

# **A CARIBBEAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STATE, ECONOMY, CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY**

## **1. Introduction**

The interaction between people in society and the different ways in which they organize themselves is an ongoing process. This is also at the core of the work of sociologists, who try to explain human behavior, especially group behavior and the interactions between individuals and collectivities. Social theories in all kinds of shapes, including Economic and Political theories, have addressed these issues. There is still no consensus, however, about the way society works and what kind of behavior is dominant i.e. does the Economy call the shots? Or the State? Or the Citizens as an organized Civil Society? Moreover the question is: are these three separate entities, institutions or what are they? According to James Coleman (1990) “a central problem in social science is that of accounting for the functioning of some kind of social system”. He sets himself out to do just that, but takes “individuals as its starting point”, because “an explanation based on internal analysis of system behavior in terms of actions and orientations of lower-level units is likely to be more stable and general than an explanation which remains at the system level”. He has done a great job in explaining the relationship between macro and micro level actions. Still such an approach for instance does not fully account for the differences between societies i.e. why is the State, and its military and bureaucratic apparatus, such a dominant factor in North Korea, while it is not in Barbados? The structure of a society clearly is more than pure rational choice, otherwise all societies would have ended up being very similar (or differ just in a temporal sense, since each one may have started at a different period) i.e. if every human was rational in the same way. Most sociologists these days will probably disagree with such a deterministic view of society. Cultural, historic processes and external influences (e.g. foreign occupation) have shaped particular societies and help explain why we have a multitude of different societies, even in their structure. Still there is a need to compare societies with each other since we want to explain differences and similarities. In this paper I suggest another approach to look at societies and a way to compare them. I have developed this approach out of my own fundamental research at looking at the societies in the Caribbean. The modern versions of these societies--(i.e. the colonial versions which have dominated and often eliminated the pre-Columbian Amerindian versions-- are much younger than those in Europe I have been able to reconstruct society from its very inception (Schalkwijk, 2011) and have made some very interesting discoveries about the relationships between what I would term different “Spheres” in society i.e. the Economy, the State and Civil Society. I also see Democracy as an instrument to manage the relationship between these three spheres. Most social theorists neglect the interaction between these different spheres and how they are managed. In many articles and books authors use these terms very loosely and often collapse different categories together. In the end the relationship between State, Economy, Civil Society and Democracy is one which is often not clear, not even to those who use these concepts professionally. This may well be one of the causes why we do not make enough progress in comparative analysis of different societies.

## **2. Three spheres: Economy, State and Civil Society**

One may say that Society consists of three spheres or dimensions --I hesitate to call them systems, since they may not act as one system-- that are interacting with each other i.e. the Economy, the

State and Civil Society. I put them in this order, because for the Modern Caribbean this is the historic order in which the different spheres developed. Also the Economy in Caribbean Plantation Societies dominated the other spheres initially. This order was different in Europe, because there the State developed out of warfare i.e. the conquerors had to administer conquered territory, while the need to extract resources (in preparation for war) also involved the need for infrastructure and administration (Tilly, 1990). Thus Charles Tilly suggests that at least initially there was a dominating State (i.e. a coercion wielding entity) around which the Economy emerged, while he does not address Civil Society. In later periods the interaction between the state and capital (can be seen as the Economy) produced a variety of state formation. and Asia, and probably also for parts of modern societies in Africa.

## 2.1 State

The pace of State-Formation in Europe was slow (Tilly, 1990), while in the Caribbean it was amazingly rapid. The two core colonies -Barbados and St. Christopher- were settled between 1620 and 1630, while most other territories were colonized before 1660. This at least is true for most British, French, Dutch and Danish colonies and does not include the earlier Portuguese and Spanish colonies.

According to Tilly (1990) States were mainly a by-product of conquest or warmaking in Europe. Not so in the Caribbean where the State developed as a by-product of the Economy and was quickly usurped by the Economy i.e. the Planters. The differentiation of the three institutions of the State into separate branches came much later i.e. the Bureaucracy (including the Judiciary), the Coercive Forces (Police and Military), and the Executive (President, Ministers, District Commissioners). The term 'Government' is used by some to describe the Executive (those exercising power over the State), by others to pinpoint the Bureaucracy, while another group uses it for both of these or even for all three institutions together. In fact, however, the State is more than the Government. One way to distinguish between these is to see the State as a more static institutional entity, while Government is the State in action.

Another way of analyzing the State is by looking at the functions it has performed during different periods. Gaining insight from various sources (Weber 1968, North 1986, Hall 1989, Mann 1989, Tilly 1990) the main functions assigned to the State can be summed up as:

1. Military function (preparing and engaging in war and attacking rivals)
2. Maintenance of internal order (state making and protection)
3. Extraction (of means for warmaking, statemaking and protection)
4. Economic redistribution (of scarce resources)
5. Production and maintenance
6. Legislative function (enactment of law, adjudication or settlement of disputes)

We can work our way through the development of the State in the Caribbean by describing these different functions. I did this for Suriname by analyzing the content of all the laws (1743 in total) that were made between 1667 and 1862. What we see is probably a pattern that also applies to most other Caribbean colonies (Schalkwijk 2011):

- Despite popular notions, initial colonization was peaceful, while the typical plantation state structure took shape in the first decades of colonization.
- In terms of historic periodization the height of the plantation period (i.e. Economic growth) coincided with intense policing (state making), production and extraction.
- This, however, led to a period of crisis, because of slave reactions to increased

- Exploitation (and we see more warmaking in addition to production).
- The period before the abolition of Slavery was marked by a Colonial State that took its distributional tasks a little more serious, while it provided more protection.
  - After Emancipation the Colonial State assumed more tasks, thus becoming more of a typical State in terms of functions.

It is safe to say, however, that for an extended period Extraction and State-making were the dominant functions of the Colonial State in the Caribbean. Whereas wars were in the center of the European State formation process and the Economy developed around it, in the Caribbean 'Extraction' was the key issue and the State developed around the Economy. Thus the Colonial State started off as a mirror image of the European State. These differences in State formation processes have been overlooked by Tilly (1990) and explain why he is unable to give a satisfactory explanation of the failure of many Third World States to follow the Western route.

## 2.2. Civil Society

There is a distinct difference between Society in general and Civil Society. Society can be seen as a wider, more inclusive concept of all three spheres; actually a concept which can be expanded to delineate all human activities within the borders of the nation-state.

In the Caribbean the Plantation Economy gave rise to a Plantation Society, with the following defining elements (Curtin 1990): Most productive labor was forced labor, the population was not self-sustaining, organization type was the large-scale capitalist plantation, there were certain feudal features, Plantations supplied a distant market with highly specialized product, Political control lay in another country. Plantation societies were fairly rigid elite societies (Schalkwijk, 2011).

Civil Society consists of the sphere of activities of the population in their role as citizens; notably the way these citizens organize themselves and act to promote their interests. This is the sphere in which all kinds of associations, cooperatives, labor unions, foundations, religious organizations, sport clubs, etc. operate. If we label all such organizations NGO's or rather NCPO's (Non Commercial Private Organizations as I prefer to delineate these organizations more scientifically, Schalkwijk 1986) we may say that NCPO's form the backbone of Civil Society. There is more going on in Civil Society, however, because we should also include the independent press as part of Civil Society and all kinds of informal networks. In fact the very notion of freedom and civil rights is closely associated with the concept of Civil Society.

The distinct process of State-formation in the Caribbean was also reflected in the development of Civil Society. The search for Civil Society in previous centuries is the search for organizations that -individually or collectively- were strong enough to compete with the State for power, or at least had some success in increasing civil rights, for we can measure the success of Civil Society by looking at the expansion of civil rights. Prior to Emancipation --and actually well into the 19th Century-- Civil Society was virtually limited to the elites, since slaves had very limited social space. Those who escaped --such as the Maroons-- also disconnected themselves from Colonial Society. The elite clubs were only concerned with their own civil rights and not those of the larger population. It was the Church --at least certain denominations-- that became the main vehicle for the expansion of Civil Society in Caribbean Colonial Society.

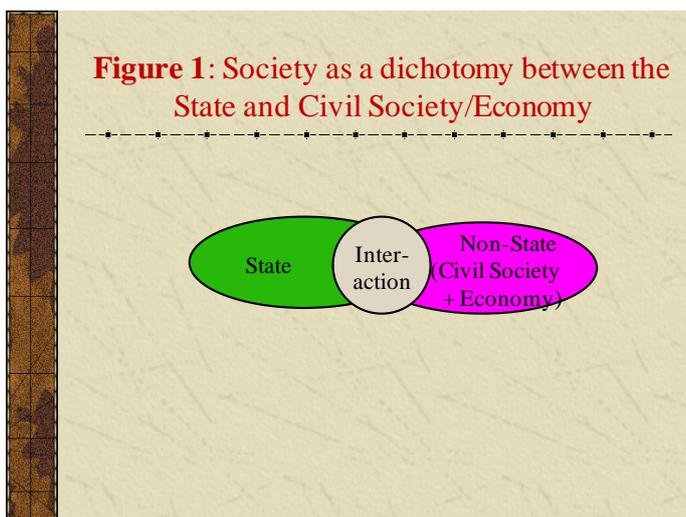
Again this was a significant departure from earlier European experience, where the Church often had much political clout over the State's personnel. In Europe the State had to wrest itself from religious control, whereas in the Caribbean it was the other way round. The Church in the end

proved strong enough to withstand the State's urge for total control over its citizens. The Church provided education and provided Mullattoes, Blacks and others with their first forms of social mobility. After Emancipation gradually other organizations became actors in Civil Society and we see social and religious life becoming disentangled. The growth and diversification of Civil Society can be reconstructed also from the growth of NCPO's, since these represent specific interest groups. It should be noted that political parties are one type of NCPO's that are a product of Civil Society i.e. of the quest for more freedom. Strong Civil Societies will probably produce multiple political parties (Schalkwijk 1986, 1997, 2011).

## 2.3 Economy

Surprisingly one will not find a definition of the Economy in the Social Science dictionaries and literature. Normal dictionaries provide definitions such as "the system by which a country's wealth is produced and used" (e.g. Longman). This is a hardly satisfying definition, since it does not identify the main actors. Likewise the term Political Economy is not suitable since it already connects the Economy with the activities of the State. From a pragmatic point we can define the Economy to be made up of all production activities (i.e. goods and services) and trade activities (distribution and everything that comes with it), and driven by actors in these areas. The actors may be individuals, corporations, or interest groups who pursue economic goals. Many authors equate the Economy with the Market, which is not correct, because often there is no functioning market e.g. in tribal societies, in traditional communist societies or in a number of authoritarian societies.

In the Caribbean the Economy has been the main force throughout much of the Plantation and Colonial period and less so during the post-Colonial period. Actually the Anglophone, French, Dutch and Danish Caribbean started out as an Economic project of several individual entrepreneurs, traders and corporations such as the Amazon Company, Guiana Company, Dutch West India Company. The plantation became the core of Caribbean society and was primarily a commercial agricultural production unit, which imposed itself on all other relationships.<sup>1</sup> The British, French, Dutch and Danish plantations were clearly different from the Latin American haciendas; and the plantation economy was very different from the colonial Spanish mining economy (e.g. Wolf & Mintz 1977).



<sup>1</sup> The main elements of the plantation as an economic unit are: specialized production of a few export products for an export market, some form of coerced labor, relatively high capital inputs, comparatively large size, and a high degree of vertical integration. Capital, management and labor were imported, while land was provided locally.

What we see is that many scholars, governments and other agencies are collapsing the Economy and Civil Society together (figure 1). For instance the European Union (EU) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) distinguish only between the State and non-State actors in the Cotonou Agreement (second revision 2007-2013). According to Article 6 of the Cotonou Agreement, non-state actors include: Civil Society in all its diversity, according to national characteristics; Economic and social partners, including trade union organisations and; The private sector. The repressive plantation with slave labor was definitely no part of a Civil Society with free citizens and similarly a multinational bauxite company that is working in a developing nation should not be included as part of Civil Society. Collapsing Civil Society and Economy under the same umbrella of non-State actors is counterproductive.

### **3. Democracy**

The three spheres of human activities do not exist separate from each other, but have to interact to make society --i.e. living together-- possible. In primitive and in authoritarian societies the three spheres are often collapsed or overlap substantially. When societies become more complex and/or less authoritarian the three spheres grow apart, which creates tensions between the spheres. In an authoritarian society such as a traditional Eastern European or Asian communist society the State simply dominates the other spheres and thus the leaders of the State emerge as the dominant forces over society. Likewise in Caribbean Plantation Colonies the Economy dominated the other spheres and the leaders of the Economy i.e. the Planters dominated society. In tribal societies citizens have a direct impact upon the affairs of the community and we can conceptualize this as Civil Society dominating the other spheres. It is when there are no clear dominating forces in a society that another mechanism is needed to make a society function. And this is where --at least in my conceptualization-- Democracy comes in as an institution i.e. to manage these three spheres. Democracy has to prevent on the one side that the three spheres increasingly overlap and society becomes increasingly authoritarian, and at the other hand should see to it that the spheres do not drift apart completely and society breaks down.

It is most often Civil Society that pushes for Democracy, and thus the introduction of Democracy can be conceptualized as a major concession by the State to its citizens. Elections and Parliament are most often the means to make Democracy functions, but it should be clear that if a chosen Parliament can not ensure that society functions to the satisfaction of most of its citizens other arrangements may take its place.

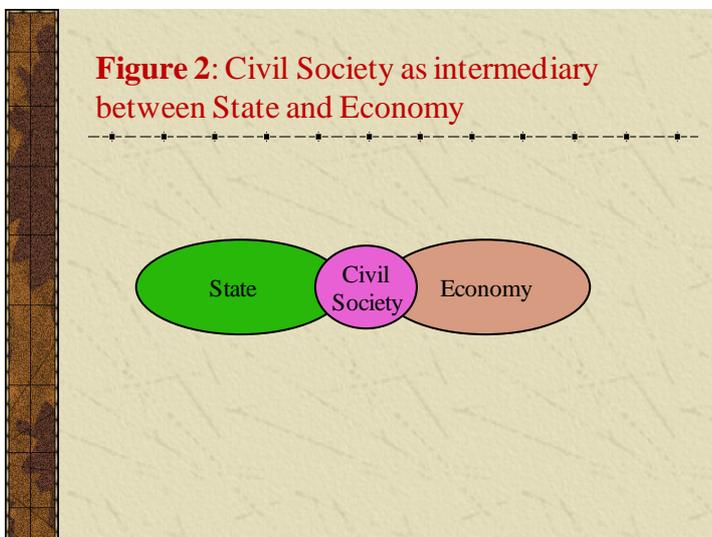
The problem is that some actors in each of the three spheres have an urge to dominate the others. Within the State itself --and within the political agents that steer the State- there are always tendencies towards oligarchy as Michels (1962) has pointed out long ago. The State agents may therefore also try to dominate the other spheres rather than provide necessary services. Or the State may want to go into business and drive private enterprises out or a State wants to limit civil rights.. Agents of the Economy are always trying to influence and steer the State through interest groups, lobbies, committees, contracts, professional associations, political parties, large donations to politicians, etc. Some societies, however, may have a weak or underdeveloped Economy which can not give counterpunches to an intruding State. Citizens (Civil Society) are also trying to influence the State and its policies through petitions, NGO's, lobby groups, or to get new agents in positions of influence by means of political parties. Such efforts are normally meant to get Good Governance and accountability as products from the State, which means that the State remains responsive. Some groups, however, may try to get special benefits for themselves rather than Good Governance and

may try to secure this by means of bribes, favoritism, etc. Some societies have weak or little differentiated Civil Societies, which allow State actors to drift easily towards more authoritarian behavior and which leads to weak democratic institutions.

The existence of political parties and the occurrence of general elections therefore do not by itself mean that Civil Society has definitely conquered an otherwise authoritarian State, but only that the agents of the State are being recruited by other means. The danger is always that the new agents may try to strengthen their position and subdue the Economy and Civil Society. Thus democracy is more than an electoral system. It is also a necessary management system of intersecting spheres of human activities in society. If it does not function properly most citizens suffer and therefore they have a stake in seeing to it that democracy works.

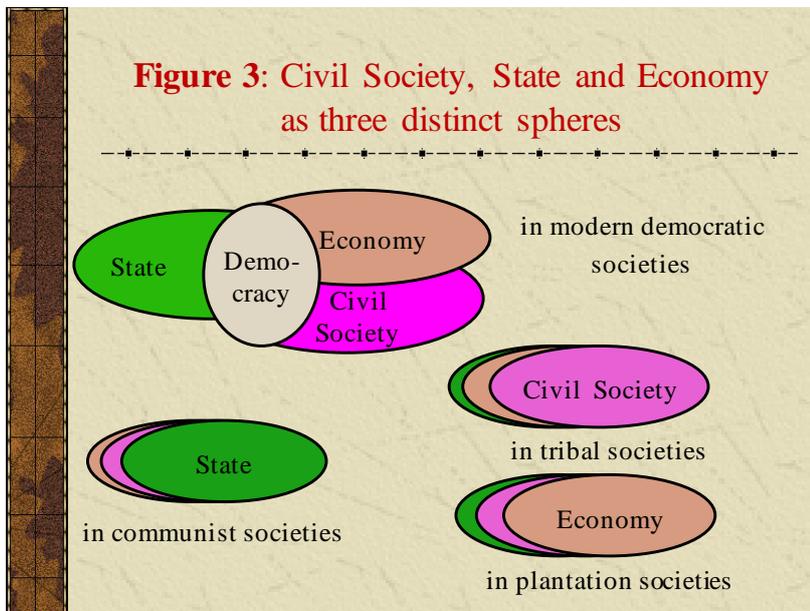
#### 4. Specification of relationships

It should be clear by now that we need to be more careful in our specifications of vital relationships in society, since they have consequences for our understanding of very important issues. William Fisher (1997) who tried to bring some analytical depth in the relationship between Civil Society and NGO's used a very weak definition i.e. the definition of N. Chazan, who described Civil Society as "that segment of society that interacts with the state, influences the state and yet is distinct from the state". Thus Fisher and Chazan see the world as consisting of a dichotomy between the State and Civil Society (figure 1). Cohen & Arato (1992) are more precise and describe Civil Society "as a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication". Still they see Civil Society as a sphere that is some kind of intermediary between the State and the Economy (figure 2).



In my conceptualization of Society, however, Civil Society is not squeezed between the State and the Economy, but these three spheres can better be visualized as three circles that intersect and overlap. Democracy (or the political process) manages the relationship between these three spheres (see figure 3). The exact relationship between these different spheres, however, will vary from society to society, based on specific social and historic processes. We have seen that the Caribbean Plantation Society is a different species than the European societies, and for that matter the Asian or African societies. This in fact means that depending on the positioning of the spheres in relation to each other, as well as their trajectory, there are several models for the development of a society.

Thus we should be cautious in our conclusions about the making of society. Also due to cultural differences the functions of a State in one society may vary with those in another society. The weight and content of each function may vary over time e.g. after emancipation the State in the Caribbean assumed more functions than before. For instance in Suriname the police became a real force after emancipation and took the place of the military and militia, probably because society needed a different manner to maintain law and order i.e. an organization was needed that knew to deal better with free citizens, while the policemen had to know the law themselves.



There is no magic bullet in the management of the three spheres that make up society, but democracy probably is the best way to try to manage it. It is clear that success does not come easy, but will depend on the democratic values and practices in that society. Given this task we probably need to put much more effort in the development and maintenance of democratic institutions and in the nurturing of a democratic culture.

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