and nation-hood.

In Singapore we see how “despite its pragmatic adoption of both (neo)liberal and communally oriented policies toward citizenship over the past two decades, the PAP’s neo-Confucian principles have long contained a sense of social citizenship emphasizing duty and responsibility toward others” which develops a socially responsible rather than politically active citizenry (Thompson 2014: 326). There is subsequently the enactment of a specific form of (limited) civility which results in “The interplay between (neo)liberal-individualist and communal values mutually work to deny the obligation (*munis*) of the social” (Ibid). As one Singaporean CSO complained, this emphasis on everyday civilities rendered moot the political aspect or terrain of civil society,

“When you talk about civil society it is based on civil and political rights... there is confusion, there are campaigns for how to brush teeth and flush toilet. Come on this is not for the state to tell us this, you should learn from your father, but the government coming to teach us how to do this it is not necessary. There is how to be kind to people, they have a kindness movement, come on! It is too far!” (Singapore A).

This sense that the political ‘teeth’ of CSOs had been removed through the shift towards welfare and civic mindedness rather than political participation and engagement meant many CSOs were concerned about the implications of there being limited scope for challenge to the dominant state and ideology. Integral to these concerns was a sense that government policy and practice were intended to pacify citizens rather than engage them in a drive for social and political change (White 2006). The framing of the allowed – or civil – role and practices of civil society were thus intended to ensure the continued provision of respect and civility *towards* elites rather than being a reciprocal dynamic, thereby meaning marginalised voices remained side-lined or silenced (Bannister and O’Sullivan 2013; Boyd 2006; Calhoun 2000). CSOs who called for citizens to be engaged in social and political justice rather than simply

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see the Singapore kindness movement, as well as Singa the Lion be courteous campaign.

accepting the status quo therefore faced challenges from the simultaneous politicisation of civility – in the deployment of a politicised approach to and use of discursive tool for governmentality – and depoliticisation of civil which facilitated the privileging of civility over demands for critical engagement.<sup>3</sup>.

### **Constraining civil society**

The space for, and models of, civil society allowed by the Singaporean and Ugandan states are intended to prevent civil society from cracking open the institutions and systems created to maintain authoritarian political power (Boyd 2006). Instead, both countries have witnessed efforts to undermine civil society in recent years in order to minimise opposition groups in the political sphere. To some extent this can exemplify Boyd (2006) and Jeffrey and Staeheli's (2005) discussions of the use of civil tactics to foreclose a critical public sphere. A key governmental tool in such practices is the deployment of discourses of civil and civility to limit topics and practices of engagement. Thus, we see how “civil society in Singapore is called upon to be civil in all manner of activity... [they] are urged to be “respectful” and “peaceful” and to operate within the bounds of the country's laws and norms. This means keeping in mind the overarching goals of the state, which are to maintain stability and to continue to prioritize economic growth” (Freedman, 2015: np). In practice, this means that CSOs face structural and social constraints on their practice where the idea(l) of civil society is to ‘do good’ rather than to ‘make changes’. This can be seen through the implementation of the Societies Act (1967) and the Sedition Act (1985) in Singapore, and the NGO Act (2016) and Public Order Management Act (POMA) (2013) in Uganda, which use the rhetoric of public order to legitimise restrictions on the acts and practices of CSOs. Underneath the

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<sup>3</sup> The backdrop of 19th century Singapore is a quintessential product of overlapping diasporas (Kong and Yeoh 2003:193). Kong and Yeoh argue that the local born inhabitants have anchored their cultural orientation to imaginary homelands. This has made the process of creating a unified nation even more difficult. Singapore is a highly cosmopolitan society; while each race is urged to maintain and draw sustenance from a carefully contained sense of ethnic and cultural identity, they are also encouraged to develop a larger identity based on secular, non-cultural national values. It is also important to note here that Singapore has a high number of temporary residents and people on work passes. One quarter of Singapore's workforce is comprised of foreign workers. Available data shows that out of a total resident population of over 4 million, 3 million are Singapore citizens, 350,000 are permanent residents, and 800,000 are foreign residents on long term employment or spouse passes (Lyons 2007: 9).

umbrella of ‘public order’, both governments are able to impose expectations of civility to curtail the public sphere but without overtly prohibiting the civil society sector. Thus, we see how the Singaporean government employs a ‘careful management’ approach so as to ensure a positive external image while curtailing the power and influence of civil society. On an everyday level, the need to act with civility embodies itself in the requirement to maintain civil relations and positive communication links with the state – including ensuring the state was fully informed of CSO activities – despite concerns that this relationship is largely unidirectional and lacking in genuine reciprocity. These pressures mean CSOs seek to maintain a ‘polite distance’ and to avoid aggravating state representatives for fear of recrimination. In turn, governments in both countries legitimised the use of surveillance and governmentality to ensure CSOs adhered to the strict parameters of activities and audience, and the securing of relevant permits for events in outdoor, public spaces and indoor, private venues,

“there are certain types of activities that if we want to do then we need to get permits for.. we usually stick to the innocuous ones like having a lunch so that is not controversial. We have of course in the past tried to organise Singaporeans and migrant workers to do like solidarity walks – [but] they won’t give us a permit... so when it comes to events we kind of do keep it quite safe because we don’t want our migrant workers to get into trouble.....” (Singapore C)

These restrictions in Singapore, borne out of the Societies Act (1967), and the threat of arrest and imprisonment for anyone attending an un-permitted event, mean CSOs feel constrained by what they called an ‘audit society’,

“it’s a constant balance that you have to strike between maintaining that relationship with them [the government] but also in a way what they call speaking truth to power... you kind of learn along the way and you know where the boundaries are... But these boundaries are often invisible and it also depends on who is the politician who is overseeing the issues” (Singapore C)

Similar restrictions are in place in Uganda, where CSOs feel that the ways in which the POMA is enforced means that they are required to inform the police about all ‘conversations’. However, creative ‘disorganisation’ by officials and subsequent failure to issue permits resulted in many CSO-organised events being cancelled. Thus, while CSOs were required – out of civil and civic duty – to gain permission for events, the lack of reciprocal civility and civil practices curtailed the public sphere.

“The Public Order Management Act basically tells you, you cannot have conversations without informing the police, and at times they put it upon themselves not to respond to you, to ignore your communication. There was a time I was holding an event, but the police refused even to acknowledge receipt of my letter, so what was the evidence that I had actually informed them?”  
(Uganda B)

Additional practices of surveillance (including phone tapping and alleged police-backed break-ins and other forms of harassment) and control over approved funding sources embody uncivil practices deployed by the government to monitor and restrict the civil practices of civil society,

“The Museveni regime has increasingly become dictatorial. Those that speak democracy and such are being silenced, and the NGO Bill is actually an attempt to silence civil society actors... they want to control what and how civil society speaks... Because civil society is seen as aligned to the opposition... they want to adopt a state controlled NGO regulatory framework”  
(Uganda C)

“the type of harassment in the Ugandan case, sometimes it might not even be overt or open, now they can have well organised break-ins that take all of your equipment, they can have restrictions on meetings - you set up a programme but last minute you get no permission from the police, they make sure that they make it difficult to operate, they can difficult to draw money from the bank... there is a lot of tapping of phones - I know that my phone is on their list of those the government has interest in... Then for us to work in the communities, they can begin refusing the local authorities to

allow us the space, they find some traditional leaders who then don't allow their people to come to your meetings, those small, small things” (Uganda A)

These concerns illustrate how approaches to the control of public space deploy civil and uncivil practices in both formal and informal – or ‘hidden’ – ways including break-ins to offices, withholding of money, and the arrest or intimidation of CSO actors (Human Rights Watch, 2012). While these actions may be seen as simple power politics by the government, they represent a form of operationalisation of civility-as-governmentality whereby elites use their power to delimit the actions, acts and very practices of CSOs towards their own interests (Volpi 2011; Calhoun 2000). The constraints placed on CSOs in both contexts are both civil and uncivil tactics through which CSOs and the public sphere are corralled by the state. Whilst such civil methods of control follow a Foucauldian structure of governance, CSOs navigate and negotiate their positions, demonstrating performative dimensions of strategic opposition and resistance, through acting in civil and uncivil ways to seek change and to act on behalf of the citizenry. Such actions reflect Scott’s (2009) discussion of what civil is and the ways in which such discourses are defined and use as tools of control by those in power which are then negotiated and resisted by citizens and civil society.

### **Civility and incivility: Practising and performing civil society within constrained spheres**

Civility is understood in various ways, from formal to substantive, and deployed to differing degrees as a tool of governmentality to facilitate or curtail participation and critical engagement. In both Singapore and Uganda, discourses of civility are deployed as tools of governmentality to restrict how CSOs operate through delimiting what constitute practices of civility and the civil component of civil society and the public sphere. Whilst civility can be used to foreclose a critical public sphere (Jeffrey and Staeheli 2015) some CSOs enact a sense of quiet power (Allen 2016), engaging with the uncivil boundaries of civility to respond to uncivil treatment by the state. In such situations CSOs must continually, and fluidly, negotiate the boundary between civil and uncivil to create spaces within which to operate.

Responding to such restrictions, CSOs create networks and alliances – with organisations, citizens, and sympathetic government ministers and civil servants – in order to navigate the imposed restrictions on their activities (Koh and Soon 2012) and campaign for social change. In Uganda, one CSO strategically invested in developing positive relations with a government department, drawing them in to conversations about the establishment of a major project to ensure Departmental support and that any critical findings would not be unexpected or seen as an attack on the relevant Minister,

“at the national level we work with different government departments mostly about corruption and accountability institutions... so we come, introduce ourselves, tell them what we do, show them all that we do, what we are for... so before we even set up the project, the application, we first got the buy-in from the District so that whenever we are bringing up issues they know what to expect, it doesn't spring on them some surprises. So that's one of the strategies” (Uganda A)

The formation of a strategic alliance afforded the CSO legitimacy (by acting in certain civil ways towards the government) and thus greater space to operate within. Moreover, this alliance formation as strategy blurs the imposed boundaries of civil and uncivil as it affords a degree of protection while allows for boundaries of engagement to be pushed.

Such efforts to ‘bend’ the rules of civility demonstrate a response to both civil and uncivil restraints. In Singapore our respondents explained how they were able to bend but not break the rules, not least in relation to rules regarding public speaking and permits,

“These activities [indoor events] that we organise are an opportunity to give them [migrants] this platform to express themselves so they may not be able to do an outdoor rally... there is some space for negotiation because the regulations don't say that you can't do an indoor rally. The regulations do say that if you are a foreigner you do need to apply for a permit to speak even if it's an indoor event but this is something which as long as you don't publicise it so widely.... nobody really cares about enforcing it” (Singapore C)

“We have a speaker coming soon.... She is speaking in private at our event.... She would not be able to speak at Speakers Corner because she would need a permit” (Singapore D)



These concerns reflect the continued limitations on critical public interventions, despite the establishment of Speaker's Corner. The expectations of civility, imposed by placing topics off-limits to civil society, meant CSOs tactically worked at these boundaries in order to 'play civil' and thus reduce the state's interest in them,

“When they want to monitor you it's because they view you as a security threat so as long as you don't get too involved in politics then you are not a threat because when you are involved in politics it means you are threatening the legitimacy of the government, of the ruling party. So it is that which makes you a security threat.” (Singapore C)

Avoiding overtly political campaigns meant that CSOs were able to promote their central message without attracting too much (negative) attention which would result in further restrictions on their activities. In this sense, CSOs are, too, performing what Weeks (2011) defines as a relationship of reciprocity, whereby CSOs reflect the treatment towards them from the state. On the other hand, CSOs here engage with ideas regarding 'dissident citizenship' (Sparks 1997); in disrupting hierarchical power structures, even through small acts, CSOs demonstrate that such uncivil behaviour is merely a practice of individual freedoms (Boyd 2006). CSOs enact 'strategic practices' (Hammett 2011) to enable continued engagement. However, it was not only the types of campaigns that CSOs strategically involved themselves with, but also how they were able to spread their messages.

Respondents noted the role of traditional and social media to spread campaign messages in ways that avoided – or reduced – state surveillance or which allowed individuals to remain anonymous, and thus avoid state censure,

“On social media we work anonymously and whatever but in direct dialogue yes we are all polite and all the rest of it but even as a campaign we are very careful” (Singapore E)

The anonymity afforded by social media was seen as allowing CSO actors to have a split personality, where they could act civil in [face-to-face] meetings with government officials but then respond on social media in potentially uncivil ways. Thus the CSOs perform questionable acts, themselves on the boundary of civility and civil behaviour (Volpi 2011), using these 'less extreme' uncivil actions to carve out an operating space within a constrained

public sphere (Obadare 2009). CSOs operate on – and negotiate the limits of - boundaries of civility in multiple ways. As one Singaporean CSO commented,

“We have to be civic in our behaviour and it can still be different from being civil society I think...” (Singapore E)

Other CSOs commented specifically on their own strategies for surveillance, for example, keeping records of overt and covert surveillance of their organisations, including of government officials who ‘watch’ them at events and rallies. This ensured CSOs could respond to specific allegations, but also that they could build a list of those for whom it was vital to perform in civil ways.

In these hybrid-political contexts, with curtailed public spheres, CSOs deploy multiple civil and uncivil practices in strategic response to such constraints. As one participant outlined, these deployments of civil and uncivil practices were vital when negotiating often contentious relationships with the state *and* citizens,

“On a public platform they say we engage civil society but it is a relationship that is never easy because there are days when we are civil but there are also days when we are actioning angry words... you have to be realistic... the relationship between the state and civil society must always be one that is tense, it has to be tension ridden, for the very simple reasons that I will always be telling you that you are not doing enough, you are not doing it fast enough. The day I will stop telling you this is the day I can close up shop and say that the problem has been solved!”  
(Singapore B)

Thus, some CSOs felt the need to act in uncivil ways and to push at the (imposed) boundaries of civility if they were to achieve anything or have government respond to them (Boyd 2006). The constant negotiation for many CSOs in Singapore and Uganda remained between being uncivil enough in order to challenge the status quo, while remaining civil enough so as to avoid being shut down or subject to harsh/ uncivil treatment from the state. The question here, then, is whether CSOs in partial democracies are behaving in uncivil, uncivilised or uncivilly civil ways to ensure their continued presence.

### **Discussion: civility within an uncivil state**

The discussions above demonstrate that the distinction between civil and uncivil society are far from clear cut (Obadare 2009; De Heredia 2012). The Institute for Civility in Government argues that

“civility is about more than just politeness.... It is about disagreeing without disrespect... It is political in the sense that it is a necessary prerequisite for civic action. But it is political, too, in the sense that it is about negotiating interpersonal power such that everyone’s voice is heard”. We would go further, however, and expect CSOs to operate in the fractures between society and the state and negotiate the boundaries of civility and incivility to action change in conditions marked by a lack of reciprocal civility or a hierarchical form of civility which serves to entrench inequalities and injustice. In other words, to achieve social change CSOs much often disagree and challenge and that in so doing, their actions may have to be uncivil – if the definition of civility is used as a tool of governmentality to maintain the status quo and prevent dissenting speech.

Two important issues follow. First is the need to recognise how notions of civil, civility, incivility and uncivil are used as discourses of governmentality, and thus how these are used to suppress or marginalise civil society. Second is the need to consider how CSOs respond to the civil and uncivil strategies of the state and the strategic practices of being civilly uncivil in order to push the imposed boundaries on civil society in order to drive progressive change but without causing too much disruption so as to be labelled as illegitimate for being uncivil. The key tension being negotiated in both Singapore and Ugandan civil society is, in part, the reciprocity of civility and the potential for this discourse to be used for progressive *and* regressive means.

As Boyd (2006, p.873) outlines, “the otherwise laudable requirement to treat others civilly may place a disproportionate burden on groups in society who have to shout or behave in ways that are deemed uncivil in order to be heard.... By virtues of the sameness of uniformity it imposes on difference, the claim is that civility excludes or dilutes those voice already most likely to be lost in the conversation”. For CSOs to be able to communicate their actions and demands in ways that are respectful of others, thereby operating civilly, they must be provided with the conditions – the public sphere – to do so. In contexts where this arena is constrained, however, they may also need to be uncivil (according a government which deploys a reductionist discourse of civility to maintain power and inequality) to *be* heard. In so doing, however, they must not dehumanise those that are opposed. Thus, CSOs are often required to be civilly uncivil, commonly in response to the ‘dark side’ or forms of incivility deployed by governments’ to police and educate citizens and promote a particular form of political civility (Volpi, 2011: 828). In certain situations, then, it is unsurprising that CSOs advocating for the voiceless and marginalised seek to engage elites in a language they understand – uncivil behaviour – in order to be heard. Thus, CSOs in (un)civil states may act in terms of self-defence or preservation in by strategically negotiating the boundaries between civil, uncivil, and openly hostile actions of the state. To refer back to what one participant argued,

“It is a constant balance that you have to strike between maintaining that relationship with them (the state) but also in a way of speaking truth to power so it

is a very delicate balance... you kind of learn along the way and you know where the boundaries are... when you overstep them they tell you that you have ... but these boundaries are often invisible... you can only learn as you go along” (Singapore, C).

## Conclusion

Civil society is deemed to be increasingly important in promoting development and democracy, meaning it is vital to reflect on how this sector is conceptualised and operates. The practices and policies of national and international institutions – governments and donors – reflect competing concerns regarding the implementation of pedagogies that not only frame the learning of citizenship but also of civil society. These processes inform understandings of what civil society is, what it should do, what it does, and how it does. Recognising the historical precedent for a “constant interpenetrating or straddling” (Chabal and Daloz, 1990: 17) between the state and civil society in Africa, it is unsurprising that we see continued efforts by governments to control and mould civil society more broadly. Not only such issues present challenges to liberalist pluralist models of civil society, which assume both the space for and ability of citizens to influence government, (as noted by Robinson and Friedman (2007)) but they furthermore allow for the deployment of (an often reductive) discourse of ‘civility’ provides an effective tool of governmentality over civil society. Whether manifest through legislation, surveillance or other practices, the concept of ‘civility’ is used to impose a (politically) acceptable version of *civil* society – and associated beliefs, practices, and areas of work – that contains and curtails the work of civil society.

The practices of civil society organisations in Singapore and Uganda demonstrate everyday responses to and reworkings of the rhetoric of civility and efforts to negotiate the fine line – the ‘delicate balance’ as one CSO representative called it – between being civil-enough to avoid overly strenuous government intervention and being uncivil-enough to be able to push for change, to act as a voice for marginalised groups and to hold political leaders accountable, what we have termed being ‘civilly uncivil’. In this respect CSOs develop a strategy of partial reciprocity (Weeks 2011), developing a code of respect (Forni 2002) to which they themselves are afforded. The success of civil society groups in hybrid political systems of negotiating this fine line is vital for the realisation of democratic participation (Friedman, 2010) but also reflects more localised restraints on civil society actors, including a disinterested public. Furthermore, the efforts by civil society to creatively rework the margins of reductive discourses of civility, which are used as a tool of governmentality to exclude and marginalise dissenting voices, demonstrate an awareness of the distinction between *civil* society and

civil society. Flowing from this, is a clear – if implicit – attempt to rework the notion of ‘civility’, from a reductive and controlling concept deployed in a unidirectional manner, to being an inclusive, reciprocal ideal facilitating participation, accountability and critical citizenship.

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