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NGOs and the Transformational State: Theorizing the Ambiguities of Educational Development and Change in Post- Apartheid South Africa

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by
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ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis is the crisis currently affecting the NGO sector in South Africa and the profound implications that it has for the development process in South Africa. The thesis sets out to examine the extent to which the state and civil society can collaborate under conditions of transformation and restructuring to ensure the equitable achievement of wide-scale social amelioration.

The thesis surveys the current state of the NGO sector in South Africa and then moves to the micro level to examine the development work of a medium-sized educational NGO and the implementation of one of its donor-funded projects in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. The argument is put forward that although this project is very context-specific it illuminates a set of problems that are generalizable across the NGO sector.

The difficulties being experienced by NGOs are analyzed using elements of Giddens's 'structuration theory' and Hargreaves's 'educational restructuring' matrix to chart prevailing development practice within the state-civil society nexus. It is argued that these positions yield four interlinked and recursive elements that are used as theoretical tools to explore the forces shaping the praxis of South African NGOs. The thesis proceeds to examine sequentially, and within the parameters of the structure-agency debate, how tensions and ambiguities are generated within the symbolic order, through the manifestations of power and authority, within the policy-making process and through the allocation of resources determine the discursive space and contextual realities within which NGOs operate.

The argument is put forward that one of the key tasks for NGOs is the necessity of constructing theoretical models that not only inform and shape their development practice but are also recursively modified by changing circumstances and conditions. The thesis concludes that engagement in this form of praxis may be one way for NGOs to ensure their survival and adds some suggestions for the way forward.

DECLARATION

This study represents original work by the author. Where use was made of the work of others, this has been duly acknowledged.

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ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
CBO	Community Based Organization
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DBSA	Development Bank of South Africa
DOE	Department of Education
EMIS	Educational Management and Information Services
EPP	English Proficiency Programme
ESST	Educational Support Services Trust
FEP	Family Education Programme
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GGP	Gross Geographic Product
GNU	Government of National Unity
HDI	Human Development Index
IDT	Independent Development Trust
INSET	In-Service Training
JET	Joint Education Trust
KT	Kagiso Trust
NDA	National Development Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SANCO	South African National Civics Organization
SANGOCO	South African NGO Coalition
SIDA	Swedish International Development Authority
TNDA	Transitional National Development Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION: THE CONFIGURATION OF THE BOARD

“Men make history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past”

“Space thus becomes analogous to a chessboard upon which each and every person is located. The moves that the agent/pieces make take place within the constraints of the board and the social rules/directions that are permitted. If we remove the board we can no longer understand the logic of the pieces that remain.” - KIRBY (1993: 13)

From 1990 onwards South Africa began to emerge gradually from its long apartheid nightmare and the international pariah status that accompanied it to take its rightful and legitimate place amongst the nation-states of the world. The peaceful political settlement of 1994 symbolically inaugurated a new era of freedom and opportunity, complete with a liberal constitution and Bill of Rights, and initiated a national commitment to transforming the political, social and economic institutions of the country to reflect its newly liberated status. It also began a hectic period of legislative activity as the new government proceeded to reverse more than eighty years of segregationist laws and thereby restructure the rules and patterns of interaction that have regulated the social formation in South Africa.

In the euphoric aftermath of national liberation in 1994 the African National Congress (ANC) set itself a tough agenda of state-driven reconstruction and development. Having spearheaded the liberation struggle the newly-elected ANC-led government was quick to signal a transformative social agenda and began to formalize its developmental intentions primarily through the establishment of the Reconstruction and Development Programme

(RDP)¹. Looking back over its five-year tenure there is significant evidence that the ANC government's post-1994 political and social achievements have been both substantive and progressive on a broad front. Major strides have been made in redressing past inequalities through the opening up of opportunities for employment, the implementation of equal opportunity and affirmative action policies, the provision of utilities to poorer communities and the restructuring of key public services such as health, welfare and education. Despite the political and social re-ordering that has taken place since 1994 South Africa nevertheless continues to face the kinds of massive developmental problems that plague so many developing states around the world. Although there has been a tendency internally for South Africa to perceive itself as some kind of deserving 'special case' in the light of its history it has become progressively more obvious that in the international scheme of things the country ranks as just another developing state struggling on the periphery of the global market place². As a result the theories and practices of development have become central yet disputed issues on the national development agenda both within state and civil society structures.

The reconstruction and development of South African society has featured as a national priority on the state's agenda since 1990. Although the previous National Party government had made belated if ineffectual efforts to accelerate national social and economic development for all South African citizens it was the introduction of the ANC's much-vaunted RDP that signaled the government's intention to construct itself as a strong developmental state. Economic policy shifts and initiatives since 1994 have however tended to indicate that contradictory development impulses are at play within government circles. This has been reflected in the chronic stresses and strains that exist between the state, big business, organized labour and civil society agents as the government has progressively shifted its socio-economic priorities from broad social democratic welfarist

¹ The Reconstruction and Development Programme was initially conceived as an instrument for kick-starting post-apartheid socio-economic reconstruction within a developmental paradigm; by 1996 however the GNU had effectively abandoned the RDP in favour of the neo-liberal macro-economic GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) plan (Maganya, 1996: 5).

² Saul Klein writes in the *Cape Times* (29/09/1998, Pg. 16) that in the latest survey of world competitiveness the IMD rank South Africa 42nd out of 46 countries, only marginally ahead of Venezuela and Poland. He attributes this poor performance to the fact that South Africa has been unable to harness either of the two engines of economic growth viz. to be an attractive destination for direct foreign investment and to be competitive in global markets.

policies to market-oriented monetarist policies in an effort to position itself advantageously in the global marketplace.

With South Africa nearly five years into its democratic transition there is growing evidence that the government is struggling to meet many of its important developmental targets. A critic like Marais questions the state's transformative thrust arguing that national reconstruction has become enmeshed in a nexus of paradoxical policy tracks that has submerged the state's development project in "broader strategic shifts that bow to the imperatives of the most powerful sections of capital" (1998: 249). The daunting social backlogs created by apartheid have undoubtedly placed enormous strains on the state's capacity to spread resources equitably and efficiently, but a host of other factors, both endogenous and exogenous, have impacted negatively on state delivery. The current financial crises being experienced in international global markets and the ripple effect that it is having on South Africa's emerging economy has served only to exacerbate the shortage of resources and thereby impose even greater pressure on the state to meet its development needs. The uncertainties and ambiguities arising out of this situation have been detrimental to both state and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) -driven development work and resulted in ever-increasing development backlogs. The result of this is that political leaders are being increasingly confronted with the problems of governing a complex and divided country with a legacy of inequality that renders potentially explosive the interrelated problems of poverty, unemployment and crime.

An unintended but nevertheless significant outcome of the government's attempts to implement a state-driven RDP initiative was the development of a strained and uneasy relationship between the state and development agencies within civil society. It can be argued that the state's initial post-1994 development impetus reflected, through its reluctance to engage effectively with the NGO sector, a naive sense of optimism regarding its own capacity to meet the developmental needs of the country. With the RDP having now been effectively abandoned and most state development initiatives assigned to line ministries and external agencies there has been a restructuring of the development focus and a growing awareness amongst development role players that the establishment of new

forms of alliance and partnership is a prerequisite for the effective planning and delivery of development programmes. These policy shifts allied to the ambivalent nature of the state's development vision over the past five years have nonetheless had the effect of stimulating debate around the nature of civil society and brought within the purview of the state the crucial role that can be played by the voluntary sector in promoting and engaging in socio-economic transformation³.

The apparently chaotic nature of change in South Africa does require a suitable discursive framework within which to examine the developmental processes taking place. In Kirby's chess analogy post-apartheid South Africa has been engaged in playing a new and untested development game. This is a game that is being uneasily played on a changed board, with an amalgam of old and new rules constructed by an ambiguous logic that presents a continual challenge to the understanding of the players. The space of South Africa's political, social and economic terrain has been shaped now by almost a decade of restructuring together with a radical reformulation of social rules and directions that make playing the development game a complex and difficult enterprise, full of potential obstacles and hazards but one that is also charged with a multitude of possibilities.

The vicissitudes of the evolving relationships that arise from these circumstances are, in many ways, the products of shifting and unpredictable sets of discourses that are embedded in the restructuring processes being undergone by South African society. These discourses are those that are shaping, amongst other things, state-civil society relationships, policy, bureaucratic and regulatory practices, funding fashions and the development practices of the NGO sector itself. The contending and often contradictory impulses that arise out of this situation have the potential to blur the development vision for all parties concerned with the result that development practices do run the risk of becoming confused and incoherent when manifested in the field. This thesis will examine some of the heterogeneous and complex processes that are shaping current development

³ The SANGOCO NGO Week, held from the 17 – 21 September 1998, brought the state and a broad spectrum of civil society organizations together. The culminating three-day plenary focused on development issues under the rubric "The Economics of Poverty and Inequality" and explored ways in which state

praxis and attempt to frame them theoretically with the aim of opening up possibilities for the recasting of meaning in NGO work and its reconstruction within the state-civil society nexus. For most NGOs, working under pressure with tight budgets, restrictive time frames and heavy administrative loads, the fast and efficient delivery of goods and services is their main priority with the result that little time is left for reflexive practices and theoretical critique. An unfortunate corollary of this emphasis on delivery is that NGO praxis is weakened to the detriment of ongoing programme improvement. The amount of * time spent on the mechanics of programme delivery tends to be inversely proportional to the amount of time organizations spend analyzing the nature of their activities, their methodologies and the range of variables that currently impact on their practice.

In the light of the problematic but necessary collaboration that is developing between voluntary sector organizations and the state, Chapter Two will describe in broad terms the work done by NGOs and other voluntary organizations in South Africa at the present time and map them across the social, economic and political variables that impact on their activities. The primary concern that will be addressed is whether the NGO sector in fact still has a significant role to play in South Africa under current political, social and economic conditions or whether there needs to be a radical reassessment of the kinds of structural, functional and financial practices traditionally associated with the sector. The first step in addressing this issue is to raise two related sets of questions. First, just what kind of profile does a 'typical' post-apartheid South African developmental NGO have when measured against conventional theories of development and the role of civil society in development practice. In order to do this it will be helpful to attempt an analysis of some of the tensions that impact on NGOs in a period of political transition and social reconstruction. Second, because the notion of a 'typical' NGO tends to be an idealist construct how does one begin to develop an appropriate set of theoretical tools that are in some sense generalizable across NGOs and within which the interaction of NGOs and the state across the rapidly changing terrain of South African society can be framed?

In order to map the current position of NGOs in a descriptive sense this thesis will focus on the work of one particular agency and view its operation as broadly typical of the trajectory of South African NGOs over the last decade. The agency that will be used as an exemplar is the Educational Support Services Trust (ESST), an educational NGO with its head office in Cape Town in the Western Cape province. Having worked for four years as programme manager on ESST's Northern Cape 'Learning Adventure' project the writer has had first-hand experience of the difficulties, frustrations and discontinuities that face development practitioners working in the development field in South Africa at present. In view of these circumstances Chapter Three will begin by describing some of the practical experiences gained through ESST's engagement with educational change in the province and then take these experiences as an initial step towards formulating some tentative theoretical frameworks that will hopefully serve to illuminate some of the ambiguities and tensions that continue to frustrate effective development work.

In order to do this Chapter Four will consider some methodological possibilities by reflecting on the nature of democratic practices in South Africa during this period of transition and then looking at some of the key aspects of Anthony Giddens's structuration theory. Of particular concern will be Giddens's analytical deconstruction of the structural procedures of society into the four elements that he describes as:

- ❖ moral rules,
- ❖ resources of authority
- ❖ procedural rules
- ❖ material resources

These four conceptual frames will then be linked on a more practical level to the conceptual framework provided by Hargreaves for understanding the process of educational restructuring. The linking of these two sets of analytical frames will attempt to establish a set of organizing principles against which to track the practical experiences of NGOs across the development terrain and the way in which, as agents of civil society, they are linked recursively with the four key structural elements that shape the social formation:

- ❖ the symbolic order that sanctions the exercise of power and the allocation of resources.

- ❖ the structures in and through which power relations are ordered,
- ❖ the policies that regulate the performance of social practices
- ❖ the human and material resources available for the exercise of power.

Chapter Five will attempt to engage with some of the normative principles that are guiding social and in particular educational transformation in South Africa with the intention of highlighting how some of the resultant contradictions and inconsistencies play themselves out within both education policies and educational practice. This chapter will then examine how NGOs, as agents of civil society that are effectively peripheral to the formal policy-making processes, attempt both to mediate the new educational values whilst simultaneously resolving some of the inconsistencies. Chapter Six will analyze the distribution of power and authority within the South African social formation by looking at some theories of the state and civil society and then relating them to both the historical and current development practices within the NGO sector.

Chapter Seven will look at developments within the South African education policy field and relate them on the macro level to the transformative goals of the state and on a micro level to the impact they have on the work done by NGOs in educational development at provincial and regional levels. This chapter will also look briefly at the issue of federalism within the 1996 constitution, review some of the tensions created by centralizing and decentralizing tendencies and then examine how these impact on the work done by NGOs at national, provincial and regional levels. Chapter Eight will firstly look at the current state of the South African economy, track the shifts in local economic policy against global economic trends and then examine how the prevailing economic conditions, the current availability of resources and specific conjunctures of national economic and international aid policies place certain constraints on the operations and effectiveness of NGOs. Chapter Nine will conclude by examining some of the possibilities NGOs have for strategic realignment within the prevailing state-civil society nexus.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE NGO SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA

NGOs have been and still are heavily involved in the developmental processes that are aimed at ameliorating the conditions of social and economic underdevelopment that affects the lives of the majority of South Africa's citizens. Yet it is the very nature of that involvement, situated at the interface between state and civil society, that is proving to be both uneasy and contested. As the political, social and economic equations that operated within apartheid South Africa have been slowly yet inexorably transformed this unease and contestation has been intensified as changing local and global development discourses have significantly altered the terrain within which South African NGOs traditionally operated. These changed circumstances suggest therefore that there is a need to reassess the role of NGOs and their development practices within the context of current South African conditions. In order to do so this chapter will look briefly at the historical role of NGOs within the context of apartheid and then move on to examine the shifts and changes that have taken place in state-civil society relations since 1994 and that impact on development praxis. The objective behind this is to start theorizing a new development role for NGOs within the prevailing state-civil society relationship.

NGOs are generally recognized as forming a distinct sector within civil society but the elusive nature of the construct and the wide variation of organizations that operate under the NGO rubric often leads to confusion and misunderstanding regarding the role of such organizations. In South Africa the idea of civil society and its organs has, as Friedman and Reitzes note, "fired the imagination of social agents and commentators across the spectrum, and has come to mean all things to all people, different things to different people" (1996: 231). The term 'NGO' has traditionally embraced a broad diversity of institutions and tends to be loosely and uncritically used to describe organizations as varied at one end of the spectrum as the World Bank and at the other end small scale community-based organizations that support economic projects for people adversely affected by the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and International

Monetary Fund. Ball and Dunn propose that the term NGO is best used to describe organizations which have four key characteristics: they are voluntary in nature as opposed to statutory; they are independent within the laws of a given society; they are not formed for personal private profit or gain; and they are not self-serving in aims and related values (1996: 17). They point out however that the definition created by these four characteristics is not watertight and that it does not necessarily separate NGOs from other organizations operating in civil society, nor does it imply that all NGOs operate with voluntary, unpaid staff. Muller captures the elusive nature of NGOs by noting that discussion on the NGO/voluntary/non-profit sector “ritually begins by establishing an elaborate, empirical and far from self-evident taxonomy to which one can always find an exception” (1993: 53).

Such attempts at definition, and particularly the notion of NGO autonomy, are also problematized by the political contexts within which individual NGOs operate and whether their development work is conditioned by participatory, collaborative or adversarial circumstances. Historically the work done by NGOs operating in South Africa under the apartheid system was both participatory and adversarial, shaped as it was by the need for NGOs to address the needs of poor, disenfranchised communities within the prevailing conditions of socially-engineered inequity and political repression. Many NGOs currently operating in South Africa were formed in the crucible of anti-apartheid action and their work informed in response to the prevailing ideologies. The next section will map the trajectory of South African NGOs across the last two decades of the apartheid state and attempt to examine how successful NGOs have been in making the transition from adversarial to collaborative development practice.

2.1 NGOs in Opposition to the Apartheid State

The historiography of the South African NGO sector is characterized by the role of organs of civil society in the struggle against apartheid. A distinctive feature of the liberation struggle was the progressive and innovative work undertaken both by large numbers of

foreign NGOs and indigenous civil society organizations against political repression and the prevailing social and economic inequalities. Historically indigenous organizations have been grouped generically under the rubric of the anti-apartheid struggle and were referred to in South Africa parlance constituting part of the “popular movement”. The growth in the number of NGOs working in South Africa from the 1970s onward stemmed in a large part from the collapse of state-provided development in a political context where most public agencies were regarded as illegitimate (Lee, 1990: 90). At the same time as opportunities for legal organization opened sections of civil society began mobilizing for resistance against the state on a broad front⁴. Mobilization was achieved through the formation of networks of civics, unions, youth and women’s groups, voluntary service organizations and other movements which found their inspiration in Left civil society theory much of which emanated from Central and South America experiences (Friedman and Reitzes, 1996: 231)⁵.

Much of the conceptual impetus for the work carried out by NGOs during the 1970s and 1980s period of mainstream development practice was derived from various readings of third world alternative development theorists such as Paulo Freire, Manfred MaxNeef, Ivan Illich, Majid Rahnema and David Korten. These and other development theorists, representative of a range of social science backgrounds, were especially critical of the inequities created by capitalism and called for resistance to top-down mainstream development and its replacement by an alternative development paradigm with “people-centred development” as its motivating discourse⁶. Although alternative development has been concerned with introducing alternative practices and redefining the objectives of development there are critics who believe that this approach has failed to develop a clear

⁴As a result of the massive industrial strikes of 1973 and subsequent labour unrest of the mid seventies the release of Wiehahn Commission Report in 1979 the National party government loosened its restrictions black trade union activity with the passing of the Labour Relations Act in 1981.

⁵ Resistance to apartheid during the 1980s was characterized by the growth of civics, which were local township organizations formed to mobilize township residents around ‘bread and butter’ community issues of housing, rents and services, transportation and utilities. Civics, coordinated under the national umbrella South African National Civics Organization (SANCO), were the breeding ground for political activists and in many instances acted as street level fronts for the then banned ANC. In the pre-1994 period many progressive NGOs, in order to effectively operate their programmes in township areas, worked in alliance with local civics.

perspective on micro-macro economic relations, an alternative macro approach, and a coherent theoretical position (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998: 344). The proliferation of this diverse range of civil society organizations attempting to address the social pathologies of institutionalized inequity was a remarkable phenomenon given that the apartheid state had mobilized its resources to counter the formation of independent and oppositional centres of social and political activity. Many of these organizations, of which civics are perhaps the most apt example, functioned as organized bases of resistance and figured as key elements in the events that culminated in the negotiated political transition between 1990 and 1994.

It is generally acknowledged in the literature that NGOs in South Africa have a distinctive history of innovative and dynamic development work and project implementation that was carried out under conditions of severe political repression and that in comparison to most other developing countries “the accumulated achievements, experience, skills, infrastructure and resources within progressive civil society organs seem formidable” (Marais, 1998: 199). During this period NGOs proliferated and by 1990 there were, according to Jeppe (1990: 172), more than 10 000 NGOs operating in Southern Africa which were spending close to R2 billion on development, welfare and community upgrade activities.⁷ Many of these NGOs prospered with the willing assistance of foreign donors eager to support those organizations and individuals committed to the anti-apartheid struggle⁸. The vitality, resilience and enterprising flair displayed by popular organizations and development NGOs linked to political legitimacy helped, as Marais notes, to draw billions of rand in overseas funding (1998: 212). During the politically turbulent years of the 1980s the increased flow of foreign funding to civil society agencies was premised on the political belief that the legitimacy and ability of NGOs to establish themselves as key

⁶ These development theorists were particularly opposed to the development practices of the IMF and World Bank who from the 1970s onwards began linking aid to developing countries with restrictive structural adjustment austerity programmes.

⁷ This figure is a disputed one in the literature. According to SANGOCO office bearer Zane Dangor whilst there are approximately 54 000 NGOs in South Africa, only 5 000 of these are involved in development work (quoted in *The Star*, 22/10/1996, pg. 7).

⁸ Robinson (1995: 367) points out the fact that channeling political aid through NGOs was the preferred option for many donors in South Africa during the apartheid period and notes for example that the British Overseas Development Administration (ODA) funded NGOs and church-based organizations for much of the 1980s when it was not possible to channel funds through the government.

intermediaries between donors and communities was the most effective way to support social and political change (Marais, 1997: 92). Although community-based structures (CBOs) have tended historically to operate at a less apparent localized grassroots and issue-specific level and have generally been more poorly-resourced they have constituted an equally vital component of civil society. The general trend during this period then was that NGOs and CBOs were looked to as vehicles for channeling political aid to promote empowerment, civic and political education and democratic reform, by virtue of their prominent role in civil society and grassroots involvement (Robinson, 1995: 360).

Characteristically the hallmarks of successful NGOs working in South Africa have been creative vision, skilled personnel and legitimacy within specific communities allied to the capacity for devising, implementing and managing developmentally-sound projects that enabled significant improvements to take place in a whole range of social contexts. Conversely NGOs have often been depicted as altruistic but inefficient squanderers of donor money and the often heroic anti-apartheid aura that attached itself to many NGOs often masked internal problems with some organizations operating with lax and inefficient management structures, weak accounting and reporting practices and impractical, poorly-conceived programmes. In mitigation it would be fair to note that in developing countries NGOs do not always operate under stable socio-economic conditions and that the contexts within which particular NGOs function have the effect of creating constantly shifting opportunities and constraints that can either promote or curtail the activities, interventions and overall efficiency of the organization. Particularly in the context of developing countries NGOs have operated very much within the paradigm of what Giddens refers to as the “risk culture” of modernity and for many NGOs practitioners “the concept of risk becomes fundamental to the way both lay actors and technical specialists organize the social world” (1991: 3). Astute calculation of the political and financial risks involved in development work under apartheid was often the defining characteristic of successful NGOs.

In the final analysis however NGO praxis has traditionally been theorized within a humanist developmental paradigm and has been realized in altruistic activities that have

worked towards economic upliftment, political and social justice, equal rights and democracy and a range of other ameliorative practices. The development work practiced by NGOs under apartheid was internationally recognized and lent South African NGOs in particular a solid developmental pedigree. With the changing socio-political context in South Africa however the development work of NGOs is no longer viewed ideologically in terms of organization's historic contribution to the liberation struggle and their role in advancing human betterment. The activities of NGOs are part of a larger system of national and global socio-economic patterns and interactions within which the development mission is mediated by practical concerns such as lobbying and networking for funds, financial sustainability, efficiency and accountability. Pieterse argues that it is in this interlocking nexus of macro-micro, formal-informal, public-private, global-local, that NGOs have to define a new practice and build a new conceptual stock (1998: 13). This interlocking nexus was however complicated for NGOs in South Africa by the unstable and fluid political and social conditions that prevailed during the period between the unbanning of the ANC in 1990 and the formal transfer of political power following the general election in 1994.

2.2 1990 – 1994: NGOs in the Interregnum Period

The politically fluid interregnum years following the 1990 unbanning of the ANC ushered in a period of change and reappraisal for the NGO sector. With the ANC preparing for power NGOs were faced with the need to begin preparing themselves for the changing terrain of power. The old politically-determined power bases were under assault and the early manifestations of political change were starting to impact on key issues of concern to NGOs such as patronage, funding conduits and donor-client compatibility that clearly held important long-term implications for their ideological principles, organizational structures and development status⁹. During the interregnum period however linkages were often blurred and ambiguous as the negotiations between the National Party government and

⁹ In his review of the NGO sector Nuttall reports that “ When it came to foreign funding a major complaint was that bilateral aid packages were diverting funding away from NGOs and CBOs. Respondents reported their perception that major donors such as the European Union and USAID were redirecting funding largely or exclusively to government RDP projects” (1997: 4)

their political opponents moved in an often arcane manner towards the final settlement of 1993. This settlement was built on sets of uneasy and often ambiguous compromises that were to have serious ramifications that would manifest themselves in the policy making arena, in constitutional, economic and social decision-making, and in state-civil society relations. The outcome of these unique sets of circumstances was that for civil society in general, and NGOs in particular, the nature and extent of the work that they did was, and in many cases continues to be, caught up in the coils of these ambiguities and confronts organizations with fundamental and ongoing issues regarding their status, relevance, legitimacy and long-term sustainability.

Prior to the first democratic elections of 1994 there was a strong belief that NGOs and other civil society agencies would have an opportunity to merge their grassroots experience and extensive fund of practical knowledge of issues into the future government's policy making process. With the steady dismantling of the legislated structures of apartheid the focus of NGO work began shifting from a position of resistance to the state to collaboration with the state and this necessitated an attendant reshaping of local development discourse to fit the changing social and political conditions. At the same time foreign donor agencies began looking towards a more co-ordinated donor funding strategy as South Africa progressed towards majority rule. These changing circumstances confronted the NGO sector with difficult and fraught choices and it was also a period that witnessed the restructuring, the reinvention and in some cases the demise of many previously flourishing NGOs¹⁰. The weak organizational structures of many NGOs combined with a resistance to restructuring also tended to compromise the efficiency of NGO operations. The fact that many NGOs continued to see their identity in the terms of their anti-apartheid credentials made it harder for them to realign their organizational and operational structures in accordance with changing circumstances. In reviewing the difficulties NGOs face in adjusting to changed conditions Pieterse makes the point that "progressive civil society organizations are in a crisis because their style of

¹⁰ For reasons of relevance, internal dynamics and funding difficulties the post-1994 period has seen the down-sizing and collapse of once-flourishing NGOs such as TOPS, USWE, the National Literacy Co-Operation, Matla Trust and SACHED (reported in the *Sunday Independent* 25/01/1998).

organizing, philosophy and mission are outdated and inappropriate for the new context” (1995: 1).

From being valorized as agents of social and political transformation during the struggle for liberation NGOs found themselves occupying an uneasy position within state discourse and began to experience the tenuous nature of voluntary development work during periods of profound systemic transition. In response to this groupings within the NGO sector started to engage in a reappraisal of their changing developmental role and as Lee points out this dynamic was “especially visible in its relationships with a public sector under political pressure and a private sector under economic pressure” (1990: 90). Despite the disarray apparent within civil society the post-1990 period was still characterized by massive developmental needs. Within the voluntary sector there were still large numbers of NGOs doing important development work either independently or in some form of collaboration with the various public sectors, particularly in areas such as administration, health, welfare and education¹¹.

2.3 *The Post-1994 Dispensation*

1994 marked a clear watershed in relations between NGOs and the state. The process of transition to a democratic order in South Africa since 1994 has initiated major changes that have impacted heavily on the terrain of civil society. An unanticipated outcome of the transition has been the strategic disorientation within the voluntary sector caused in part by the struggle to identify a coherent set of motivating ideals, goals and principles in the aftermath of the fight against apartheid (Marais, 1997: 120). An unfortunate outcome of this situation is that many NGOs and other voluntary organizations that played a leading part in providing some form of quality service provision and development assistance in an otherwise bleak period for many South African communities have found themselves in a state of confusion about their developmental role within the process of transformation. The systems and structures which in the past determined the distribution of power and

resources within and between societies have been unevenly but inexorably shifting. Many NGOs have been forced to scale back or have simply ceased to operate in an economic environment of financial austerity. Dwindling funds, more exacting funding requirements from donors, a restrictive legal framework, internal disarray and high staff turnover as new government and other parastatal structures actively recruited skilled practitioners from their ranks have had a detrimental impact on the ability of NGOs to continue functioning effectively. NGOs operating without clear operating structures and access to technical assistance now run the risk of being overwhelmed by the financial, technical and ideological weight of government policies and private sector interests. The outcome of these factors is that NGOs have found themselves frustrated by the lack of clear connecting points with government, and by often ambiguous and differing government responses to their work and plight.

Those NGOs that continue to operate within the various public sectors often find themselves in an anomalous Catch-22 position. In education, to take a case in point, the changed educational circumstances, certainly at the level of policy and to a lesser extent at the level of practice, have meant that NGOs have had to re-theorize the work that they do and to re-position themselves strategically in order to maintain the capacity to access funds from both the state and aid agencies. This crisis of praxis can have serious implications for development work, a point made by Korten when he expresses the position that an organization cannot have a meaningful development strategy without a clear theoretical approach otherwise “the aspiring development agency almost inevitably becomes instead merely an assistance agency engaged in relieving the more visible symptoms of underdevelopment through relief and welfare measures” (1990: 113). The material conditions and social pathologies which typified apartheid are still very much in place and continue to impact negatively on public sector provision yet the political objectives, having changed so significantly, demand a new approach to state-civil society collaboration. In many instances NGOs have, in a fairly fundamental way, been forced to compromise their values and independence by operating in effect as development arms of state departments as a prerequisite for access to donor funding or government tenders

¹¹ During this period large numbers of NGOs were being funded by tax-payer money through the IDT which

when in fact they end up operating as a substitute agents for state departments. If such a situation exists then questions need to be asked about the extent to which voluntary sector development programmes operate to alleviate social ills rather than eradicate them and whether they are in fact welfarist and non-sustainable exercises in social containment rather than a comprehensive redress of social inequalities. Despite the rhetorical call from both local and foreign donors for the voluntary sector to “engage” the state NGOs working at the interface between state policy and implementation at local level are often held captive to policies that fail to empower either state bureaucrats or NGO practitioners. Being forced into poorly understood forms of collaboration also puts serious strain on the sustainability of projects that are conceived of as “joint ventures” between the state and civil society organizations. These contextual realities make it very difficult for NGOs to find a comfortable space within which to develop and implement innovative approaches and programmes and according to Beauregard the net social result is an anaemic civil society and a weakened democracy (1995: 364)¹².

On the other hand positive outcomes have stemmed from the need to survive the post-1990 political flux. The learning curve for the NGO sector has been a sharp one and many organizations have switched to rapid reaction mode, restructuring and forming strategic alliances to enable themselves to act flexibly and creatively in response to the plethora of changes and initiatives in the kaleidoscopic terrain of development. Policies and practices have been emanating continuously from a multitude of sources and localities of power and authority both within and without state structures and this has meant that NGOs have needed to be constantly alert to the shifts and currents of policy within state departments, business, industry and foreign donor agencies. As a matter of necessity NGOs have had to engage with the process of reconstituting themselves into professional business-oriented organizations with the capacity to research, strategize, work to schedule, lobby and constantly monitor and evaluate their capabilities. They have also had to deliberately compromise their independence by forming strategic alliances with other NGOs and enter into contractual partnerships with the state and the business sector. Although NGOs

was established in 1990 to act as a conduit for state-funded development activity.

¹² Beauregard makes this generalized observation in an article in which he examines the evolution of the NGO Planact from its pre-1994 genesis through to its post-apartheid form.

generally have an edge on government when it comes to creativity, flexibility and lack of red tape the real decision-making powers, however, lie within state and provincial departments. Nevertheless the fact that the government has absorbed an estimated 60% of the NGO workforce since 1994 means that NGO workers can often find a sympathetic ear in government departments (*Mail & Guardian*, 06 – 12/03/1998, pg. 33).

As a consequence of the changes over the last five years NGOs have been treading a difficult path between collaboration and resistance, domestication and independence, involvement and marginalization and ultimately between survival and extinction. The structural ambiguities of this state-civil society relationship have undoubtedly created tensions between government departments, NGOs and funders. A fairly common position taken by NGO personnel is that co-optation impacts negatively on the ability of NGOs to operate independently and to retain their position external-to-the-system. Fowler, for example, argues that as a result of the modernization thrust of official donor policies bilateral aid has the potential to mould NGOs as substitutes for public service systems thereby turning them into aid-dependent unofficial parastatals rather than development organizations co-existing alongside government (1991: 70). Nederveen Pieterse disputes this view as being a sterile kind of island mentality and states that in terms of national development strategy “governments and NGOs are factually interdependent in terms of agenda setting and funding” (1998: 359). Certainly in terms of current bilateral donor funding priorities collaboration is the logical way forward and there is clearly an advantage for NGOs in such a relationship in that previously marginalized development approaches and programmes have a greater chance of being implemented if they are mediated through official state channels.

The post-1994 has been a difficult one for NGOs. During the apartheid era the state-civil society terrain was clearly demarcated by boundaries between what was politically legitimized and what was not. Legitimate civil society organizations were those that were either actively or tacitly supportive of the National Party regime; the majority of NGOs, however, were opposed to official state policy and their adversarial role lent them a clearly defined identity and defined the modalities of their development practice. Since 1994 such

clear identities have been blurred and the contradictory stresses of weakly-defined state-civil society relationships have contributed to the difficulties being experienced by NGOs.

2.4 Contradictory Stresses in State-Civil Society Relations

Since coming into power the government's attitude towards voluntary sector organizations has tended to be ambivalent and although their role is acknowledged in official government policy and political rhetoric their developmental role has been viewed as secondary to that of the state (Marais, 1997: 93).¹³ The changed developmental priorities of the South African state after 1994 and the shifts in the policies of foreign countries towards bilateral government to government aid have had a profound effect on the South African NGO sector. The sector has seen their previous anti-apartheid funding transformed into bilateral aid earmarked for management by government departments as part of a state capacity-building strategy. Following the 1994 election there was a clear move by the government to draw funding away from non-governmental agencies and to redirect donor resources to democratically sanctioned state organs, such as the RDP and Masikhane, which required finance for development projects. It can be argued that these moves reflected a deliberate political strategy to domesticate the role of civil society organizations. Whilst many prominent NGOs have been allowed to collapse over the last five years the state has sanctioned the flow of considerable funding into non-governmental development organs like the Independent Development Trust (IDT), Kagiso Trust (KT) and the Transitional National Development Agency (TNDA). It has been argued that this was done on the basis that the state could monitor and access the activities and accounts of these organizations and that they would pursue development initiatives that were in

¹³ In the government's *White Paper on Reconstruction and Development* (1994) brief mention is made in Chapter 7 that "The empowerment of institutions of civil society is a fundamental aim of the Government's approach to building national consensus" (pg. 39). In the *White Paper on Education and Training* (1995) a few rather cursory references are made to the role of NGOs in assisting educational delivery, for example in Chapter 5 it is stated that "There is a need for an evaluation of current INSET practice ... and the role of departments of education, faculties and colleges of education, the NGO sector, and teacher organizations, in a revitalized, properly accredited INSET service from primary school through to the senior secondary phase" (pg. 30).

accordance with the government's political priorities¹⁴. There are risks to be run, however, when large non-governmental organs as well as smaller NGOs engage in partnership agreements with the state. Glaser notes that the donor state could find itself open to the charge that it is misusing funds for partisan purposes or for patronage whilst civil society associations could find themselves politically compromised by their alliance with the state (1997: 17).

At the level of official policy both the government and foreign donors have articulated the desirability of partnerships between the state and civil society and they reaffirm the need for NGOs to function not merely as agents of state-defined and state-led development programmes but rather as independent players in the reconstruction effort. In reality however many NGOs are forced to work according to the dictates of line ministries whose policies regarding state-civil society partnerships are often uninformed and confused. This is a situation that impacts negatively on the government's stated aim of implementing participatory and transformatory programmes for achieving equity and social justice. Whether these tensions between the state and civil society can be resolved or not is a matter of perspective. Niederveen Pieterse takes the fairly pessimistic view that independent and alternative NGO development programmes will tend to suffer from a lack of institutional support "because agencies, bureaucracies and ministries cannot handle sharp discontinuities in principles and practices" (1998: 357). Pieterse on the other hand argues that this raises important strategic questions about the need for transforming the state from within and through alliances between NGOs and government line departments "aimed at effecting equity through incremental programmes and policy reform efforts" (1997: 15). Notwithstanding the developmental benefits of such a strategic alliance this crisis of role and identity within civil society has led to suggestions that many organizations are anachronisms within the new dispensation, hangovers from a period of political resistance and no longer relevant to the demands of reconstruction and development. For Marais (1998: 209) this ambivalence highlights the central conundrum of the relationship between state and civil society within the context of a national reconstruction effort.

¹⁴ A strong argument exists that these large bureaucratic NGOs function more as parastatals rather than as NGOs. Muller (1993: 53) suggests that the DBSA, Kagiso and the IDT can be seen as public sector contractor-type NGOs.

Over the past year or so there appears, however, to have been a change in the state–civil society relationship. With the post-election euphoria long since dissipated the hard realities of resourcing and implementing socio-economic reconstruction have set in, accelerated by the poor performance of the government's RDP developmental flagship and GEAR-imposed budgetary austerity within state departments. There are clear indicators of the shift that is taking place in current state-civil society relations as both sectors move towards building a more structured enabling environment for NGOs. The reasons for this shift probably stem from a complex interplay of factors but it is clear that economic constraints and lack of capacity are two of the key issues driving this *rapprochement*.

Finding themselves in the increasingly tight grip of limited budgets and moratoria on personnel appointments many government departments, at both national and provincial level, are being forced to look outside of state revenues in order to both finance and implement development programmes. Having gone full circle many government departments are coming to realize the importance of the voluntary sector in facilitating reconstruction and development initiatives. It is possible to argue that what is occurring is a more normal pattern of state-civil society relations within a newly-independent social formation and as Cernea points out "it is clear that the natural evolution of the state and local government in the developing world creates room and indeed calls for increasing the role played by non-government bodies in local development, local planning, local service delivery and local administration" (1988: 12). On the other hand this shift in emphasis has been linked to the introduction of the GEAR policy which some have argued indicates a retreat by the state from its key social responsibilities and that the new state-civil society discourse reflects the state's need for the voluntary sector to shoulder the burden of services partially or wholly unmet by the state. This change of emphasis then has not necessarily been brought about by a deepened understanding of the role of civil society and the resources that non-governmental development work provide but rather by "capacity constraints and internal dysfunction in state departments as well as lobbying work done by the voluntary sector" (Marais, 1997: 93).

Debate around the issue of state–civil society interaction undoubtedly promotes a keener understanding of the issues involved but optimism needs to be constrained, as Ranson makes clear, by the fact that NGOs do not relate to the state from a position of equality (1995: 432). Transactions with the state are by definition likely to be unequal and the state will generally have the power and resources necessary to win most contests. In development discourse NGOs have conventionally been seen as the third part of the development triad, the other two being the state and the private for-profit sector. Jeppe argues that the greatest deficit in building a solid state-civil society alliance has been the limited contact and cooperation between the “big powers” of the state and business sector and the “community powers” of the NGOs (1990: 169). This situation arises primarily out of an unequal distribution of power and resources where economic and political control clearly lies in the hands of the state and big business.

The danger inherent in such a situation is such that the voluntary sector effectively becomes co-opted as a privatized development and welfare arm of a state unwilling or unable to address the structural causes of under-development with the result that, as Kraak argues, NGOs run the risk of losing their historical role as an agent of change and transformation (1997: ii). Nevertheless, over the last few years it has become evident that there has been a commitment within certain sections of the NGO community to mobilize the sector with the aim of protecting the interests of organs of civil society through the creation of a powerful representative body capable of negotiating with the state. The three most prominent indicators of this shift in emphasis are the establishment of the South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO), the creation of the National Development Agency (NDA) as a state funding conduit and the introduction of legislation to facilitate the work done by non-governmental organizations.

2.5 *The Restructuring of the NGO Sector*

In 1995 NGOs from all nine provinces came together to establish the South African NGO Coalition (SANGOCO). SANGOCO’s stated mission is to promote civil society by

uniting and strengthening the NGO sector to enable it to influence development policy and advocate for programmes that meet the needs of the poor as effectively and cost-efficiently as possible. The Transitional National Development Agency (TNDA) was also established in 1995 by the government in co-operation with the country's two biggest non-governmental funding agencies, the IDT and Kagiso Trust. The objective of this initiative was to establish an interim measure whilst investigating a sustainable way of structuring and supporting the relationships between the state and civil society with the view to advancing the principles of the RDP. This move had a twofold purpose: firstly to provide a short-term funding lifeline for voluntary sector organizations in financial trouble, and secondly as the first step towards creating a unified development agency to act as principle conduit of funding to the voluntary sector¹⁵. According to Marais the proposed National Development Agency (NDA) "could become one of the clearest expressions yet that the government is serious about civil society's role in development" (1997: 97). Another view is that the lengthy delay in getting the NDA Bill through parliament reflects the difficulties in achieving consensus on the shape of the NDA and the scale of effort needed to put it in place¹⁶ and Smith argues that "until there is a coherent vision and strategy, strongly backed by government, projects like the NDA will be hard to accomplish" (*NGO Matters*, Vol 3, No. 12 November 1998: 3). The NDA is expected to act mainly as a grant-provider concentrating on the provision of funding to the voluntary sector and as a policy mediator between the voluntary sector and the state. The discourse informing the debate is one of state-civil society collaboration premised on the state's insistence that the NDA will not function as a funding "gatekeeper" and its commitment that all government departments and agencies will collaborate directly with civil society organizations. Strengthened by this strategic alliance since 1995 both SANGOCO and other voluntary sector organizations have put pressure on the government to create a more nurturing environment for NGOs.

Despite the ANC pre-1994 insistence on the importance of a vibrant civil society support for the NGO sector tended to remain at the level of political rhetoric and concrete progress

¹⁵ By January 1998 the TNDT had already committed R105 million to about 417 projects of which about R89 million had been disbursed (NDA Progress, Jan. 1998: 2).

in formalizing relations between the state and the voluntary sector was slow. An example of this was that up until late 1997 voluntary organizations were obliged to operate in accordance with the old *Fundraising Act* which, owing to its apartheid era origins, was perceived in progressive circles as being “shrouded with negative connotations and bad administration” (*NGO Matters* Vol. 3, No. 8 August 1998: 14). Nevertheless, an attempt to construct an enabling environment for civil society organizations was initiated by government moves to merge the IDT and KT into a single national funding agency that would act as a conduit for funding to the voluntary sector but this process was beset by political tensions. After almost two years of difficult negotiations and under pressure from ANC activists within the NGO sector the government released the document *Structural Relations Between Government and Civil Society Organizations*, a report initially commissioned by deputy president Thabo Mbeki and compiled by an Advisory Committee appointed by him. The Report dealt with three major areas of concern. Firstly it dealt with how appropriate and functional relationships could be evolved between the government and organs of civil society with respect to the provision of capacity for the implementation of the RDP; secondly it looked at the feasibility of an effective funding mechanism that would enable a co-ordinated approach to the funding of civil society organizations; and thirdly it investigated the possibility of establishing a mechanism to promote a sustainable partnership between these organizations and government¹⁷.

The lengthy negotiations between the government and the NGO sector resulted in the passing of the Non-Profit Organizations Act that was passed by parliament in December 1997. The content of the legislation was informed largely by policy proposals developed by SANGOCO in consultation with the broad NGO community, the contents of the Mbeki Report and inputs from government representatives with experience working within the voluntary sector. The core feature of the Non-Profit Organizations Act is that it establishes the *de jure* independence of the voluntary sector and recognizes the need for a co-operative rather than coercive relationship between civil society and the state. The legislation was greeted with satisfaction by the NGO sector and SANGOCO president

¹⁶ It is currently projected that the NDA will become operational in mid-to-late 1999 (*NGO Matters* Vol. 3, No. 12 November 1998: 2).

Rams Ramashia stated that the passing of the Act was a major victory for the South African NGO sector and pointed out that NGOs had demonstrated “that where appropriate [they] can work effectively with government to recognize the valuable contribution made by NGOs and to build an environment in which they can grow and flourish”¹⁸.

Although local NGOs continue to operate under adverse conditions there has been a process of adjustment and stabilization that has taken place over the last few years (Marais, 1997: 92). Earlier confusion and dismay about the future of the sector has abated as NGOs have initiated internal restructuring and strategic rethinking along business lines. Although funding difficulties persist other more positive developments, such as the formation of SANGOCO, the revision of regulatory frameworks, changes to tax laws affecting voluntary organizations and the prospective establishment of the NDA, look set to improve conditions for longer-term financial and operational sustainability. There is little doubt that during the earlier part of the post-1994 period the voluntary sector failed to engage with the state in a proactive direct way and left government to define a policy towards, and initiate relations with, the sector. However the seemingly intractable problems of poverty and inequality and the consequent enormity of national developmental needs require a new era of government and voluntary sector engagement. Marais argues that such an engagement would open up a new and more complex terrain - “one in which the voluntary sector conceives of itself as an agent in development, in which the government is no longer the sole actor” (1997: 90).

2.6 Conclusion

This short historical overview of the NGO sector in South Africa has charted the progress of NGOs from organs of civil society that worked in opposition to the apartheid state for the amelioration of the social and economic impact of politically engineered inequalities to development partners of the state in national reconstruction and transformation. In

¹⁷ These key aspects were set out in the executive summary of the report *Structural relationships Between Government and Civil Society Organizations: A Report by the Advisory Committee*.

¹⁸ Quoted in SANGOCO's *Annual Report* August 1997 – August 1998: 19

charting this transition it becomes clear that the process has been a difficult one both for the state and NGOs as organs of civil society. Whilst the role of NGOs during the anti-apartheid struggle was unequivocally oppositional and antagonistic to the state the role of NGOs in South Africa's nascent democracy has been characterized by tensions and ambiguities that have worked to lessen the impact and effectiveness of NGO developmental interventions. There is nonetheless a mutually beneficially symbiosis in process as the state struggles to define itself *vis-à-vis* civil society and NGOs are forced to grapple with their own identity and their relevance and place within the development field.

This historical review of NGOs within the context of state-civil society relations has attempted to give a broad perspective on developments within the NGO sector over the last three decades. It is important, however, that issues described within the macro-context of state-civil society relations are explored at the micro-level as well. In order to do this the following chapter will track the work of one particular NGO, the Educational Support Services Trust (ESST) within the context of the 'Learning Adventure' project and its implementation in the Northern Cape province.

CHAPTER THREE

ESST: AN EXEMPLAR OF CURRENT NGO PRACTICE

In many ways ESST has followed a trajectory typically experienced by many South African NGOs - one that has spanned the divide between the period of anti-apartheid struggle and the post-apartheid democracy. It is in this sense that ESST will be presented within a descriptive framework as an exemplar of NGO development practice from an historical perspective but perhaps more significantly, for the purposes of this paper, as it functions currently within the present South African conjuncture. A brief history of the organization will serve to encapsulate its development mission and pedagogic philosophy. As the organization has a number of different components and operates a range of national programmes this paper will focus on ESST's 'Learning Adventure' project and how this particular programme was scaled up for delivery in the Northern Cape province.

The spatial, demographic, social and economic realities prevailing in the Northern Cape will be reviewed so that the constraints under which the project operates can be contextualized. This will then lead into an overview of the current position of NGOs in the province, their relationship with the provincial government and the Department of Education in particular and some of the difficulties being experienced with regard to funding. These nature of these various contextual circumstances will hopefully highlight many of the difficulties and constraints that have consistently characterized the operation of the 'Learning Adventure' project in the Northern Cape province and some of the strategies that have been used to circumvent or resolve those tensions.

The elements outlined above are intended to serve as a set of descriptive tools which will be used to map the trajectory of ESST against the complex political, social and economic changes that have been taking place over the last ten years. In a sense taking ESST as an example of NGO practice will be a starting point for the later discussion of some of the forces that have shaped that practice. Thus by using this NGO as an exemplar and examining the range of events and interactions that have impacted on its development it should be possible to get a clearer picture of how the work of ESST has been shaped both

materially and discursively by interaction of social forces. An effort will be made to ensure that the narrative of ESST's progress is informed by a combination of concepts, assumptions and principles of explanation drawn from different theoretical systems and then drawn together to arrive at a composite, theoretical analysis. The intention of this is to map how an organization caught in the flux of multiple discourses and social practices struggles to maintain a unified or principled development stance no matter how committed it is to a particular position and cause.

Caught in these shifting cross-currents an NGO will inevitably be forced to play by the often unrealistic and conflicting rules of its development partners, will be forced to speak with many tongues and will have to please its many masters. Two key assumptions will be made in trying to illustrate this thesis. The first point is that an adequate explanation for any given actual event should reveal how different causal chains have interacted to make it necessary, or to determine it in the real world; the second point is that even though any actual event may be the overdetermined result of the interaction of different causal chains, there is no single theory that can adequately explain why this interaction occurred nor why its outcome was necessary. The inevitable outcome of this critique is that we will be left with a narrative-in-process, the partial and recursive story of an agent of civil society in continuing dialogue with the state that features as a single strand in the process of social structuration. Despite the emphasis on recursivity a starting point is generally helpful and therefore, for the purposes of narrative coherence, the following section will give a brief historical overview of the organization and its development mission. The interactions between ESST and the Northern Cape Department of Education between 1995 and 1998 clearly reflect the slow and arduous nature of engagement on this complex terrain.

3.1 *Genesis of the organization*

The Educational Services Support Trust began its life in 1985 as an outreach project of the School of Education at the University of the Western Cape, an historically coloured university situated in the greater Cape Town metropole in the Western Cape Province of

South Africa¹⁹. The mid-1980s were a time of extreme political turbulence and the South African education terrain was one of the principal sites of the struggle against the apartheid government. The Cape Flats, where the University of the Western Cape is situated, featured consistently during these years as one of the major flashpoints of resistance to the state and its education policies. During this period education was characterized by political turmoil that resulted in a chronic breakdown in the capacity of African and coloured schools to provide uninterrupted tuition to their students as protests, boycotts and riots became endemic features of educational life. These disruptions had a deleterious effect not only for students and teachers but also for the maintenance of the normal bureaucratic procedures necessary to sustain an efficiently operating education system.

The school of education at the University served not only as a centre for the pre-service training of teachers but also as a provider of in-service training and teacher support, primarily to those teachers working in areas that were most seriously affected by the disruption of schooling. A concern articulated by many teachers during that time was that learning materials and resources necessary for the maintenance of syllabi were either irrelevant to the needs of students or simply unforthcoming from the various racially-segregated education departments. The response from two academics within the department was to focus on the development of learning materials that, at the time, signalled a fairly radical departure in pedagogic practice²⁰. This new pedagogy was powerfully influenced by Vygotskian notions of language and cultural acquisition and by Feuerstein's notions of mediated learning and instrumental enrichment. The original idea was to produce a range of materials that were cross-curricular, graphic and filled with a mixture of reading activities, games and puzzles that encouraged learners to interact with the materials without necessarily having the intervention of a teacher – in essence the notion that the “mediatory text” was a partially adequate learning instrument. The idea that drove this process of materials development was the belief that learning could take place

¹⁹ The preference of the writer is to avoid racial categorization but given the historical precedents of racial segregation it is at times difficult to provide adequate and clear descriptions without recourse to the racial terminology of apartheid.

even in the most adverse of circumstances if the materials themselves had the capacity to capture the interest and imagination of the learners and if the materials engaged authentically with their cultural and linguistic realities. From the outset the ESST directors chose to use English as the language medium despite the fact that their target audience consisted almost totally of English second-language speakers. This was done in the belief that not only was English effectively the lingua franca of the country but that it was also free of the political and cultural biases attached to some of the vernacular languages.

For the first few years of the organization's existence there was an emphasis on the delivery of selective quality interventions in a small number of schools. This was dictated to some extent by the initial availability of funding but also by the organization's desire to test and evaluate their learning interventions before any concerted attempt was made to replicate them on a larger scale. The early years of the organization's activities were marked by a steady increase in demand by teachers and schools for the ESST learning materials and support programmes and by 1991 the organization was responding to this by broadening its donor base and expanding its staff. By 1992 ESST was operating as a fully-equipped and professionally-staffed production house for learning materials and in 1994 the organization established a small teacher-training unit to complement its material production activities. It was the establishment of this INSET component that proved the catalyst for attracting considerably larger amounts of donor funding than had previously been available and encouraged ESST to consider scaling up its programmes to reach a wider target audience.

3.2 *Scaling-up: The Learning Adventure Project*

As with most NGO activity the availability of funding resources determines the nature and scale of programme delivery. For the first decade of its existence ESST worked at slowly expanding the network of schools that received its learning materials within the cost

²⁰ The background to the establishment of ESST has been gleaned from numerous discussions with the co-founder of the organization, Andries Sinclair, erstwhile Professor of Socio-linguistics at the University of the Western Cape.

structures allowed by available income. The organization make use of modest but steady donor funding from international development agencies such as ODA and USAID and quite substantial local funding from the corporate sector. Parastatals such as SPOORNET (now TRANSNET), ESCOM and TELKOM and large development agencies like the IDT also funded ESST to develop, publish and distribute its English Proficiency Programme (EPP) to primary school learners and its Family Education Programme (FEP) adult learning materials to schools and communities throughout the country.

In 1995 the conjunction of two unrelated events acted as a catalyst that took ESST in a new direction in the work that it carried out. At the time ESST was servicing a few schools in the Northern Cape, principally around the Niewoudtville and Calvinia areas in the extreme south west of the province. The provision of materials to these schools was not a deliberate attempt to access the Northern Cape but rather a slight geographical extension of ESST's regional Western Cape 'West Coast' pilot programme which was funded under the aegis of IDT's 'Thousand Schools Project'. It was during this period that the materials came to the notice of the Minister of Education in the Northern Cape. Together with her newly-appointed Deputy Director General she indicated an interest in meeting with ESST to discuss the possibility of initiating a provincial pilot project that would centre around the provision of new learning materials in conjunction with teacher training in aspects of cognitive education and learner-centred methodologies. At roughly the same time USAID had indicated to the organization that it was interested in funding the ESST materials on a larger scale than it had previously done but insisted on a number of conditions. Firstly it required that its portion of funding be matched by other funders; secondly it made it a condition of funding that the delivery of the materials to schools should include in-service training for teachers whose learners would be using the books; and thirdly it insisted that the initiative should be an independently-evaluated provincial pilot project

For the first time in its existence the directors of ESST were persuaded, on the advice of USAID, to set aside their "personal touch" approach to fund-raising and enter into collaboration with Khulisa Management Services, a South African-based development management consultancy run by expatriate Americans. Over a period of a few months, and

in consultation with ESST, Khulisa Management put together a joint venture that included state commitment, NGO expertise, foreign funding, local corporate sponsorship and consultancy management of the process. Despite eventually raising sufficient funding to implement a province-wide pilot programme this strategic amalgam of local NGO, provincial education department, foreign funders, the corporate sector and consultancy made for an uneasy alliance of disparate visions and agendas that resulted in problematic working relationships.

The process of scaling up included a number of factors that reflected the unstable nature of state-civil society relations within a capitalist economic formation. At a time when relations between the state and NGOs were uncomfortably strained the Northern Cape Education Department took a fairly bold step in assigning an NGO the responsibility of operating a province-wide educational intervention. The department's sympathetic stance, certainly at leadership level, was in many ways a reflection of the Minister's previous experience as a SADTU leader, the Deputy Director-General's experience of working for a number of years in the NGO world and a joint desire to initiate innovative projects that could compensate for the newly-created provincial education department's lack of capacity and expertise. However, a significant feature of the selection of Khulisa Management Services to manage the programme was that it appeared not to have been a neutral or arbitrary choice given the fact that one of the Khulisa directors was a close personal friend of the Deputy Director-General. It was issues of patronage such as this and in particular that involving the work of the consultancy firm Aurora Associates International/SA that were cited in the eventual dismissal of the Deputy Director-General on charges of mismanagement in September 1998.

The issue of project ownership was a fraught one throughout the planning phase of the programme. Whereas ESST maintained throughout a strong insistence on proprietorship over their intellectual and material products the corporate sponsors were primarily interested in the extent of advertising mileage to be gained from the programme. Whilst for USAID the primary issue was to ensure that the project matched their funding priorities and development policy, Khulisa Management were mostly concerned with

efficiency of delivery, their profit margin and the degree of media coverage that could be gained from the project. This uneasy mix of development altruism and corporate pragmatism was exemplified by the heated wrangling that preceded the allocation of R250 000 from the R2,5 million project budget that was spent on a high profile project launch in Kimberley attended by the national Minister of Education and other dignitaries. The fact that further disagreements around the timing and method of delivery of the learning materials dogged the early phases of the implementation process was in large part due to the consultant's lack of local knowledge and complete ignorance regarding distances, terrains and available infrastructures within the province.

The ESST coordinators in the field took issue with this high profile "quick fix" approach to development and were determined to embark on the lengthy process of understanding the contextual realities of the province and adapting the project to the specific social and educational needs of the province's diverse communities. The following section will outline the contextual realities unique to the Northern Cape province and highlight how differing understandings of these conditions can generate tensions and ambiguities at the different levels of project conceptualization and implementation.

3.3 Contextual realities in the Northern Cape

The demographic and geographical features characteristic of the Northern Cape make it unique amongst South Africa's nine provinces and an understanding of these features is crucial in any planning and policy formulation that hopes to address adequately the problems that are often directly linked to them. The Northern Cape is the largest province in South Africa, comprising 30% of the total land area, but it also has the smallest population, in terms both of population numbers (737 306 according to the 1994 census) and in terms of population density which stands at six people per square kilometer²¹. The 1996 census estimates that the Northern Cape population now stands at 840 000,

²¹ The figures quoted here have been obtained from the Education Foundation's *An Overview of Education in the Northern Cape* (1995).

representing 2,1% of the total South African population of 40 584 million²². The province is predominantly rural with only two significant urban nodes situated at Kimberley and Upington. The rural nature of the province is significantly different to those rural areas in provinces such as the Northern Province and KwaZulu Natal where despite the obvious rural nature of settlement towns and villages are generally close and there is still a relatively high population density. Although approximately 78% of the Northern Cape population is regarded as functionally urbanised with three out of every four people living in an urban node most of these nodes are in reality either small isolated towns with limited infrastructure such as Carnarvon, Pofadder and Prieska or small remote settlements such as Rietfontein, Kommagas and Niekerkshoop.

The economy of the province is based primarily on mining (27% of Gross Geographic Product [GGP]²³) and agriculture (10,5% of GGP). The dependence of the province on the primary products from these sectors places the provincial economy at the mercy of world mineral markets and local climatic conditions. The Northern Cape is ranked as having the least developmental potential of all the nine provinces and has the lowest economic growth rate in the country, producing about 2% of South Africa's GGP which makes it the lowest contributor of all the provinces to the country's economic output. Although the Human Development Index (HDI)²⁴ of the Northern Cape is 0,698, second only to Gauteng at 0,818, this is a misleading statistic; when the average is disaggregated into racial categories the inequalities between the racial groups becomes very evident as the high standard of living enjoyed by whites in comparison with the coloured and African population skews the statistic. In reality the HDI of coloured and African people within the Northern Cape is approximately 0,30, which is comparable with countries such as Chad, Niger and Tanzania that have some of the lowest indices in the world.

²² These revised figures appear in the government's 1998 *Medium Term Budget Policy Statement*, pg. 26.

²³ GGP is the value of the final goods and services produced in a geographic area in one year.

²⁴ The Human Development Index is an index of human development calculated according to three indicators: income per capita converted according to purchasing power parity, life expectancy and adult literacy. It is measured on a scale with a maximum value of 1 indicating high human development as opposed to 0 that indicates low human development.

The Northern Cape is, in many ways, caught in the double bind of low development and poor economic prospects. The starkest manifestation of the province's socio-economic status is the high level of unemployment, standing at around 35%, and the social problems related to joblessness. This phenomenon is closely linked to the spatial distribution of resources reflected in the distorted pattern of rural settlement and endemic rural poverty created by segregationist policies over the last sixty years. A characteristic of towns and rural settlements in the Northern Cape is the distorted pattern of rural economies in which the connection between towns and their agricultural and mining hinterlands have become significantly weakened (Dewar, 1994: 353). Scaling down of mining, changing transport technologies and the operation of cartels have seen the service and manufacturing functions of smaller rural nodes being diverted to larger towns such as Upington and Kimberley, resulting in the economic decline of many smaller centres such as Brandvlei, Richmond, Nababeep, Port Nolloth and De Aar. The relative decline in many smaller Northern Cape towns has not been accompanied by a population decline with the result that growth has inevitably been accompanied by increasing levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality. It is this distinctive rural character of the province combined with its low levels of employment, literacy and skills that creates a unique set of problems both for the state and NGOs in managing educational development work in the province.

The availability of human resources is also a pressing concern for a province with a small population, low literacy levels, no university and few other tertiary institutions of note. For an NGO attempting to implement a province-wide educational project knowledge of local teacher profiles is a crucial indicator for the level and complexity of any proposed intervention. There is a general assumption that good quality teachers are a prerequisite for the provision of quality education and that the availability of well-trained and effective teachers is a crucial variable when the education system is undergoing profound curriculum restructuring. Fullan, for example, argues that a high-quality teaching force should be the *sine qua non* for coping with the dynamic social and educational complexities involved in such a transformation (1993: 104). Although the term "quality" is problematic because of the value-laden assumptions underpinning it, there is a basic correlation between teacher training and qualifications and classroom practice.

Given the fractured nature of teacher training under apartheid and the non-existence of a standardized qualification system across the 19 education departments it is difficult to generalize or to derive a set of definitions of teacher qualifications. According to *EduSource Data News* nearly three quarters of the 360 046 educators teaching in schools in 1998 are now fully qualified, which represents an improvement over 1991 when only half the total teaching force was fully qualified (1998: 10). The following table reflects educator qualifications by province for 1998:

TABLE 1 EDUCATOR QUALIFICATIONS BY PROVINCE, 1998					
Province	Un(der) qualified	%	Qualified	%	Total
Eastern Cape	20 800	31	47 023	69	67 823
Free State	7 502	31	16 581	69	24 083
Gauteng	5 504	13	38 495	87	43 999
KwaZulu Natal	25 261	34	49 503	66	74 764
Mpumalanga	6 947	27	18 413	73	25 360
Northern Cape	1 412	21	5 463	79	6 875
Northern Province	12 210	21	44 889	79	57 099
North West	16 895	53	14 956	47	31 851
Western Cape	3 755	13	24 437	87	28 192
National	100 286	28	259 760	72	360 046
Source: Crouch, L., <i>More Than you Ever Wanted to Know About SA Educator Numbers: A Preliminary Detailed Analysis of PERSAL and Enrolment Records, August 1998</i> (Quoted in <i>EduSource Data News</i> No. 23/December 1998).					

These figures, because they have not been disaggregated into racial categories, tend to mask the fact that African teachers remain the most poorly qualified group of teachers in the South African education system.

The Northern Cape reflects the national norm whereby white teachers tend to be the most highly qualified, followed by coloured teachers with African teachers constituting the most poorly qualified group. According to the Education Foundation's *An Overview of Education in the Northern Cape* the picture of African teacher qualifications is depressing with only 4% being qualified, 15% being unqualified in terms of departmental requirements and 81% being under-qualified (1995: 54)²⁵. Bearing in mind that the last two years have seen wide-ranging rationalization of the Northern Cape teaching corps, and acceptance of voluntary severance packages especially amongst better qualified and more experienced educators there is a strong likelihood that these figures may be even bleaker. The following table reflects the qualifications level of educators in the Northern Cape in 1995:

Table 2 Qualification Levels of Educators Northern Cape 1995							
Rank	Un-qualified		Under-qualified		Qualified		TOTAL
Principal	29	7%	75	19%	290	74%	394
D. Principal	0	0%	6	4%	139	96%	145
Head of Dept.	1	0%	102	15%	567	85%	670
Teacher	173	3%	1 843	31%	3 983	66%	5 999
Total	203	3%	2 026	28%	4 979	69%	7 208
Source: Table 3, Educators by Province, Race and Level, EduSource Data News, October 1995: 16.							

These figures reflect the views set out in the 1995 *National Teacher Education Audit* which noted that the quality of teacher education was generally poor with training at 90% of the country's colleges of education failing to train teachers adequately (*EduSource Data*

²⁵ Definitions for teacher qualifications were derived from the DET classification which stated that: *qualified* teachers have a professional qualification of at least 3 years of appropriate teacher training; *underqualified* teachers have not less than a Standard 10 and only some appropriate teacher training; and *unqualified* teachers have no teacher qualifications and may or may not have a Standard 10.

News, No. 12 April 1996: 9). The reality of a poorly trained national teacher corps poses a serious implementation problem for provincial Departments of Education trying to introduce a new national curriculum. Not only is the new curriculum constructed on fairly sophisticated notion of pedagogy but it is also packaged in difficult technocratic language that in many instances taxes the abilities and understanding of ordinary primary school teachers.

The possibilities for the kind of personal and intellectual growth envisaged by the new curriculum are in many ways limited by a number of other related factors prevailing in the Northern Cape. The Northern Cape, as is the case in predominantly rural areas the world over, tends to be a deeply conservative region at political, social, religious and cultural levels. The entrenched conservatism is reflected in the uneasy and ambivalent attitude of provincial education officials, educators and parents towards educational transformation, state policies and the role of NGOs. This level of conservatism poses some problems for more progressive organizations that are trying to encourage acceptance and internalization of the norms and values embedded in the new curriculum. Exacerbating this situation is the fact that the Northern Cape is the only province in South Africa without an established university campus with the result that the province lacks an academic institution and intellectual culture where issues related to educational transformation can be robustly debated. There is a small teachers' training college in Kimberley but its apartheid legacy as an African college, the trauma of its forced amalgamation with the coloured college in 1997 and the depredations of rationalization and cut-backs in intake have effectively marginalized it as an academic training ground for teachers.

The inherent conservatism of the province also manifests itself in strong hierarchical structures, authoritarian management styles and patriarchal attitudes. Despite the fact that the MEC for Education is a woman there are still very few women in management positions within the Northern Cape Department of Education (DOE), particularly at regional level where regional offices continued to be dominated by male management. Although the Northern Cape DOE is looking at decentralizing educational authority within the province in accordance with the principles set out in the 1997 *White Paper on the*

Transformation of the Public Service, the devolution of governance and resourcing control to the four regional offices has also been an extremely slow and incomplete process²⁶. An unfortunate by-product of the tensions and uncertainties that have resulted from this process has been a chronic bureaucratic inertia at regional level that has had a negative impact on decision-making and the delivery of educational services in the province. Compounding this situation is the fact that, as a result of historical and geographical legacies, almost all of the province's educational resources are to be found in Kimberley. Institutional teacher education provision, the provision of educational support services and nearly all material and human resources are located in Kimberley, a situation that has been worsened by rationalization and the termination of many services and resources in the regions.

These contextual realities form the matrix for any developmental work carried out by NGOs. The effectiveness of the work done by NGOs is however also determined in many ways by the relationship that NGOs have not only with provincial government departments but also with the regional and district offices. As a result projects implemented at provincial level are to a large extent shaped by the prevailing material conditions and the nature of existing state-civil society relations. The following section will examine the nature of the state-civil society relationship that has prevailed over the last three years and the way that it has impacted on the work done by ESST.

3.4 The Position of NGOs in the Northern Cape

After three years of working in the Northern Cape it has become increasingly clear that the state's ambivalence towards NGOs is a serious inhibiting factor. Although there are relatively few teacher development programmes presently being operated by provincially based NGOs the Northern Cape Department of Education has not gone out of its way to

²⁶ The Policy and Planning Unit's report entitled *Operational, Structural and Management Review* (September 1998: 2) notes that "Previous provincial moves towards centralization of functions have proved counter-productive. The centralization of functions in the DG's office since 1996 has had negative consequences for the Department. The effect of the centralization of budgetary and personnel control in the DG's office has had similar negative effects on departmental planning".

encourage the expansion of NGO activity. This is despite the fact that in the *Strategic Plan of the Northern Cape Province Department of Education, Arts and Culture* the Department stresses that collaboration between the government and NGOs in the delivery of education services is crucial, and points to the fact that “a wealth of useful experience and technical skills still resides in the NGO community, and it is both efficient and cost effective that the Department should tap into it wherever possible” (1996: 117). The Plan also takes note of the fact that many donors are willing to channel support to education through NGOs, preferably in partnership with the Department of Education. Significantly the Plan also identifies NGOs as potential competitors who potentially seek to take away control from the Department in running programmes and takes the parochial position of viewing “dependence on outside expertise” as a threat to the Department (1996: 8). In practice this has been a frequent experience for NGO personnel in their working encounters particularly with middle level department bureaucrats in the curriculum and subject advisory services.

These ambivalent responses to NGOs reflect the tensions that exist at a broader level between the state and civil society. Despite supportive rhetoric the Department of Education has not sought partnerships and inter-institutional linkages with NGOs with any great enthusiasm and where such partnerships do exist, as in the case of ESST, the Department shows little interest or collaborative will in co-ordinating, systematizing and evaluating the process. The department is generally unwilling or unable to offer logistical support and the result is that NGOs tend to operate their programmes in isolation from the department.

In November 1996 the Northern Cape Department of Education hosted a two-day NGO planning “Indaba” as the culmination of discussions with various NGOs over the first year of the department’s existence and to demonstrate the partnership needed between the Department and the NGO community. The workshop was facilitated by Aurora Associates International/SA, a consultancy firm favoured by the Deputy Director General of Education in the province. The programme was technically elaborate and strictly controlled with little room given for deviation from the pre-arranged agenda to which none

of the participating NGOs had been party. The workshop took participants through a programme that included *inter alia* generating principles of engagement between the Department and NGOs, the establishment of terms of reference, identification of areas of need and the expression of expectations and concerns from both sides. Working groups were established and tasked with generating principles of engagement that could be synthesized and used as a template for the establishment of a working relationship between the Department and NGOs.

These groups threw up fairly predictable lists of ideas that in essence reflected the uncritical nature of the process and the unwillingness of both sides to tackle some of the central state-civil society tensions hindering collaboration. A few examples taken from the *NGO Indaba Report* will suffice to demonstrate this point. Group Four suggested that “NGOs and the Department should enter the relationship as equal partners” and that “NGOs and the Department should share the same goals and objectives in service delivery” (1996: 5). Group One, clearly aiming for rhetorical effect to obscure its semantic hollowness, suggested that NGOs and the Department “ensure that, through the establishment of appropriate mechanisms for accountability, partnerships focus on the needs of learners, educators, local communities, local business, government and other educational clients in an effort to affirm the human dignity of these groups and promote a value based approach to education” (1996: 3). Group 5 felt that NGOs and the department should establish a “commitment to find synergistic solutions arising out of respect for each other’s professionalism and experience” (1996: 6).

The text of the *NGO Indaba Report* reflects the naïve enthusiasm and lack of critical engagement that emerged as the driving force of the process and which papered over the contending discourses that were at play during the two days. For the NGOs present at the Indaba the proceedings were both frustrating and disempowering as it was clear that the Department was either unwilling or unable to commit itself to anything beyond vague pledges of support and future working relationships. For the Department the Indaba was an expedient process: it had shown its symbolic commitment to engaging with the NGO sector by hosting an elaborate workshop but had also managed to avoid any concrete form of commitment. The Indaba ended with the seemingly obligatory series of self-

congratulatory speeches that embodied all the high-sounding principles that had been worked to death over the previous two days. Since then there has been no follow-up at all on these proceedings and two years later NGOs working in the Northern Cape still operate under conditions of disengagement from the department and in an environment of indifference and uncertainty.

The Northern Cape NGO Indaba clearly exemplifies the fragile and poorly-defined nature of state-civil society relations and the difficulties of establishing solid and workable partnerships and joint ventures. Whilst there is a rhetorical commitment to partnership neither side appear capable of overcoming their mutual mistrust in order to establish a sound working relationship. In the case of ESST the weak relationship that it has with the DOE has been further strained by the form and nature of the foreign funding that has, on the one hand, extended the lifespan of the 'Learning Adventure' in the Northern Cape but on the other has had the effect of frustrating the effective delivery of the programme.

3.5 Foreign funding and the 'Learning Adventure' Project

It was clear by mid-1997 that the corporate funders of the 'Learning Adventure' in 1996 were no longer interested in sustaining the project despite the fact that the Joint Education Trust's (JET) *Evaluation Report of the Northern Cape Primary School Workbook Pilot Project* pointed to the positive impact of the ESST learning materials and teacher support programme on learner performance. Appeals by the provincial deputy Director General of Education for a continuation of the project also fell on deaf ears. This situation pointed to the problematic nature of corporate funding for development projects. Driven by private sector perceptions of development needs and allied to the desire to maximize both profits and their social awareness image such funding arrangements inevitably involve a clash of organizational cultures and development philosophy. Funders from the corporate sector tend to favour one-off projects that will attract public attention but are generally reluctant to assist NGOs in building capacity or longer-term sustainability and there is justifiable criticism for their unwillingness to enter into long-term contracts or partnerships. This experience corresponds with Hallows findings that "local corporate funders [are]

criticized as interested in public relations, not development, and as being inconsistent, indifferent and self regarding ... and frequently demand a return which is not warranted by the amount of their donation" (1995: 4).

By mid-1997 the ESST project coordinators were introduced to the Swedish International Development Authority's (SIDA) provincial representative. Impressed by ESST work with teachers and learners he advised ESST to draw up a funding proposal for submission to SIDA in Stockholm. Sweden has a long and historic tradition of support for the liberation struggle and for the ANC in particular, and after the 1994 elections the Swedish government pledged support to the newly-installed ANC-led government for transforming its public sector (1994: 16). In early 1997 Sweden and South Africa signed a bilateral agreement in which the government of Sweden pledged a grant of SEK (Swedish kronor) 460 million for the period 1997/1998²⁷. SIDA's development goal was to contribute to the democratic development of South Africa through the promotion of poverty alleviation, the strengthening of the social reform process and the furthering of gender equality²⁸. This agreement is currently being reviewed and there is a strong possibility that SIDA will extend the present period of aid to the year 2000.

According to this umbrella agreement between SIDA and the South African government a percentage of the Swedish grant would be allocated for special national projects and the rest would be allocated to the Northern Cape provincial government which was one of the provinces identified by SIDA for major development intervention. According to the terms of the umbrella agreement all the separate sectoral and project specific agreements lined up for implementation would have to be signed at national government level before any funds would be disbursed. The bilateral agreement stated that the five main areas of co-operation would be (a) democracy and human rights, (b) public administration, (c) education, (d) culture and media and (e) urban development and housing. On account of

²⁷ This bilateral agreement was formalized by the signing of the *Agreement between the Government of Sweden and the Government of the Republic of South Africa on Development Co-operation from 1997 to 1998*.

²⁸ Using the November 1998 exchange rate of SEK 1 to R1, 45 this amount translates into R667 million. This was not the final amount as further funds have been allocated to a range of other projects that have been identified subsequent to the original agreement.

Sweden's support for the anti-apartheid struggle aid to South Africa was considered to be a special case as under normal circumstances the Swedish government's policy has been to channel aid to the poorest of the poor in third world countries. In 1997 for example Sweden provided aid worth SEK 245 million to Mozambique, SEK 180 million to Tanzania and SEK 120 million to the West Bank and Gaza (SIDA, 1997: 5). South Africa would under normal circumstances not have met the criteria used by the Swedish government to identify its aid recipients.

According to SIDA policy funding for projects within a specific public sector had to be framed within the parameters of SIDA's "sector support programme". The sector support programme to the Northern Cape was tailored to meet the urgent capacity-building requirements of the provincial ministries and specifically excluded support to NGOs, although this is not general SIDA policy. Both in South Africa and in many other countries SIDA is an energetic supporter of NGOs: in 1997 around 300 different NGOs received SEK 1,3 billion in funding (SIDA, 1997: 3). The sector support programme for the Department of Education identified curriculum development, in-service training, adult basic education, special needs education, educare and educational management and information services (EMIS) as the main areas for targeted funding.

Each of these DOE units was requested to submit proposals in the form of detailed business plans using the logical framework format to ensure that the requirements of results-based planning and management were met and that the plans reflected coherence of purpose and action. Drawing up proposals using the logical framework approach is however an onerous, time-consuming exercise that can result in rigidity of programme design and, as Hallows points out, it has the tendency to produce proposal frameworks that "are widely regarded as making things look good on paper in a way that seldom reflects reality" (1995: 9). The ESST proposal requesting the continuation and expansion of the 'Learning Adventure' project was written in the form of a detailed programme business plan with a budget of R2,9 million and submitted in January 1997. The ironic feature of this proposal was that it had to be written as if it came from the curriculum unit

of the Northern Cape DOE – an open secret to all concerned but nonetheless part of an elaborate charade that had to be played in order to satisfy pre-determined funder policy.

This experience illustrates the fact that when NGOs are made dependent on funding channeled through the state and provincial treasuries they are easily drawn into the technicist discourse that characterizes large bureaucracies. Under these circumstances NGOs come under pressure from both funders and government departments to assume functionally intermediate roles as instruments of state planning and delivery. The irony of this anomalous situation was that despite the greater resources at its disposal only one business plan, that from the ABET unit, was forthcoming from the Northern Cape DOE. Frustratingly for ESST the inability of the units within the Education Department to produce business plans that met the requirements of SIDA meant that the whole process was delayed while local and Swedish consultants were employed at considerable expense to assist unit heads in re-writing their business plans.

In good faith and with the support of the provincial SIDA representative ESST went ahead with its 1997 project. By mid-1997 no progress had been made and consequently no funding was available. As a result the ESST head office found itself in a serious financial predicament as the Northern Cape 'Learning Adventure' project drained its resources and it was only after numerous representations to the SIDA provincial representative and the intercession of the Swedish Embassy in Pretoria that a special agreement was signed between SIDA and ESST for the release of the funds directly into ESST's banking account. At the time SIDA made it quite clear that it viewed this as an exceptional case that was contrary to their stated policy and that it would not be repeated under any circumstances in the future. This essentially cut ESST loose from any contractual obligations with the Department of Education during 1997 and allowed them to proceed with their training programme unimpeded by bureaucratic constraints. The outcome of all this was that the 1997 project operated fairly smoothly, run enthusiastically and productively by a four-person team who managed, through efficient planning and careful budgeting, to achieve satisfactory training results. Despite these obstacles the co-ordinators of the 'Learning Adventure' project in the Northern Cape were rewarded for

their endeavours by being awarded the 1997 Premiers' Education Award for their contribution to educational development in the province. Ironically these successes went unrecognized by both SIDA and the Northern Cape Department of Education and reflected the reality that despite its best efforts ESST was somehow destined to remain enmeshed in the inertia and indifference of the DOE and the excessively bureaucratic workings of SIDA.

At the end of 1997 the ESST trainers were asked to submit another business plan for the extension of the 'Learning Adventure' project for a further two years along with the other units within the Department of Education. As was done in the previous year ESST submitted a new proposal for R3,7 million, this time in a format that made it appear as if it had been written by the curriculum unit. Meetings were held early in 1998 between the various unit heads, ESST trainers and SIDA representatives from the embassy in Pretoria regarding the disbursement of quarterly tranches to the different education programmes, including the 'Learning Adventure' project. Since that time numerous meetings have been held, a series of Swedish delegations have visited the province and numerous assurances have been given but as of December 1998 the bulk of SIDA funding has yet to reach the Northern Cape. Despite the fact that virtually no substantial programme funding has appeared SIDA continues both to request programme reports and to send a steady stream of short and long-term consultants to the Northern Cape to advise on various projects, assist in drawing up business plans and monitor as yet uninitiated programmes.

This lengthy delay in funding has had serious implications for ESST. Whereas some of the larger NGOs are able to shuffle money between accounts to bridge the gap ESST has been caught out at a time when it has unwisely banked on the SIDA funding to maintain its financial viability. The organization has also been forced into unnecessary expense and been forced to waste productive time chasing SIDA, the DOE and the provincial and national treasury in an attempt to speed up the process. The long initial lead time and the subsequent delays has also seen the original project budget eroded as the effects of economic recession push printing and production, transport and administration costs ever higher. ESST is left sitting with an accumulated deficit for a project partially implemented

at the organization's expense and a deep sense of frustration that urgently needed development funding gets caught up in bilateral policy practices, protocol and bureaucratic procedures.

3.7 Conclusion

The work of ESST in the Northern Cape has been shaped by the intersection of a unique set of circumstances peculiar to the contextual realities within which it operates.

Nevertheless many of these realities are typical, to varying degrees, of the conditions that impact on the work of many other NGOs working in the development field in South Africa at present. The uneasy and poorly-defined relationship that continues to exist between the state and NGOs as organs of civil society, as reflected in ESST's experiences with the Northern Cape DOE, remains a central obstacle however to the creation of a sound and effective development partnership. ESST's experiences in the Northern Cape reflect the equivocal and ambiguous nature of current state-civil society relationships, a relationship that is correspondingly mirrored in the changed relationships that have developed between NGOs and their funders.

It would appear that operating within the old development paradigm is no longer a viable option for NGOs in the sense that failure to respond to altered priorities and fluid relationships ultimately prove to be detrimental to the development practices of individual NGOs. The past few years have been marked by strategic realignments within the NGO sector and attempts are being made to reconceive and restructure the philosophies and operational practices of NGOs. Crucial to this process is the need to theorize the restructuring process within the context of state-civil society relations as they are shaped by prevailing regimes of power and control over the determination of normative systems, the formulation of policy and the distribution of resources. In order to do this the following chapter will attempt to set out some of the methodological possibilities that could potentially enable NGOs to theorize both their relationships with the state and their development mission during a period of transition.

CHAPTER 4:

MAPPING SOME METHODOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES

4.1 *Some Reflections on Democracy and the State*

The experiences of ESST in the Northern Cape between 1995 and 1998 are, I would argue, fairly representative of the kinds of issues, problems and tensions that most South African NGOs have had to confront in attempting to implement their development programmes. Whilst these experiences reflect the quotidian nature of much NGO development work they are at the same time manifestations of sets of deeper structural relations operating within the social formation. So, for example, when an attempt is made to describe and analyze the operation of particular NGOs and the development work that they do at a deeper level within the structural relations of the state-civil society nexus and in the context of the shifting ebb and flow of regional, national and global developments it becomes evident that there are a whole range of binary tensions and contradictions which make it difficult to establish broad generalizations. In attempting to conceptualize relations between the state and civil society it is important to examine the tensions that exist at the heart of the state-civil society relationship and how these tensions can determine the degree of democratic participation and civil autonomy available within a given polity.

The nature and extent of the democratic order within the post-apartheid South African state and the power differentials that maintain it are of crucial analytical importance for agents of civil society working in the development field as these are what set the boundaries of agency. Whilst the 1996 constitution has been praised internationally as one of the most liberal in the world there are indications that it is by no means a document that can guarantee the preservation of an already fragile democracy. As it stands it has the capacity to restrain or inhibit the abuse of political power but on its own cannot prevent it. Welsh points out that though the constitution provides for a federal system it is essentially unitary with strong elements of the 'winner-take-all' Westminster model and he sounds a

cautionary note by arguing that “neither of these qualities makes for a durable democracy in a deeply divided society like South Africa” (1998: 21).

In his study of democracy and the limits of autonomy within the nation-state Held makes a number of observations that are of crucial importance for development practitioners working in the education field to establish and nurture democratic forms of citizenship. Arguing that the existence of fundamental liberal tenets, the centrality of an ‘impersonal’ structure of public power, a constitution and bill of rights, and mechanisms to promote unfettered political activity are not sufficient to guarantee liberal democracy Held believes that for democracy to flourish it must be fully entrenched in and among those sites of power which have unnecessarily restricted its form and efficacy (1995: 153). According to his view, the focus on

‘government’ and its actions alone tends to draw attention away from a thorough examination of “the relation between formal rights and actual rights; between commitments to treat citizens as free and equal and practices which do neither sufficiently; between the concept of the state as, in principle, an independent authority, and state involvement in the reproduction of the inequalities of everyday life; between notions of political leadership and political parties as appropriate structures for bridging the gap between state and society; and the array of power centres which such structures cannot reach. To ignore these matters is to risk the establishment of ‘democracy’ in the context of a web of political, economic and social circumstances – from the power systems of leading social groups to the international organizations of the states system and the global flows of capital markets – which challenge the control and reach of democratic governance (1995: 152).

What Held’s observation highlights is the fact that the practices associated with democratic governance within a given nation-state are variously and often contentiously shaped by both endogenous and exogenous arrangements and patterns of power.

Bearing these observations in mind it is clear that the power configurations shaping the South African polity and their structural linkages with the prevailing global order determine in large measure the parameters within which NGO development practice happens. Consequently part of the task of this thesis will be to try and define theoretically some of those parameters and then try to gauge to what extent they both constrain and enable the development practice of NGOs working in South Africa. In the next section an

attempt will be made to extract a number of key ideas from Giddens's structuration theory, link them with a set of theoretical lenses set up by Hargreaves, and then suggest ways in which these frameworks can be used to theorize the work done by NGOs within the context of current state-civil society relations in South Africa.

4.2 *Giddens and the Theory of Structuration*

Giddens makes the crucial point that social theories, whatever their focus, should function not as ideological paradigms but rather as resources that do not restrict the individual to a specific theoretical position. In this view different theories and theoretical traditions operate as sensitizing devices that alert practitioners to the epistemological, ideological and normative foundations that underpin specific theoretical approaches and allows them to shape their resultant practices in an informed manner. According to Cohen this eclectic or syncretic approach is a function both of Giddens's aversion to systematic coherence and theoretical totalization as well as of structuration theory itself which conceives of social structures and social practices as protean rather than stable (1989, 6 – 7). Le Roux takes up Giddens's position and argues that this approach will have the effect of developing a better understanding of the processes that can influence the potential successes or failures of NGOs in the development field (1996, 282).

To help establish this theoretical perspective Giddens's theory of structuration, and in particular his notion of structured social practices, will be used as a framework within which to synthesize some of the different development, state and civil society perspectives raised in this thesis. One of the key concerns of this thesis is to explore the interactions of agency, in particular individual NGOs, with the social systems and structures that demarcate the limits of action within a particular social formation. A key element of structuration theory is the use that Giddens makes of 'structured social practices' as primary units of analysis and this has an important bearing on notions of agency and structure. The crucial insight here is that structure exists as both the medium and outcome of social reproduction and as such is open to change through human agency. According to

Giddens however agency is constrained in the sense that while people can create their own futures this does not happen under conditions of their choice, nor with the consequences originally intended. Thus, although certain liberties will be taken, these units of analysis will be put to work in an attempt to measure the ability of NGOs as agents of change to bring about significant social transformation within the structures determined both by the state, the economy and the prevailing global order.

An important departure point in this analysis will be Giddens's notion of the interaction or "double hermeneutic" between structure and agency. This duality arises out of the fact that in order to reproduce a structured practice agents must draw upon previously acquired knowledge and resources so that action is conceived as a continuous flow of interventions in the world which are initiated by autonomous agents. However just as agents need knowledge of how a practice is performed in order to reproduce it, so too as they perform the practice they reproduce this knowledge (with all its associated patterns of power and resource distribution) thereby advancing it recursively into a new moment in time and re-enforcing the awareness that the practice exists (Giddens, 1984: 17). Thus using this approach does not imply that either position will be privileged: instead the structuration approach will be used to explore the recursiveness of social life, the way that it is constituted in social practices that are ordered across time and space and the manner in which social structures are re-created, with slight variations, from location to location. Archer observes that this theory "is predicated upon grasping the temporal and spatial locations which are inherent in the constitution of all social interaction" (1990: 75) and Ball suggests that the central concern of such a sociological approach is "to account for agency in a constrained world, and show how agency and structure are implicit in each other, rather than being the two poles of a continuum" (1994: 15). In rejecting functionalist theories and the structuralist denial of agency Giddens focuses on the dynamic interplay of structure and agency and his theoretical approach reflects the position that social systems are in continuous process of structuration, they are not static or reified systems.

A crucial aspect of the theory of structuration is the emphasis Giddens places on the potentially enabling or constraining effects that structure has on agency. For Giddens 'structuration' is a conceptual framework for analyzing how society is produced, reproduced and constituted through the actions of human beings who, as knowledgeable and purposive agents capable of reflexively monitoring their action, make their own history (Thompson, 1989: 58). Importantly agency serves both to transform and maintain social structures through what Giddens terms the 'unintended consequences of action' and the 'unacknowledged conditions of action' which reproduce the structures that render further action possible. This, according to Archer, is an acknowledgement that "social practice is ineluctably shaped by the unacknowledged conditions of action and generates unintended consequences which form the context of subsequent interaction" (1990: 74). Giddens suggests that the intended or unintended consequences of what social agents do are "events which would not have happened if that actor had behaved differently but which are not within the scope of the agent's power to have brought about" (Cassell, 1993: 97). Giddens's theory proposes that social systems *per se* are constituted by structured practices that are reproduced by social agents through their repeated interactions with one another and the structures that constitute the social formation – what he terms the flow or "*durée*" of human action. These structured practices can be broken up into three constitutive elements that Giddens identifies as acts, interaction and rules. For Giddens the crucial element is that of interaction, out of which arises the "meaningfulness" of the social system as a totality.

According to Giddens in order for these structured practices to be reproduced as discursively and experientially meaningful, social agents must draw on previously acquired knowledge and resources as to how these practices are performed (1984: 88)²⁹. Thus any single organ of civil society working as an agent for social change will necessarily find itself enmeshed in the sets of intersecting discourses and practices that flow from the state, from civil society and from the global order. However both the 'state and 'civil society' are manifestations or effects of society in its broadest sense. In order to

²⁹ Giddens stresses the importance of mutual knowledge within the social context of interaction and suggests that this knowledge is applied "in the form of interpretive schemes whereby contexts of communication are created and sustained in interaction" (Cassell, 1993: 106)

avoid essentializing the notion of a social formation it is important to work from the premise that the terms 'society', the 'state' and 'civil society' should not be seen as neutral or purely descriptive terms but rather that they are defined in different ways and from different ideological perspectives. Jessop for example proposes that there is no reason to privilege 'society' as a unit of analysis when theorizing either the state or civil society but to view it rather as a horizon against which to examine different axes of what he terms "societalization" and its implications for the ensemble of social relations (1990: 7).

Applied to the uneven and fluid nature of the South African social terrain it is difficult to argue for the fact that social agents operate within a system that is constituted and reproduced through more or less stable social processes and practices. For small organizations such as ESST that are dependent on special kinds of ideologically and financially enabling support systems this terrain often proves to be both confusing and disabling, particularly when the systems of power, knowledge and resources that constituted the 'meaningfulness' of past social practices are being reconstituted in the new dispensation. Such processes and practices are articulations of diverse social relations which combine to produce 'society effects' which Jessop argues arise in any given social formation as a function of its being constituted by contested and contradictory elements that continually establish the scope for rival 'societal projects' (1990: 5).

In the three years that the 'Learning Adventure' project has been in operation in the Northern Cape it has gone through three distinct phases. The first year was characterized by a joint venture between the corporate sector, the Department of Education and ESST; the second year saw ESST operating fairly independently with foreign donor funding; the main feature of the third year has been the attempt to establish a contractual relationship between the Department of Education and ESST under the aegis of SIDA funding. Nevertheless, prevailing normative orders, the nature of state-civil society relations, policy and financial constraints have been consistent variables impacting on ESST's development practice. How these variables have shaped the work of ESST will be the principle concern in the following section.

4.3 *Setting up a Theoretical Framework*

In the South African context the restructuring of education is rooted in the government's transformative vision of social reconstruction and development. The realities of reconstruction bring with them profound socio-cultural changes and embody a fundamental redefinition of rules, roles, values, responsibilities and relationships for educators, administrators and civil society agents working in the education sector. In trying to map the effects of profound socio-cultural and educational change Hargreaves believes that it is crucial to identify the range of choices and dilemmas bound up with restructuring and to examine the powerful implications that they have for the purposes of restructuring and the outcomes achieved (1994: 51). These choices and dilemmas are exemplified through the engagement of the small core of ESST personnel with the processes of educational restructuring in the Northern Cape that has undoubtedly involved a battle against many odds. It is essentially a story of agents of civil society with limited powers caught up in the structural dynamics of state organs in transition. Within the context of educational restructuring the primary focus of ESST's 'Learning Adventure' project has been the distribution of innovative learning materials to all provincial primary schools together with teacher development through in-service training. This work was expanded in 1997 to incorporate the demands of the implementation of Curriculum 2005. Despite the difficulties and frustrations inherent in the process it has given ESST personnel an ideal vantage point from which to view the dynamics of educational restructuring as they play themselves out across the terrain of contending political, social, cultural and linguistic realities.

Given these difficulties two questions of great concern for development practitioners are raised. The first question relates to the extent to which acting subjects or groups of subjects have the capacity to influence social change? In a Giddensian sense the meaningfulness of social action and the extent of possible change is dependent on the capacity of individual agents not only to act consciously and constructively but also on their ability to sustain a reasoned and critical reflection on the meaning of their actions from moment to moment in every day life in an effort to bring about social change. The

second question is to what extent is agency constrained by structure or, in other words, what precisely constitutes the social practices that have the capacity to both constrain and enable the development work conducted by NGOs? The kinds of development practice conducted by NGOs are dependent on four ever-present concerns that may either constrain or enable development practice. The four elements are the prevailing value systems of the communities they work in, the legitimacy and political acceptability of their work, the policy frameworks within they must operate, and the availability of funding. From this one can argue that for any particular NGO meaningfulness of action lies in the dynamic and unpredictable interplay of agency and structure that occurs within the prevailing configuration of four key systemic concerns: the normative discourse at play in the social formation, the effective location of power, the discourses shaping policy formation, and control over the production and allocation of resources.

Giddens's notion of structure involves an analytic deconstruction of social procedures into four elements and stresses that every structured practice combines all four elements. Giddens suggests that all social practices can be broken down into these four constitutive and inter-linked elements that he argues form the matrix of systemic interaction that endures over time and that distributes people in space. At the macro-level of institutional practices these four elements can be linked to four types of institutions and their associated practices that establish the parameters within which social practices are legitimated:

- ❖ Firstly there are the symbolic orders of rights and obligations that are connected to class, cultural and ethnic sanctions in social systems and which determine the moral rules for appropriate normative enactment.
- ❖ Secondly there are the political institutions that determine the distribution of power and authority and create the conditions that either enable or constrain the strength of civil society.
- ❖ Thirdly there are the legal institutions that determine the procedural and generalizable rules, for example through the enactment of laws and the formulation of policy, for the performance of social practices.

- ❖ Fourthly there are the national and global economic systems that determine the distribution of material and human resources. These systems are transformational and mediating in that they are either mobilized or withheld in various ways to perform or prevent specific activities and to achieve specific ends

The four structural elements that Giddens proposes at the macro-theoretical level can be linked to the conceptual framework offered by Hargreaves in his examination of educational restructuring and the tensions or dilemmas that are embedded in that process. Hargreaves (1994: 51) organizes these tensions into four analytical clusters that he believes have powerful implications not only for the purposes of restructuring and the directions it takes but also for the processes of educational development contained within it. For the purposes of explanatory structure he terms these clusters:

- ❖ vision or voice
- ❖ structure or culture
- ❖ mandates or menus
- ❖ trust in people or trust in processes

These tensions can be viewed as the inevitable effects at a micro-level of a globalized world where the traditional boundaries of identity, knowledge, authority and trust that held social structures in place have been fractured by the dynamics of modernity that separate time and space, disembody systems from their locales and foreground institutional reflexivity as a constitutive element of social life (Giddens: 1991: 20). The sets of tensions that Hargreaves describes can, therefore, be seen as the localized outcomes to the four elements that Giddens proposes. The linkage between the two then establishes a theoretical ordering that will be used in the rest of this thesis. The terrain of the symbolic order is constituted by the tensions generated by the conflict between normative metanarratives and the need for the local expression of values. The terrain of power and authority generates tensions between politically-motivated and officially sanctioned structural modalities and the localized and embedded traditions, assumptions and working relationships that shape existing practice. The terrain of procedural and allocative rules generates tensions between the officially mandated and bureaucratically administered

policy decisions that emanate from centrally situated expert systems and the needs and aspirations within different contextual particularities. The terrain of resources generates tensions that arise from a mistrust of official systems to provide the necessary human and material resources necessary to implement meaningful change. A crucial understanding for NGO practitioners is that forms of social, political and economic life have their own specific modes and dynamics of inter-relation with their own specific contextual conditions, range of human agency, available resources, power distributions and situationally-mediated unintended consequences and that these complex interrelationships shape development practice in a recursive manner (Lash and Urry, 1994). In this sense the combination of Giddens's four structural elements and the four heuristics proposed by Hargreaves can be put to work in examining the trajectory of ESST's teacher training programme as set against the contending stresses of state and civil society and their respective value systems.

4.4 Conclusion

Organizing the disparate assortment of experiences, perceptions and anecdotal stories that have arisen from these dynamics and putting them into a coherent analytic framework does present somewhat of a difficulty. By combining the four elements of Giddens's structured practices with Hargreaves's four heuristics, however, a set of composite theoretical lenses is created through which it is possible to examine the conditions under which many NGOs in South Africa are operating at the present time. What the rest of this thesis will attempt to do then is to take the experiences of ESST and examine how they have been constituted within the state-civil society nexus in South Africa during the post-apartheid period of radical socio-political transition and economic restructuring. In order to do this the succeeding chapters will deal sequentially with each of these elements under the following headings:

- ❖ The symbolic order
- ❖ Power and authority
- ❖ Rules of procedure

❖ Material and human resources

Thus in each chapter the experiences of ESST will be mapped across the inter-related strands of the South African social formation: the state and the patterns of power that maintain it, the nature and role of civil society, the distribution of resources, the discourses that shape both formal policy and the national psyche and the part played by agents who constitute the society and the social formation of human agents. This will be done within a theoretical framework that takes as its premise the recursive nature of these structural elements and the way in which their dynamic interpenetration opens up possibilities for human agency in the process of social transformation.

CHAPTER 5

THE SYMBOLIC ORDER

5.1 *Configuring the Rules of the Game*

Giddens emphasizes that formalized procedural rules – embodied in legislative and policy texts - are themselves structured by prevailing ideological and moral orders and in this way they operate as normative indicators for social practice. Since 1994 the South African political and social normative order, on paper if not in practice, has been systematically overhauled. This has been done with the intention of purging the country's social formation of practices deeply embedded in colonialist and racist values and to reconstruct a just and equitable social order based on universally acceptable liberal norms and values. This normative dimension to the restructuring of society is reflected in the language and content of policy documents emanating from both state and civil society and embodies perceived social goods such as social justice, multi-culturalism, nation-building and redress.

Though these rules and norms come into being through the will of dominant aggregates within the discursive space of a social formation they are nonetheless subject to enhancement or constraint that is determined by the material conditions prevailing both at the local, the systemic and the global scale. In other words policies shaped within negotiated forums at governmental level are reshaped in their passage through to the local level and in that journey may lose or gain emphasis and legitimacy. The nature of the geographical locales within which policies must be implemented inevitably shapes the way in which a given policy is presented and made meaningful to its recipients. The spatial particularities linked to specific socio-cultural conditions can impose a unique set of constraints that can effectively rewrite or negate the policy imperatives. The following section will examine how NGOs, in terms of development praxis, find themselves at the interface between a nationally constructed normative consensus and the varying interpretations and practices of this consensus at a more localized level.

5.2 NGOS: *Boundaries of Values, Norms and Practices*

In much of the post-1994 debate South Africa's transition to democracy has been analyzed in terms of its political development and economic potential. Notwithstanding the traumatic web of apartheid history that has been partially unravelled by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) relatively little debate has been taken place around the complex and potentially fraught issue of a common set of national norms and values. South African social life has been systematically restructured over the last five years and will undoubtedly continue on this trajectory for a number of years to come. This restructuring is being enabled by the passage of legislation designed to negate apartheid systems and to replace them with systems that are liberal and democratic in nature.

Although much recent legislation has been constructed around sets of norms and values that legislators believe reflect the virtues of an ideal society there exists a fracture between the normative work of the state and the historical, cultural and linguistic realities of South African society. It is in this sense that Mangcu argues that the success of South Africa's nascent democracy will more than likely be determined by the extent to which the country's political, administrative and policy institutions are informed by the values, aspirations and motivations of ordinary South Africans rather than grand normative masternarratives³⁰. By calling into question the wholesale imposition of a universalizing Western value system this argument however sets up a tension between notions of cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization. In effect this argument poses the question of whether it is possible for a culturally, economically and historically fragmented population, whose fragmentation is currently being sublimated into disturbing forms of nationalism and xenophobia, to be the source of a common set of values³¹.

³⁰ These views are expressed by Xolela Mangcu in an article entitled "Seeking common national values" which appeared in the *Mail & Guardian*, 5 to 11/05/1998.

³¹ South Africa is currently experiencing a wave of xenophobia, directed particularly against migrants and illegal aliens from other African states, that has been well documented in the media in articles such as "African foreigners terrorised" (*Mail & Guardian* 18 – 23/12/1998)

Underlying much of the effort that has gone into the conceptualization and production of policy since 1994 has been a set of pluralist assumptions that South African society should be restructured around a basic normative consensus built on certain historically and politically legitimated moral premises such as democracy, equal rights, non-racism and multi-culturalism. There is a need however to examine the correspondence that exists between the kind of normative moral discourse that is being constructed at the level of the state and the prevailing moral and ethical regimes that exist within the South African social formation. At the symbolic level there is undoubtedly a broad national consensus about what is required to transform South African society but at the level of social and political interaction problematic tensions are generated where traditional and customary forms of moral foundationalism conflict with modern and post-modern forms of moral relativism. The problem essentially becomes one of trying to reconcile contending aspects of moral and cultural diversity within contingent historical contexts. The danger is that attempts at reconciling diversity into a national project, as for example with the state's call for 'nation-building', can end up being "a polite term for the cultural and ideological homogenization of a country's population" (Nandy, 1993: 265).

Just as the political and economic spheres are contested terrains the same is true of the sphere of symbolic production. Although the constitution tries to establish in an apparently neutral manner the normative conditions that can create the possibility for the complex intersection of webs of belief and custom, the tensions that exist are not necessarily resolved through the formulation of policy associated with those norms (Reeder, 1993: 195). It goes further than this however. If one considers that the meaning, interest and language used to construct norms are bound up in the unequal power relations that exist within society then, as Apple argues, "the circle of dominant ideas does accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others and to set limits on what appears rational and reasonable, indeed on what appears sayable and thinkable" (1989: 9).

Moral premises are never unproblematic and the difficulty that arises from an artificially constructed normative national framework of morals, values and attitudes is that it assumes a cross-cultural consensus of values between groups who may share little in

common in the way of customs, attitudes and beliefs. The moral order for determining ideal social interaction is established however as an agreed upon regime of norms mapped across a set of power relations. It is in this sense that the South African constitution, drawing on the nexus of Enlightenment norms that include ideas of rights, freedoms, justice and democracy, maps out the negotiated normative regime that creates the conditions for the actualization of rights and the enactment of obligations with the social formation. If we see national policies as “authoritative allocations of value” (Badat quoting Prunty, 1991: 18) then the question arises as to whose norms, values and beliefs are being privileged and then legitimized through the institutionalization of these values in policy documents and legislation. From a liberal perspective there is a sense that the nurturing of a democratic culture should supercede nation-building and Habermas contends that “the nation of citizens does not derive its identity from some common ethnic and cultural properties, but rather from the praxis of citizens who actively exercise their civil rights” (Marais, 1998: 257).

Appadurai prefers to see the construction of normative frameworks within the context of the global cultural economy in which the internal normative logic of the Enlightenment meta-narrative has become loosened in its spread across the world. The result of this is that its terms, images and values have become “a loosely structured synopticon of politics, in which different nation-states, as part of their evolution, have organized their political cultures around different ‘keywords’” (1993: 331). These ‘ideoscapes’, as Appadurai terms them, become both polysemic in their global migration, require careful translation from context to context, and are pragmatic “to the extent that the use of these words by political actors and their audiences may be subject to very different sets of contextual conventions that mediate their translation into public policies” (1993: 331). It is in this dialectical sense that the production of normative social interaction is both constraining and enabling, dependent as it is on all normative elements being treated “as a series of claims whose realization is contingent upon the successful actualization of obligations through the medium of the responses of other participants” (Giddens in Cassell, 1993: 107).

In the area of education the currently dominant norms and standards set out by the National Ministry both enable and constrain the terrain of praxis for teachers and NGO practitioners working with the new curriculum. The *White Paper on Education and Training*, which itself derives its moral authority from the constitution, informs the discourse of Curriculum 2005 and stresses the fundamental importance of education for the promotion of social justice, human rights, democracy and citizenship. At the same time contested issues such as multi-lingualism and multi-culturalism are viewed unproblematically as social goods. In terms of the government's overall strategy of transformation schools have been identified as key sites for the opening up, reshaping and integration of South Africa's diverse cultural capital. This is a difficult task as schools are being placed under pressure to desegregate and to open admissions to broader school-going communities that straddle the racial and cultural boundaries of neighbourhoods and communities. They are also expected to conform to principles of equal access and opportunity that are regularly violated by prevailing socio-economic disparities within the broader community. It is under conditions of inequity that, as Mitchell points out, schools must operate as agencies for inculcating the values of tolerance and understanding for diverse cultures amongst their learners that often go against the wishes of teachers, parents and community groups (1995: 176). This opens up the possibilities for a clash of different world-views and clashes between diverging understandings of consensual norms which result, as Giddens argues, because "the moral co-ordination of interaction is assymetrically interdependent with its production as meaningful and with its expressions of relations of power" (Cassell, 1993: 108).

Part of the problem is that within the South African context positive normative attributes tend to be associated with the notion of community in an unproblematic and sometimes politically expedient manner. Badat believes that the concept 'community' (frequently interchanged with 'the people') "lacks any particular rigour, especially when it is employed to convey the picture of a homogenous mass, unfractured by race, class, gender and other divisions" (1991: 34). In this sense the construct of 'community' can function as an abstract sociological concept invested with an ideologically constructed normative value in whose name resources, power and status can be accessed. In a symbolic manner the notion of 'community' is then utilized as an ideological tool to justify or legitimate a

particular set of norms at the expense of others. Urry makes the point that “community can also be understood as ideology, where efforts are made to attach conception of communion to buildings, areas, estates, cities, and so on, in ways which conceal and help to perpetuate the non-communion relations actually to be found” (1997: 376). Thus it can be argued that the notion of representivity and accountability embedded within the construct of ‘community’ is an inherently complex and problematic one that is often used unproblematically to hide its ideological sub-text. This is a common feature of development work in South Africa and it can have a negative effect on NGO activities. The work carried out by NGOs, for example, is often bound by donor requirements that programmes must be operated in consultation with representative community structures to ensure their legitimacy. However through their experiences of working with diverse communities many NGOs have found that in many cases supposedly representative community organizations or groupings are not representative at all but rather, as Pieterse notes, these structures may often be “controlled by elites, they may be riven with differences and they may ignore the interests of women and other, more marginal social groups” (Pieterse, 1998, pg.1).

In the South African education context the difficulty exists in trying to determine precisely how a set of standardized norms, functioning as a kind of national normative template, fit the inconsistencies that mark the social terrain and its diverse communities. On a broad level, and arguing from the perspective of globalization, it can be argued that norms within the modern nation-state are shaped by the demands of economic imperatives. In their review of education policy documents from mid-1997 to mid-1998 Vally and Spreen note that most of them continued to reflect global educational trends and neo-liberal, market-oriented approaches such as school decentralization, rationalization and budgetary cuts (1998: 5). For Aronowitz and Giroux there is a disturbing contradiction between the discourse of democratic human rights that is embedded in the liberal ideology and the economic counter-logic that creates the conditions for resistance and conflict. For them the “liberal democratic ideology contains concerns for human rights that are often at odds with capitalist rationality, its ethos of commodity fetish, and its drive for profits” (1993: 89). Apple for example points to the American and European experience where the social democratic goal of expanding equality of opportunity has been subordinated by dominant

groups within politics and the economy onto the terrain of competition, standardization, productivity and industrial needs (1989: 7). For Apple the common good comes to be determined by economic forces to the extent that “definitions of freedom and equality are no longer democratic, but commercial” (1989: 9) and in even more radical terms Esteva claims that “as a conceptual construction, economics strives to subordinate to its rule and to subsume under its logic every other form of social interaction in every society it invades” (1993: 17). The juxtaposition of the discourse of the global market economy and that of democratic citizenship have created contradictions that are in turn embedded in the new curriculum. This has led some analysts to note with concern that both discourses are “accepted as non-negotiable realities, and both are projected as if they can be operative simultaneously in general South African society and particularly in learning and teaching situations” (Vally, 1998: 17).

National normative statements are not solely determined by political or economic determinants but also by the symbolic orders of tradition and faith. It is clear that within South African society the extremely liberal nature of the constitution and its enabling frameworks are being compromised by forces released by the transition from one political order to another and as a consequence are being internalized with some apparent difficulty. In a particularly obvious way this is illustrated by a disregard for basic liberal values, laws, rules and regulations to the extent that it appears to have grown into a national pathology. This pathology, well documented in the media, manifests itself at different levels of the social system and to differing degrees of intensity from the perpetration of brutal crimes to the thoughtless littering of public spaces. The prevailing slide towards anomie in South Africa is noted with concern by Van Zyl Slabbert who makes the point that “to have a constitution that eloquently enshrines basic human rights in a society where crime and corruption is rampant is to devalue the meaning of human rights and bring them into disrepute” (*Sunday Independent*, 20/12/1998).

On a less obvious but perhaps more pervasive level the state’s normative impetus is engendering a range of unanticipated tensions and resistances in response to policy decisions that are perceived as threatening to established practices. Within the education

sector there appears to be a growing disillusionment with many of the changes that are being implemented at school level. In their work with Northern Cape teachers ESST trainers are consistently asked to explain and justify department policy around broad issues such as teacher rationalization and classroom-based concerns around questions of curriculum content, language policy, new assessment practices and disciplinary issues such as corporal punishment. It is possible to argue, as is done in the following section, that such conflictual perceptions arise as a manifestations of tensions not only between the norms expressed differentially at national and community level, but also between the norms that underpin different kinds of organizational culture and the respective expectations and modes of operation that arise from them.

5.3 *Organizational Cultures and Normative Dichotomies*

The work being done by NGOs as they attempt to engage with the reconstruction and development work in South Africa is caught up in a cross-current of contending discourses about how the new education system should be theorized and practiced within the constraints of normative frames prescribed by the state. There are at the present time a multiplicity of signs and counter-signs that point to the enormous tensions and contradictions confronting development practitioner working in the education field. These tensions and contradictions emanate both from particularist readings of policies, practices and norms shaping the South African educational terrain and from their increasing resistance to critique and revision by state officials. As discussed earlier NGOs currently occupy an uneasy and indeterminate place in the reconstruction of South African society and perhaps nowhere more obviously than in the field of education which generally tends to be one of most contested of social arenas.

Up to 1990 NGOs worked within a clearly defined oppositional paradigm and espoused a particular set of social democratic norms that gave their activities a clear focus and direction. Since 1994 however NGOs have had to redefine their roles and confront uncomfortable contradictions. Historically NGOs have guarded their autonomy as organs

of civil society, their liberal values and their non-partisanship as agents of social development. The current circumstances in South Africa have started to shift these boundaries and many NGOs are being faced with difficult choices, the polarities of which are on the one hand imminent demise and on the other hand co-option as agents of state delivery. The praxis of development by NGOs is thus being shaped not by theories of development embedded in civil society discourse but by the ambiguities arising out of the fact that the state experiences difficulties in delivering services yet it also exercises power over access, resources and values. One can view this in an ironic sense as Nandy does and argue that development is the process in the name of which the state mobilizes resources internally and externally and, then, eats them up itself, instead of allowing them to reach the bottom and peripheries of the society.” (1993 : 270)

The question that needs to be raised then is to what extent NGOs and the state can act in partnership within the boundaries of conflicting normative stances. The move towards state–civil society partnership in the development sphere, currently in vogue at the discursive level of policy, undoubtedly throws together uneasy bedfellows and raises the crucial developmental issue of project-to-institution compatability within the context of institutional norms and values. There appears to be little in the South African literature regarding the nature of the bureaucracy and the state in relation to organizations of civil society. The developing trend since 1994 however has been for NGOs and government departments to work in collaboration on projects that are designed by NGOs, offered by funding agents or consist of state programmes put out to tender. NGOs are expected to tailor their programmes to state policies but this means that NGOs insert themselves at the problematic interface between policy formulation, policy implementation and normative imperatives. Greenstein argues (1997: 2) that the mechanisms involved in moving from policies on paper, frequently designed by committees of experts and “stakeholders” that operate outside of the boundaries of the state, to the implementation of policies in practice which are controlled by state officials with their distinct agendas and modes of operation are fraught with tensions. Projects set up in this way necessitate, at the level of a strategic or business plan, a close and co-operative working relationship between service provider and the responsible line ministry.

The effectiveness of such joint ventures is however often impaired by differing perceptions, expectations, preoccupations, personal agendas and work patterns that reflect an essential clash of organizational cultures. Such clashes of organizational culture, certainly in the South African context, are also reflections of unresolved racial, linguistic and gender issues. Leach argues that problems hindering cooperative working relations are encountered because NGOs and government departments operate according to different sets of dynamics where each have “different goals, different time scales and different types of power structure, roles and tasks” (1995: 462). Government departments generally conform to what Handy calls ‘role’ culture: they are “bureaucratic pyramid-like organizations, with well-established rules and procedures, a rigid hierarchy, centralized decision-making and well-defined roles for individual employees” primarily engaged in systems maintenance (1988: 67). As a result government organs as structures are often rigid, hierarchical and autocratic and that display a natural tendency to centralization, bureaucracy and control with ultimate jurisdiction resting at the topmost level where programmes are designed, personnel assigned and resources allocated.

It can be argued that in the present climate of public sector restructuring the systems maintenance function of South African government departments is being compromised by a set of tensions generated by the processes of transformation itself. The ANC government has, in its first five years in power, introduced far-reaching changes within the public service, not only through internal redress measures such as affirmative action but also through radical policy shifts such as the introduction of Curriculum 2005. On the other hand these changes are being implemented within the framework of budgetary constraint, rationalization and restructuring. Where such conditions prevail a ready matrix is created for bureaucratic inertia and confusion, for shifting power bases, for constantly changing policies and for chronic shortages of funds and weak infrastructures. NGOs working in contractual or partnership relations with government departments have to deal with the ambiguities and inconsistencies that are a natural corollary of bureaucratic situations such as these. A recent TNDT study on the relations between civil society organizations and the government identifies a number of obstacles to improved co-operation and noted that

ignorance, indifference and apathy amongst middle and lower level bureaucratic staff represented a major hurdle to improved working relations. These attitudes, including a 'them and us syndrome', a lack of communications skills necessary to engage in partnerships among the old guard, and sometimes a dash of old-fashioned racism, are exacerbated by a lack of clarity about appropriate roles for different players and the severe capacity problems affecting both sectors (*Sunday Independent 'Reconstruct'*, 22/11/1998, pg. 7)

NGOs on the other hand tend to operate within what Handy calls a "task culture" where the focus is on getting a job done as efficiently, effectively and timeously as possible and NGO practitioners typically operate in flexible, innovative and non-hierarchical ways that are often prerequisites for partnerships and participatory forms of development. The changed socio-political paradigm since 1994 has meant that people working both within and outside of the public sector have had to re-evaluate the mindsets, strategies and practices that characterized their previous working conditions and re-focus on supporting the transformative processes that have been legislated at a steady rate by parliament. This has resulted in a disorientating process as individuals move rapidly between very different organizational cultures. Many NGO practitioners, whose *raison d'être* was to work at countering and subverting the policies and practices of the apartheid government, have been forced to re-evaluate their theoretical and operational strategies to accord with the changing socio-political circumstance in South Africa. On the other hand ex-NGO practitioners who have moved into government have been forced to re-evaluate their old antipathies to state structures and bureaucratic practices. There are also many bureaucrats within the state structures who have been forced to reconcile themselves with a new order that has effectively removed their old loci of authority and control and that operates within a set of norms very different from their own ³².

³²The so-called 'sunset clause' was a disputed aspect of the negotiated settlement of 1993 that made provision *inter alia* for the retention of 'counter-revolutionary' white and homeland bureaucrats in the civil service for the initial five year period of power-sharing after the first democratic election (Marais, 1998: 87).

Giddens makes the point that normative claims may be acknowledged as binding “not because an actor to whom it applies as an obligation accepts that obligation as a moral commitment, but because he anticipates, and wants to avoid, the sanctions which will be applied in the case of his non-compliance” (Cassell, 1993: 107). The argument that Giddens makes is, in many ways, an accurate description of the situation that exists within the South African education system at present. In effect state bureaucrats are tasked with implementing a policy vision and supporting a normative discourse that, although potentially troubling to their own intuitive understandings and deeply-held convictions, is subject to a pressure to implement which does not allow for the expression of counter-discourses. As agents of civil society within a democratic state NGOs should see it as part of their educational development work to both support educational change in collaboration with the state whilst simultaneously subjecting that very process to an informed and reasoned critique. At the same time NGOs could also see it as part of their work to assist both state bureaucrats and educators in engaging with the inevitable tensions generated by contending value systems and in working to resolve those tensions so that compromises can be reached.

The many tensions that do arise are a function of the different normative perspectives that inform the public and the voluntary sectors and are reflected in range of ways across the terrain of day to day educational activities. The localized manifestations of state-sanctioned norms will be explored in the next section by appropriating the “vision/voice” dilemma that Hargreaves raises. On the one hand the state is driven to construct a new national identity to replace the fractured identities created by segregationist policies and one way of doing this is to drive the process through the development and implementation of a centralized national curriculum. On the other hand, as Hargreaves argues, the bureaucratic impetus to manage the process of transformation and change from the centre will inevitably meet with resistance from educators whose own vision of teaching and learning may be at odds with the prevailing mindset (1994: 53). A brief review of ESST’s development and training work both with state bureaucrats and teachers will show that the clash of normative perspectives does pose a real threat to the internalization and effective implementation of the new curriculum and the normative discourse that informs it.

5.4 Working with the Tensions Between “Vision” and “Voice”

The process of social transformation in South Africa is taking place through both the legislated and informal restructuring of social systems characterized by the realignment of power relations, the reallocation of resources and the articulation of new national norms and values. The transition to a post-apartheid society is being experienced as an intensely local South African phenomenon driven by the nationally mandated imperatives of justice and equity; yet it necessarily unfolds in a dialectic fashion against the multifaceted conditions of globalization that creates a growing worldwide interconnectedness of structure, culture and agency that is paralleled by a localized de-differentiation of traditional historical and customary boundaries. The national transformative vision, informed by standard western ideas of justice, human rights and progress, is not uniformly internalized by South African citizens but is, as Kirby suggests “mediated via local political practices, local employment opportunities, local educational experiences, and the long-standing cultural forms that contribute to local knowledge” (1993: 25). This dialectic informs the new integrated approach to education and training, curriculum and INSET provision and as Christie points out “to whatever extent integration ideas are the result of global influences, in practice they are being woven into a texture of local concerns” (1997: 117).

These processes have undoubtedly had the effect of liberating previously silenced discursive spaces and have opened up the possibility for the expression of voices previously suppressed by apartheid ideology and its education practices. Ironically however, although this liberalization has brought with it the benefits of an open society it has also produced fears that the unpredictable patterns of global processes and their articulation with local and regional practices, customs and traditions will rupture established institutional, community and personal identities. This suggests that a dislocating paradox is at play in work done with teachers: that the emergence, in the context of the new state, of “the voices of those who have previously been unheard, neglected, rejected, ignored – the voices of those who have formerly been marginalized or dispossessed” (Hargreaves, 1994: 52) often articulate concerns that are little different to

those expressed under the old dispensation. This does not necessarily imply resistance to new policies (although in some cases it may) but reflects rather a more localized and immediate set of demands, pressures, constraints and tensions and the ways in which teachers set up coping strategies to deal with the events and changes that they encounter within their working environment.

For ESST working at close quarters with teachers, principals and department officials across the province these contradictory forces play themselves out repeatedly. It is quite evident that teachers are now far more willing to articulate their views, beliefs and criticisms and share them with NGO personnel who are generally viewed as “non-official” civil society agents, outside of state structures and therefore relatively unthreatening. An interesting feature of this interaction is that amongst white teachers there has been a noticeable reticence about engaging openly with the new debates, a tendency that possibly arises out of suspicions based on historical ignorance of what NGOs do, an assumption that NGOs are “messengers” of the ANC state and a discomfort with what they perceive to be the advocacy of a liberal agenda. Despite this discontinuity two fairly consistent and clearly discernable discourses are regularly articulated by teachers. The first discourse expresses at a generally uncritical level a “new South Africa” patriotism that is upbeat, positive and enthusiastic about the new democratic, non-racial system of education being put in place and confident of the possibilities that it offers to the present and future generations of learners. It tends to place a naïve trust in the state as bearer of social goods and a faith that new educational policies reflect an unmediated and transparently just form of social reconstruction. The second discourse is less optimistic and more deeply felt and clearly reflects the fears stemming from a vision of education that is at odds with the existing mindset. There is a perception that the state is promoting policies that both undermine deeply held values, beliefs, customs and traditions and misunderstand the educational needs of children. Simple examples serve to illustrate this contradiction. A training strategy used by ESST trainers is to extract specific passages from policy texts, for instance from the first *White Paper on Education and Training*, the *South African Schools Act* or the *Constitution of South Africa*, and set them up for debate. The purpose of this is to track, in discussion with teachers, how certain policy guidelines inform curriculum development and classroom practice. Predictably the issues of discipline,

religion, gender, sexual orientation and cultural mores generate fierce debate and demonstrate perceptions and attitudes that are fundamentally in conflict with the progressive social discourse that frames new education policy.

A crucial factor in the restructuring process is that the opening of discursive space and the rise of critical and dissident voices can be read as a threat to traditional centres of authority and control. In many ways teachers find themselves caught in the cross-currents of macro-political struggles to control the instruments of power and authority that are played out in the contending discourses of centralization and decentralization. In terms of the relationship between teacher and learner there is a clear perception, and one voiced with some regularity, that the new system of education is breaking traditional hierarchical structures and eroding the traditional disciplinary and pedagogic roles played by teachers. At the same time the structural and bureaucratic impetus to implement the processes of change from the centre works to silence the doubts of individual agents and to label as 'obstruction' or 'resistance' any discourses that run counter to the hegemony of the new order. Hargreaves notes that proprietary claims and attitudes by those driving the process of restructuring has the potential to create the impression that ownership of change "is individual rather than collective, imposed rather than earned, and hierarchical rather than democratic" (1994: 54). It is in this sense that Curriculum 2005, outcomes-based education and all that goes with it runs the risk of becoming the new educational truth regime that comes to supersede the old truth regime of Christian National Education.

Most of ESST's work over the last year has been focussed on mediating and explicating the intricacies of Curriculum 2005 and outcomes-based education to teachers, school managers and parents. For the ESST trainers this has been a difficult, time-consuming and often frustrating experience as they are more often than not working, particularly in the poorer rural areas, with inadequately trained teachers, school managers lacking in confidence and illiterate or semi-literate parents. Given the stringent, if unrealistic, time frames set by the national Department of Education for the implementation of Curriculum 2005 and associated National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels training time has been at a premium. In the Northern Cape this process has been constrained by the number

of teachers needing training, the shortage of department personnel to undertake the training, the relatively few NGOs capable of assisting with training and the pressures of time that are exacerbated by the enormous distances separating schools and trainers. As a result the duration of training for educators has tended to be short and the nature of the training has been inadequate, poorly planned, superficial and weakly implemented. Whilst the outcome of this has tended to be perplexity and frustration it has highlighted a number of key issues linked with broad national assumptions made about the epistemological basis of the new curriculum, notions of what constitutes legitimate knowledge and how knowledge is constructed, controlled and mediated.

At a surprisingly generalizable and cross-cultural level the experience of ESST trainers has been that the conservatism embedded in Northern Cape social formations tends to be structured around ordered totalities within which cultural, religious and historical truths, certainties and beliefs are woven into the fabric of daily life. The new curriculum is in a crucial sense antithetical to such structured and traditional worldviews and their constitutive master narratives. Curriculum 2005 is in many ways postmodern in its call for discursive reflexivity and its view that knowledge on the basis of reflexivity operates via not just a single but a double hermeneutic, in which the very norms, rules and resources of life are constantly put into question (Lash and Urry, 1994: 61). Thus whilst ESST teacher training workshops have been generally well received across the province³³ there is a sense that real engagement with teachers has tended to be superficial and that the process of mediating the new curriculum is being fractured by fundamentally different and often mutually exclusive frames of reference. In a very real sense the ESST trainers are bearers of alien identities that have not transplanted easily to the Northern Cape. The trainers are not from the Northern Cape; they are English speaking, clearly liberal in outlook, academically trained and cosmopolitan, yet as a professional safeguard they deliberately avoid articulating any marked political, cultural or religious allegiances. The resulting intellectual and experiential lacunae undoubtedly stem from the difficulties experienced in trying to interact meaningfully with teachers and department officials when there is a

³³ Over three years' worth of workshop evaluation forms do attest to the fact that most teachers have gained some benefit from ESST workshops. One needs however to bear in mind the caveat that workshop

fundamental absence of a common shared discourse that is rooted in the every day life, understandings and experiences of the locality.

5.5 Conclusion

The South African educational terrain is marked by contending normative discourses that have the capacity to impede the effective implementation of the new curriculum. These contending discourses are a feature of sets of relationships – the state and civil society, state bureaucrats and NGO practitioners, departments of education and school communities - that should ideally work in partnership for educational and broad social transformation. The fragmented diversity of ethnicity, culture, language, faith and political history manifests itself in the cacophony of disparate norms, attitudes and beliefs that characterize the South Africa's fractious society and the contending discourses that shape it. The national vision for educational renewal appears to be normatively seamless; in reality, however, it conceals the fact that it is riven by a host of unresolved difference that are probably unresolvable within the education domain alone. This situation presents NGO practitioners with a difficult juggling act to perform. In essence NGOs find themselves in a situation where they have to support the national vision whilst maintaining a critical distance, support the work of provincial DOEs without operating as transmitters of official discourse, and work to empower local voices without mandating values antithetical to national reconstruction and development. The normative course that individual NGOs pursue is shaped, however, by state-civil society relations and the regimes of power and authority that operate at a given moment within the social formation. The following chapter will therefore attempt to explore the nature of the prevailing state-civil society relationship in South Africa and chart the impact that it has on the development work of NGOs.

CHAPTER 6

POWER AND AUTHORITY

6.1 *Power, the State and NGOs within the Agency/Structure Dualism*

As voluntary non-profit organizations NGOs are heavily dependent both on state sanction and on externally generated resources to operate their development programmes. It is not sufficient however to speak of resources, as is generally done for example within the more bureaucratic strands of development discourse, as the material and human requirements needed to facilitate programmes at a purely logistical level – funding shortfalls, poorly-trained field workers, lack of infrastructure and so on. There is another dimension at which the importance of resources as structural properties of the social system can be linked to the concept of power. Giddens argues that resources can be treated as ‘bases’ or ‘vehicles’ of power that comprise the structures of domination (Cassell, 1993: 122). Power, in this sense, represents the capacity of the agent to mobilize resources to achieve specific outcomes and as such represent “the transformative capacity of human action” (Giddens, 1984: 96). In other words it is not simply the availability of resources that is at issue but rather under what relations of power those resources are used and allocated and whether they are used to positive or negative purposes.

Differential power relations are diffused through a whole range of social structures within which NGOs operate and it is the demands and conditionalities of this matrix that pattern the uneasy terrain of both state-civil society interaction and NGO-donor relations. These unequal distributions of power and authority also generate tensions between the centralizing and decentralizing tendencies that are evident from the national level right down to local level. Within the South African education system these relations of power remain unresolved and as a result tend to have a negative and disruptive effect on the work done by NGOs. These tensions exist not only between national departments and the provincial departments but also within provinces where tensions between regions, localities and individual school can be quite distinct.

These tensions are also embedded in the relations between individual agents and the structures they interact with. Within the world of development practice there is always a pervasive sense of altruism, a sense that individuals and agencies working for human betterment can ultimately make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs or cause of events and thereby make a positive impact on society. The development discourse however entails more than a valorization of human agency; it is also about the structures that facilitate, obstruct and ultimately shape development practice and the work of individual agents. Over the last decade or so development studies have seen a revived interest in both theories of the state and theories of civil society as tools for analyzing the imbrication of power, structure and agency under the conditions of modernity and globalization.

Much of the development writing has been in the context of the particular tensions, contradictions and lacunae that lie at the heart of what Elliot terms “the fragmenting and dislocating global world of postmodernity” (1995: 161) where the more traditional values and ethics that drove early post-war development practice have been fractured by the heightened postmodernist deconstruction of moral absolutism and the valorization of moral relativism. Typical of the kind of theoretical frameworks used for academic writing on the state and civil society are those of globalization and its impact on social relations, the hegemony of free-market capitalism, the rise of nationalisms and ethnicity, the death of the nation-state and issues around what constitutes authentic development practice in a postmodern age. These writings are also embedded in different ideological discourses that range from neo-Marxism to neo-Liberalism, from modernist rationalism to relativist post-structuralism, and a host of positions that fall in between these polarities. Veit-Brause argues (1995: 60) that within these debates core concepts are often highly contested because evaluative and prescriptive connotations become inextricably intertwined in theoretical formulations and their ideological subtexts.

Whatever position is taken on the nature and effects of the state, civil society and development many of the debates are informed by theories of modernity and post-modernity and attempts to identify the characteristics that define these phenomena within

the context of the structure/agency divide. Whilst for Marxists working within a structuralist paradigm the dominant structures of modernity are the constitutive factors in shaping human action, theorists like Giddens believe that social theory must provide a less deterministic account of human agency. For Giddens the key to understanding this is to recognize the recursive nature of social practices, how the macro and micro-contexts interpenetrate, and how the active reproduction of social conditions is itself unavoidably conditioned by the prevailing structural features that give form and shape to social life (1989: 256). Whilst Kirby too believes that human action, grounded as it is in place, cannot be understood without recourse to wider forces and events he emphasizes that social practices in localities are singular and consequently important and as such “cannot be read off the actions of the state or evolution of the world economy” (1993: xix).

If development is about social amelioration it is also about human empowerment in its broadest sense. Yet, as Giddens warns, development practices will fail on an empirical level to grasp the nature of human progress and empowerment “if we do not see that all human agents stand in a position of appropriation in relation to the social world, which they constitute and reconstitute in their actions” (1991: 175). This brings us back to the notion of the double hermeneutic and the question that it poses: to what extent do NGO practitioners contribute to the process of change and to what extent is practitioner agency either circumscribed or enabled by the social structures within which they operate. These questions will be explored in the following sections through an examination of the effects that the structural modalities of the state and of civil society have on NGOs and their development praxis.

6.2 *NGOs and the Ambiguities of State–Civil Society Relations*

In terms of Giddens’s notion of structure the elements of rules, norms and resources are subsumed within the discourse of power and authority. To talk of power in the context of state-civil society relations consequently raises the question of power differentials and how to understand the use of “power in interaction” in terms of resources and knowledge

which actors bring to and mobilize as elements of its production. Thus, on different levels, the state and governmental aid agencies operate within a power differential that favours them over organs of civil society in terms of the resources and knowledge they are able to mobilize. At the core of each set of power relations there exist “frames of meaning” and it is this understanding of where power lies that shapes social reality not only at the level of ordinary, everyday interaction but also on the level of global culture and ideologies. These power differentials are rarely disembedded from the conditions of their production and for Giddens this is a function of the fact that “the reflexive elaboration of frames of meaning is characteristically imbalanced in relation to the possession of power” (Cassell, 1993: 112).

These power differentials can be highlighted by referring to particular sets of circumstances that NGOs find themselves in. Most NGOs depend on both foreign and local funding for their existence and are reliant on various forms of donor funding in order to conduct their programmes and interventions. The nature of donor funding is however a double-edged sword in that whilst funding is the lifeblood of NGOs and allows them to put their projects into operation it also brings with it unwanted constraints, limitations and compromises. The nature of the funding context inevitably places recipients in less than equal relationships with the donor and makes them vulnerable to changes in funding fashions, changes in policy, changes in objectives and can also immobilize them through the vagaries and delays of bureaucratic processes.

Since 1994 these relationships have been further complicated by the fact that most major foreign donors have been entering into bilateral government to government funding agreements that have cut NGOs out of the funding loop or forced them to engage in the competitive state tendering system for funding. In order to gain some degree of access to foreign funding of this nature NGOs have also had to learn to work with government structures and to collaborate in state-run delivery processes on a contractual basis. This however involves NGOs in somewhat of a Catch-22 situation. Whilst the positive side of this is that it has forced NGOs to streamline and become more business-like the detailed procedures and conditionalities set by foreign donor agencies and the often tortuous

administrative requirements of government structures within South Africa are very often antithetical to traditional NGOs practice.

It is important that an attempt is made to situate a specific and real social practice, in this case the development work done by a specific NGO, within a set of social conditions that constitute the South African development terrain. This means searching for useful descriptive and analytical space within a discursive field that is both broad and theoretically contested. Such an attempt will need to involve the identification of the agents, institutions, and sedimented practices that make up the structural nexus of state, civil society and the economy. It is equally important, however, that theoretical understandings need to be contextually grounded in specific sets of experiences that are shaped by the complex interaction of state, civil society and the private sector under post-apartheid conditions. These issues also need to be examined against the prevailing discourses of international development.

To examine the role and work of an NGO within the debates conducted around the notion of the state, civil society and development means first of all confronting the term “non-governmental” organization. This immediately sets up a polarity between organs, agencies and structures that are separate from government and those that are not and the connotations that these carry for different people. Problematizing this state-civil society duality is the fact that other contested terms such as “government” and “nation-state” intrude on the debate and demand to be reviewed. A further complication arises when NGOs are categorized, as is general practice, as voluntary, non-profit organizations which then sets up a second bipolar axis between civil society and the private for-profit sector of business and industry. This requires that the differences between government and state, the state and the nation-state and the state and the private sector be delineated and then linked to the nature and place of NGOs within these debates around the relationship between the state and civil society.

The work of NGOs is essentially shaped by the often ambiguous nature of their position within the nexus of state – civil society relations and their activities are subject to legitimation by the policies and practices that arise out of that relationship. Development

work carried out by non-governmental organizations in fields such as education and health, sectors that are normally considered to fall within the ambit of state responsibility, inevitably brings such organizations into direct though often uneasy contact with the state and the multiple layers of bureaucracy that constitute it. The nature of the relationship that exists between the state and organizations sited within civil society is a fundamentally unequal relationship and one that generates sets of tensions that are mapped across civil society by the state as the mediating and dispensing author of particular regimes of knowledge and power. This raises not only questions as to the nature of the modern state and where, precisely, the limits of its power and authority lie and how dominant discourses are mediated to groups and individuals within civil society but also for an attempt to define the South African state *qua* state. The following section will therefore attempt to outline various theories of the state in an attempt to gain some insight into the role that the state can play in the transformation of society.

6.3 Theories of the State

The key focus of this section will be to explore notions of the state in an attempt provide a better understanding of the role of the state in successfully transforming society. Unlike more traditional Marxist approaches the methodological approach used in this section will not be deterministic but will follow the approach that Giddens takes of viewing the state as a structural system that is continually being reconstituted and transformed by individuals, groups, economic systems, cultural orders and dominant ideologies. Le Roux points out that any attempt at theorizing the state must necessarily be tentative and incomplete and suggests that “at best, theories of the state can provide us with an understanding of some of the possibilities for a state which wishes to restructure and develop a society, and also provide us with some caveats on how government actions could quite unintentionally go wrong” (1996, 265). In attempting to scan different theoretical approaches to the state it is also important to bear in mind, as Kirby suggests, that “different societies and states evolve along different trajectories, and that the search for a single state theory can exist only at some level of massive generality that explains everything – and thus nothing” (1993: 41).

The trajectory of theories of the state has had a long history: Machiavelli explored the notion of the despotic state, Hobbes argued for statism and Locke for limited government, Mill for a liberal and utilitarian state. The major conceptual leap in theorizing the state took its impetus from Marx and Engels who provided for many what became the definitive critique of the modern industrial capitalist condition. Marx and his followers were still deeply embedded in the Enlightenment metanarrative so that for them the state functioned as the epitome of scientific rationality and as the principal secularizing agent within the social formation. Marxist writers problematized the notion of the state by framing it within the empirical and deterministic framework of dialectical materialism thereby initiating debates that revolved around the question of whether the state operated as a purposeful entity acting independently of major interest groups or whether it was structured within the dynamic interplay of social and economic forces. Modern theorizing of the state has taken the Marxist critique as its starting point and then diversified into a multiplicity of approaches with other disciplines apart from political science taking an interest in legal and state theory as an area of academic study.³⁴ Thus for some theorists such as Camelleri it is axiomatic that the state “cannot be understood in isolation from the contingencies of contemporary political, cultural and economic life” (1995: 209).

The concept of the state in the period of modernity, specifically the European form of the nation-state as first formulated at the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, gave rise to a system of territorially discrete sovereign entities, each equipped with its own centralized administration and the means to defend its national integrity³⁵. Associated with this is the view of the state as the pre-eminent protector of the modern institutions associated with industrial capitalism - law and legitimacy, systems of justice, equity and accountability. As

³⁴ Jessop, for example (1990: 4), describes his own intellectual progress through his theorizing of the state as a route that takes “the ‘high road’ of anti-reductionism rather than the ‘low road’ of economic determinism ... then proceeds via more concrete analyses of specific regimes (such as corporatism and parliamentarism) and more complex analyses of political economy (especially accumulation strategies and modes of regulation) ... and is now moving slowly towards the ultimate destination of ‘putting the state in its place’ within a more general theory of societalization or ‘society effects.’ ”

³⁵ The Treaty of Westphalia signed in 1648 brought to an end the Thirty Years’ War. A major significance of the Treaty was that it recognized, for the first time and as prototypes of future nation-states, the sovereignty of the German states, the Netherlands and Switzerland outside of the confines of the Holy Roman Empire.

Kothari points out the state has come to function as “the premier instrument through which the multiplicity and plurality of the civil domain has been ordered in both perception and reality” (1997: 143). Not all theorists of the state view it in a positive light. For instance Kothari believes that the reflexivity of modern life has produced a growing scepticism and distrust about the states’s ability to protect fundamental rights and to deliver basic services and that globally citizens are facing “a combination of growing marginalization in the state’s role and status in civil society, accompanied by growing myopia, dehumanization and brutalization in its relationship with that civil society” (1997: 145).

Whilst the European concept of the state remains hegemonic on a global scale there is growing critique of the nation-state and the taken-for-granted co-definition of “state” and “nation”. Such has been the enduring attraction of the “nation-state”, particularly within nationalist and post-colonial discourse, that it has acquired immense institutional power and a wide base in the global mass culture. But if sovereignty is the modern hallmark of the state the central debate within the context of the globalized, post-modern order concern these long-held assumptions. Held for instance believes that the key issues involved are whether sovereignty has remained intact while the autonomy of the state has diminished, or whether the modern state actually faces a progressive loss of sovereignty (1991: 151).

Held’s belief that the modern nation-state is facing a crisis of sovereignty is seen by others state theorists in terms of a loss of legitimacy. Offe argues that the crises in the world economy of the mid-1970s significantly increased the gap between the horizon of events by which states are passively affected and the horizon of those events which it can still actively control and direct and that this has led “to the nation-state’s regulatory competence retreating hopelessly into the background in the face of a supranational state of nature made up of technical, economic, military, and ecological interdependencies and long-range effects” (1996: 106). Offe’s point is that the modern capitalist state, in its drive to encourage capital accumulation within the global order, faces a crisis of legitimacy as it increasingly struggles to deliver social and other services to its citizens. This is a crucial understanding with important implications for NGOs, their development practice and their interactions with the state. Keane takes the view that within any national context ‘the

state', flanked from above by an interdependent system of transnational power groupings and from below by a multiplicity of sub-governments operating their own systems of decision-making, is losing its primacy as the key arbiter of power and authority (1993: 6). Nandy takes a contrary view and asserts that the state, far from losing its sovereignty, has evolved to ensure that organized political or civil power cannot easily be mobilized to resist the pathologies of the modern nation-state. This double bind leads analysts such as Nandy to take the somewhat pessimistic view that "in society after society, in the name of protecting or helping states, rulers have begun to extract new kinds of economic and political surplus from the ruled and have unleashed on the citizens who resist this project new forms of oppression" (1993: 268).

It is important at this point to make a slight deviation so that a distinction can be made between the 'state' and the 'government'. Early guild socialists in Britain such as Hobson defined the state as that organ that represented the whole population as the organized expression of citizenship in an organic relationship with the government which was that structure that worked out in detail the will of the citizens expressed through the state. This view, according to Vincent, implied that the government derived its authority and had its function defined by the state (1987: 213). According to Giddens a state exists when a political apparatus, defined as the government plus the civil service, rules over a given territory, and whose authority is backed by a legal system and by the capacity to use force to implement its policies (1993: 309). Dale sees governments as representing the short-term interests of a temporarily dominant coalition of forces, such as political parties, within a social formation that acts as the primary mediator between the state and the citizenry (1989: 53). He defines the state, of which governments are a part, as the totality of all publicly financed institutions. Whereas government, as a coalition of ideologically similar forces, generally has a common purpose Dale argues that the state, to varying degrees in different contexts, is not some kind of monolithic social actor and may in fact experience tensions generated by divergent interests and goals. Camilleri argues that the state is an unstable entity in that it is both agent and victim of the ebb and flow of economic and political change (1995: 211). This view is inherent in Giddens's structuration theory which rejects any reified notion of the state, seeing it rather as social structure being shaped recursively across space and time by the forces of social interaction and change.

The pluralist theory of the state resonates strongly within the South African context and is one that is currently shaping the modalities of state and civil society in post-apartheid South Africa. Strategies built on the pluralist notion made its first significant impact on the state-civil society terrain with the emergence of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 that brought together in a populist coalition a diverse range of civil society organizations in resistance to the apartheid state. Modern political pluralism found its strongest expression in post-1776 United States of America with its strong federalist tradition and in the early 20th century it was given greater ideological weight by the pluralist and pragmatic philosophies of William James and John Dewey whose writings denoted the acceptance of diverse theories of knowledge or frames for understanding the world. Some theorists of the pluralist state like Dahl and Truman have gone as far as to posit the state as a more or less neutral arena, or the state as non-partisan arbiter where conflicting and competing interests play out their different agendas to shape consensual policy and that all interests, views and institutions have an equal opportunity to influence public opinion and decision-making. These conceptions appear to remove from the equation on the one hand the notion of the hegemonic power of the state and on the other structural inequalities within the social formation. In the South African context Friedman and Reitzes argue that pluralism is severely compromised by the fact that the “ability to participate is shaped not only by differential access, much of it a deliberate legacy of apartheid, to resources such as formal education or the leisure time and funds needed to organize, but by a factor as basic as language” (1996: 239).

The ideological corollary of Dewey’s notion was the advocacy of a particular kind of limited government where political power was to be dispersed through several institutions which could thereby act as a system of consensual checks and balances to prevent the domination of one group over another. Out of this sceptical and relativist discourse arose a set of corresponding pluralisms – ethnic pluralism, religious pluralism, cultural pluralism and linguistic pluralism to name perhaps the most obvious examples. Vincent argues that pluralism is a theory which views social life in terms of groups whose primary allegiance is to the group rather than an abstract state and that the theory embodies the notion of a

normative consensus of mutual respect between groups (1987: 183). According to Offe pluralism is sceptical about the ability of developed capitalist industrialized countries to influence themselves and their future development by means of rational government planning, control and intervention and consequently tend “to interpret the state not as a sovereign and autonomous unit of action but as the total of reflexes and resultants of particular societal centers of action” (1996: 62). In this system the state forms part of the political arena in which groups conflict, negotiate, bargain, form coalitions and struggle over policy output. The initiative for policy making activities, however, is generated by society and as Grindle and Thomas point out is “structured by the ways in which groups are organized around particular interests and resources available to them for achieving their goals” (1991: 23). Historically pluralists have been critical of the growth of the state, seeing it as an incursion into the fundamental freedoms of groups and arguing that the state could not represent a common, or national good, in anything but the most minimal sense. The growth of the state however should not be equated with a growth in power and authority. Offe makes the point that the multiplication of responsibilities assumed by the modern state and corresponding increase in its bureaucracies results in “an internal pluralization and fragmentation of departmental perspectives within the administration, an escalation of the respective rivalries, and, on the whole, an increasing unpredictability of the long-term and ‘synergetic’ effects of individual policies which are nearly impossible to coordinate” (1996: 63).

Prior to 1994 the ANC was already searching for a constitutional and governance structure that would harness the country’s diverse social and ethnic groupings. Under conditions of relative stability and freedom South African social diversity would have constituted a difficult plurality but years of segregation and apartheid have abnormally polarized and frequently demonized difference. The negotiated settlement went for the pluralist option and with it the democratization of difference, recognizing that individuals belonged to different groupings with conflicting interests and loyalties and the responsibility of the state was to harness this diversity. It is in such instances, as Vincent has suggested, that “the national interest, in a minimal sense, is the final bargain struck between interests in the policy sphere” (1987: 189). From 1994 the South African state has in theory committed itself to a pluralist agenda of bargaining, compromise and trade-off through

negotiation and stakeholder participation. Nevertheless, despite substantial devolution of powers in some areas it remains the dominant power and has retained its centrist prerogative that policy should emanate from dominant coalitions of groups via the state apparatus. The state's carefully orchestrated normative consensus, mapped out semiotically in the discourse of nation-building, has ensured its virtually unchallenged legitimacy to exercise central authority, to assign boundaries to group activity and to rule out harmful challenge and dissent. Indeed, as South Africa approaches its second general election, there are suggestions that the state fully intends to strengthen its centralized grip on power and to limit the scope for resistance to its authority³⁶.

These move by the South African state to assume hegemony signals a potential danger to the pluralist project as it sets in motion a contradictory process that leads potentially to the silencing of groups that do not conform with the hegemonic normative order being established. The pluralist discourse of the state has, at a broad populist level, been successful in affirming difference as simply an end in itself, as the "rainbow nation" assiduously and unproblematically promoted by the media. The concern is that this discourse has transposed itself from the political arena into other sectors, for example into the new educational discourse without, as Aronowitz and Giroux point out, "acknowledging how difference is formed, erased and resuscitated within and despite asymmetrical relations of power" (1991: 72). Whereas first-world pluralists would expect extensive constraints to be placed, at least theoretically, on the roles of policy élites in the initiation, formulation and implementation of policy there is a caveat that this may not apply in its purist sense in developing countries. This is so in the sense that, as Grindle and Thomas suggest, within the polity of developing countries votes and lobby activities may not be valued "currencies" for interpreting social preferences, that policy debate may be contained within government appointed technical committees and "that interest groups may not be sufficiently well-organized to put effective pressure on policy élites or may not have guaranteed access to them" (1991: 24). If this is true of the South African state, as seems increasingly evident, then it poses a set of very obvious difficulties for NGOs and

³⁶ The *Sunday Independent* (20/12/1998, pg. 1) reports that the ANC is moving into a new era of centralized deployment of members to the government and parastatals and that "every appointment will be screened and

other agents of civil society in their efforts to develop effective development programmes in collaboration with the state.

These various readings of the state can be helpful, for example, in examining the tensions that are evident in a range of South African socio-political relationships within both the political terrain and between state and civil society. These tensions are manifested, for example, within the tripartite alliance between the ANC, COSATU and the SACP, in the tensions that exist between national, provincial and regional education structures, in the tensions between Treasuries and sectoral government departments, and in tensions between NGOs and their funders. Theorizing the state in this way also has clear implications for issues of policy implementation. If one accepts Dale's thesis that the government is unable to institute effective day-to-day control over every aspect of each State apparatus, and if each apparatus takes on its own characteristic within the broad constraints placed on it by government, it implies that these apparatuses may not be particularly effective or efficient vehicles for the execution and implementation of specific varieties of government policy (1989: 56). This notion of the 'overloaded' state can be linked to the forces of globalization in the sense that as substantial areas of human activity are progressively organized on a global scale the future status of democracy and the sovereign democratic nation-state seems uncertain. Held believes that the striking paradox that exists at the heart of political action in the contemporary era is that as "more and more nations and groups are championing the idea of 'the rule of the people' they are doing so at just that moment when the very efficacy of democracy as a national form of political organization appears open to question" (1995: 21).

If, as Held believes, the efficacy of democracy as a national form of political organization is under threat on a global level then our media-shaped, common-sense notions of what constitutes democratic practice and what it means to develop democratic citizenship need to be reviewed. Held's position also has profound implications for the development work that NGOs do in their efforts to disseminate and entrench notions of democratic

citizenship and civic responsibility. If the developmental role of an NGO like ESST is to promote the ideals of democratic citizenry through education by assisting the state in advocating and facilitating the new curriculum then its practitioners need to develop a critical awareness of the prevailing structural modalities that impact on their work. There is a fundamental need to engage theoretically not only with issues such as the nature of the state, its inter-penetration with civil society and the prevailing patterns of political power, but also with hegemonic practices and the normative value systems that are embedded in the new education system.

6.4 Education, Politics and the State

In a Gramscian sense education as a public good is unavoidably compromised by its interconnection with the state, politics and the social practices of the prevailing hegemony. In the modern nation-state the education of the nation's citizenry, generally recognized as a public good and a central pillar of the social contract, has fallen under the ambit of the state's public responsibility. In post-apartheid South Africa the political transition has been characterized by the state's commitment and determination to transform the entire education system. The overarching educational goal of the state is to entrench equal educational opportunities as a key aspect of its social democratic agenda as set out in the government's *White Paper on Education and Training*³⁷. This raises the crucial question, and one that is trenchantly theorized in Britain and the USA by commentators such as Dale, Ranson, Aronowitz, Giroux and McClaren, of how the distribution and exercise of power between the state, education and civil society at a generalized level manifests itself at the specific level of curriculum, schools and pupil learning. It is a function of state action during times of transition, when issues of accumulation, legitimacy and identity are at stake, that a greater emphasis is placed on the ideological constructions that shape educational agendas, on the politics of culture and knowledge, and on the complex relationship between the state and civil society. For Apple the terrain of education "is not a neutral set of institutions but is inextricably connected to the forms of domination and

subordination in a society” (1990: 1). In the South African context, however, this perspective tends to be dismissed by many state education officials as being an unnecessary and overtly politicized critique of what they would like to portray as a transparently obvious and developmentally sound programme of social transformation.

From the previous discussion, which focussed on different interpretations of the state, it seems clear that the relationship between the state, the education system as a whole and the beneficiaries of the system is a complex, dynamic, contested and recursive inter-relationship. The fact that education falls under the aegis of the state opens up, according to Apple, “a set of complications involving the nature of the economy, power relations within the state and between it and other aspects of the larger social formation, and an understanding of the social functions of the educational system” (1990: 11). This suggests that it is useful to focus on the complex relationship between broad state policy, economic conditions, education policy and local pedagogic practice. The way in which these structural systems and practices interpenetrate on multiple levels within the educational system, at national, provincial and district level, in schools and in civil society offers an important analytical approach for mapping the progress of state education policy from the centres of power to the peripheries and the implications that this has for NGO practice.

When agents of civil society, for example project workers from an educational NGO, move into the development field their work is constituted at the interface between state policy and localized implementation where the centralized control of educational processes weakens and dissipates in proportion to contextual nature of specific education sites. Dale captures this reality and the responses to it when he suggests that control of schools, and by extension civil society agents, “has proved remarkably difficult for any groups to achieve” and in response to this the educational system has developed ways of mediating and recontextualizing “in deliberate and unintended ways, the aspirations, policies, interventions, pressure, and so on of any and all groups” (Apple, 1989: 13). Jules and Apple argue that within the transition state the state-civil society relationship is played

³⁷ For example the *WPET* states that “It is now the joint responsibility of all South Africans who have a stake in the education and training system to help build a just, equitable, and high quality system for all the

out within the fundamental problematic of democratization and centralization, or “egalitarianism” versus “statism”. They point out that this is a difficult contradiction to solve and that as a result policy gets caught up in these contradictions where “both want central control over education so that a more ‘progressive’ content can be taught that represents the needs, interests, and culture of the majority of the people and at the same time want to increase the right of the ‘people’ to have serious influence in any decisions affecting their lives” (1995: 198).

In the South African context of educational transformation the state appears to be caught in this very antinomy with the result that NGOs working in the field of education experience the tensions and contradictions that result from it. If, as it seems incrementally to be doing, the South African state opts for a more *dirigiste* approach to the implementation of a transformed education system then the current and future role of civil society in that process, through organizations such as ESST, needs to be reconsidered within the context of theories about the nature and function of civil society. The following section therefore will explore different theories of civil society and reflect on the current status of civil society organizations in South Africa as the work under conditions of political and social transformation.

6.5 Theories of Civil Society

Within broad political and development discourse NGOs such as ESST are generally considered to be organizations of civil society. There are however many different interpretations of the term civil society and each one has its own theoretical and political consequences. Thus any attempt to define the precise nature of NGOs and to explain their function and purpose within civil society remains an ongoing debate within social and development theory. Although some writers prefer not to draw a rigid distinction between the “economy” and “civil society” (Atkinson, 1996: 289) this thesis will, for methodological reasons, take the position that civil society is a sphere separate from both

citizens, with a common culture of disciplined commitment to learning and teaching.” (1995: 19)

the state and the economy. This means that if one attempts to position NGOs and their work within the parameters of the term 'civil society' then there is also a need to theorize civil society within the context of its relationship to the state and the prevailing economic system. Giddens takes the position that civil society and the state have evolved as linked processes within modern social formations and that civil society is structured as the reverse side of the penetration of the modern state into the day-to-day lives of its citizens, with both being "internally referential within the reflexive systems established by modernity" (1991: 151). This perspective brings into focus the structure/agency dialectic and highlights the recursive nature of the relationship between state structures, economic systems and individual agents that this thesis intends to explore.

From a structural perspective Camilleri is correct in insisting that globalization has meant that the state, civil society, and market have become inextricably intertwined and that all three "are drawn further and further by the very process of trans-nationalization into a 'structured field of action', by which we mean that fluid pattern of fragmentation and integration deriving from the deepening, at times contradictory, interconnections between world polity, world economy, and global civil society" (1995: 223). For development practitioners, as agents of civil society, the enduring problematic remains to what extent they can impact on and change the structural dynamics at play within society. Keane, however, rejects the construction of any theoretical 'metadiscourse' around the past, present and future relationships between states and civil societies and suggests that for the purposes of clarifying the confused and overlapping usages of the state-civil society distinction attempts should be made "to develop an interpretive standpoint which can be of some utility in historical investigations, sociological inquiry, normative discussions and political action" (1993: 14).

Notions of an active and engaged civil society began to take develop in conjunction with the changing relationship between state organizations, representative institutions and classes in the era of the formation of the modern state (Held, 1995: 64). The origins of the civil society discourse can be traced to early modern European political thought with its preoccupation with the notion of civil society and how to control and limit the exercise of

political power by the state. Vincent argues that from 1688, Locke and other exponents of natural rights, and in particular rights to property, were marking out discrete spheres of activity for the State and civil society which thereby created a type of duality between state and civil society which remains the basis for Western democratic and liberal institutions up to the present time (1987: 188). The natural rights thesis was extended and developed during the eighteenth century by notions of social contract and Hegel's idealist political philosophy that proposed that the state represented the highest expression of human freedom and was dialectically connected with civil society, conceived of as the sphere of justice, in which people could freely secure and contract away their rights. Taking issue with Hegel's privileging of agency Marx argued that the determinism of material conditions gave rise to class structures and established the consequent inequalities that were inherent in civil society³⁸. In attempting to map out the dialectic of 'coercion' and 'consent' twentieth century Marxists such as Gramsci theorized civil society as constituting key sites of the struggle for leadership and power in society and re-worked the term into a political construct for analyzing the complex tensions that exist between individual social agents and hegemonic social structures.

For much of the post-second world war period 'civil society' as a sociological and political construct has featured prominently in development discourse. The extent to which civil society and its array of institutions flourish is commonly used as a measurement of the degree to which democratic institutions have taken root and prospered within a given state. The normative use of the term 'civil society' has come to embody one of the key defining features associated with the nature and meaning of legitimate power and authority within society, an aspect of what Held terms 'democratic autonomy'. A key debate that has arisen out of South Africa's transition to democratic rule has centred on the issue of what constitutes the nature of civil society in relation to the nation-state in a period of political and social transformation. Held describes the normative nature and process of such transformations as the achievement of "democratic autonomy with its emphasis on: the enshrinement of the principle of autonomy in a constitution and a bill of rights; the

³⁸ Marx believed that the forms of state were to be understood "neither for themselves nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but rather have their roots in the material conditions of life" and argued that the anatomy of civil society was always to be sought in political economy (McLennan, 1980: 82)

reform of state power to maximize accountability (within the terms of the constitution) to elected representatives and, ultimately, to the citizen body; and the experimentation in civil society with different democratic mechanisms and procedures” (1991:164). Keane makes the point, however, that modern civil societies “have comprised a constellation of juxtaposed and changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, an essential core or generative first principle” (1993: 19).

The term ‘civil society’ became prominent in South African political discourse as a result of its introduction by left-leaning critics into their analyses of resistance to the apartheid regime. The term was popularized in “struggle” discourse during the 1980s with the advent of mass democratic movements like the United Democratic Front and the growth of the labour and civics movements³⁹ but Atkinson believes that it was only after 1992 that any really intense debate about civil society emerged, “spurred on by the activities of a wide array of civic associations, trade unions, community-based organizations, stokvels and other self-help organizations” (1996: 287). The post 1990 conjuncture has been notable for the renewed theoretical debates around the issues of the state, civil society and social movements, and has raised concerns both within and outside of official structures about the degree of autonomy enjoyed by civil society agents within the new dispensation. Lee for example quotes from the African National Congress Document of 1990 *Discussion Document on Development* which asserts that civil society would have a key role to play on the basis that “the ANC believes that it is not desirable for the state to attempt to control the overall process of development in society, but rather to facilitate a participatory development process” (1990: 96) and the *White Paper on Reconstruction and Development* states that “The democratization of society will require a process of transformation of both the state and civil society” (1994: 9). The South African state however, enmeshed as it is in the process of its own transformation, plays a central role in constructing and managing the current discourse around the provision of social goods, such as education, within the context of its own transformative agendas. Consequently a key question for NGO development practitioners is, to what extent agents within civil

³⁹ Civics evolved in a complex way from their origins in a few urban townships to become, in the early 1980s, country-wide radical township-based associations allied to the ANC. During the late 1980s civics generally acted as vanguards for resistance politics under the banner of the United Democratic Front.

society have the capacity to engage with and potentially reshape the dominant educational discourse and structures legitimated by the state? Attempting to analyze the position of any single civil society organization means engaging with the debate amongst social analysts that there exists a growing inability on the part of the nation-state to serve the needs of civil society in large parts of the world, and in particular those countries that constitute the developing world.

According to Cohen and Arato the “concept of civil society is indispensable if we are to understand the stakes of “transitions to democracy” as well as the self-understanding of the relevant actors” (1994: 2). They believe that the problem of civil society and its democratization is latently present in the different axes of society and state and that it constitutes the theoretical terrain on which their internal antinomies might be resolved (1994: 3). These antinomies are explored within the framework of three debates that have shaped the recent re-emergence of the discourse of civil society and each one holds a particular set of implications that are of fundamental concern for civil society in South Africa. If, as Cohen and Arato argue, the debate between elite and participatory models of democracy leaves us with the antinomy that “contemporary democratic theory involves either some rather undemocratic adjustments to the ‘exigencies of complex industrial societies’ coupled with an abandonment of the normative core of the very concept of democracy, or it proffers somewhat hollow normative visions that cannot be reconciled with the institutional requirements of modern society” (1994: 8). These tensions lie at the heart of South Africa’s nascent democracy, its political elite and its political agenda, raising key issues regarding the degree to which democratic practices are taking root both within new state structures and the reconstituting terrain of civil society.

The debate that focuses on rights-oriented liberalism versus communitarianism produces another antinomy that seems set to dog political transformation in South Africa for many years to come. As Arato and Cohen see it the issue at stake is whether the idea of freedom should be explicated primarily from the standpoint of individual rights or of the community’s shared norms (1994: 8). There exists within South African society the reality

that, as in many other developing countries, there is a stark dichotomy between its modern, globalized and developed component and its traditional, localized and under-developed component. It can be argued that the tensions generated by this fracture are glossed over in state policy in the interests of overarching political concerns such as national reconciliation, nation-building and social transformation. Proponents of a communal practice of citizenship claim that if individual rights proliferate social formations are put under threat by the forces of individualism that breaks down community solidarity by encouraging a society of alienated entities pursuing their own privatized, competitive and amoral existences. Arguably however the issue is less one of valorizing the virtues of community existence but rather a reaction to a perceived assault on traditional structures of power, authority and subjugation. If however modern civil societies are characterized by a plurality of cultures, and are structurally differentiated and socially heterogeneous then for Cohen and Arato the liberal concern centres on the concern that democracy, with its emphasis on consensus and majority rule, is under threat “unless suitably restricted by constitutionally guaranteed basic rights that alone can render them legitimate in the eyes of minorities” (1994: 10).

Justice, equity and redress are the core normative principles informing almost all South African policy initiatives that have emerged in the post-apartheid period. Inevitably however these principles have been compromised within the tensions created by the ideological polarities between neo-liberal free marketism and proponents of the welfare state. Historically the ANC aligned itself with Keynesian economic doctrines that linked welfare policies to increases in social justice and put its faith in the belief that the welfare state would create the preconditions for a true equality of opportunity and the context within which civil and political rights could function in a universalistic manner. As will be argued in more detail in Chapter 8 the ANC government has, since 1994, been moving progressively towards neo-liberal, market-oriented policies. This has happened despite resistance from left-oriented political organizations and certain segments within the labour movement who claim that subjecting the social formation to the exigencies of market forces will reinforce rather than ameliorate the prevailing injustices, dissatisfaction, instability and class confrontations that characterized apartheid capitalism. Keane argues that the political difficulties faced by Keynesian welfarism “have been exploited most

successfully by neo-conservatism, which emphasizes the negative consequences of state intervention into the private markets of civil society” (1993: 9). Predicated on the assumption that there is an unlimited economic growth potential once the state is ‘rolled back’ and the markets liberalized neo-liberal economists argue that welfare policies are counter-productive and result in practices that are fundamentally antithetical to economic growth and ultimately undermine the pre-conditions necessary for an increase in social justice and equality of opportunity. For Cohen and Arato the tension between these two positions stresses the reality that liberal democratic market societies cannot coexist with, nor can they function without, the welfare state and that this leaves both state and civil society with the choice between “more social engineering, more paternalism and leveling, in short more statism, in the name of egalitarianism and social rights, or ... the free market and/or the refurbishing of authoritarian social and political forms of organization and relinquish the democratic, egalitarian components of our political culture in order to block further the bureaucratization of everyday life.” (1994: 15).

By employing these theoretical approaches it is clear that Cohen and Arato are attempting to work towards a theoretical model of civil society in which the systemic task is to guarantee the autonomy of the modern state and economy whilst simultaneously protecting civil society from the destructive penetration and functionalization by the imperatives of the two spheres (1994: 25). Whilst Cohen and Arato explore the nature of civil society from a predominantly Western perspective other theorists attempt to view civil society within the context of post-colonial developing states. Fatton, for instance, defines civil society as that segment of the social formation which operates as a counterweight to state power, as the “private sphere of material, cultural and political activities resisting the incursions of the state” (1995: 67). In the context of the South African struggle for political liberation this definition holds true when one examines the role that was played by the civics, labour organization and NGOs in their resistance to apartheid. One of the outcomes of the anti-apartheid struggle was that ‘civil society’ came to represent a powerful strand in the populist trajectory and generally denoted those organizations and structures that worked in opposition to the National Party government for social amelioration and political justice. As a result the term ‘civil society’ in the South African context came to have a somewhat unproblematic social good attached to it both

locally and by foreign advocates eager to support the ANC and its allies and the label tended to be imbued with the a somewhat mythical capacity to deliver far more than it was financially or logistically able to. Thus civil society became burdened, as Friedman and Reitzes note, “with the expectations that it could provide a panacea for many ills: development, active participation in decision-making, the representativeness, accountability and transparency of social, political and economic structures, a watchdog role on the state, responding to demands and expectations of communities which the state and business cannot or will not meet, community self-identity and empowerment” (1996: 232).

In order to counter idealized conceptions of civil society it is possible, following Fatton’s “ideal types” model, to view civil society in South Africa as being constituted by three separate and contending levels roughly corresponding to the conventional Marxist class model (1995: 77 – 78). In this model the most powerful level of civil society is represented by those individuals and organizations that are in coalition with the ruling forces and that benefit from their proximity to power and patronage; the second level is represented by the liberalizing bourgeois sector and the third level is represented by the subordinate majority. In attempting to position any NGO within the currents of state-civil society relations this model seems useful although the somewhat obvious irony is that while political power has shifted significantly since 1994 and has caused a major realignment within the NGO sector the subordinate majority remain by and large outside of the equations of power. The notion of the ‘good’ civil society is, as Badat points out, a fundamentally flawed one that idealizes civil society as an independent realm of benevolence instead of recognizing it as a realm of conflict, self-interest, inequality and exploitation that is not immune to being domesticated by the state (1997: 17).

In democratic theory governments bear the prime responsibility for providing basic social services to all its citizens but in practice ideology and the compromises of power often results in the perpetuation of social inequities. Across the world civil society, being less bound by these restraints, has often filled in the development lacunae abdicated by the state and operated as agents of significant social change. Kraak argues that unlike civil

society in former Eastern bloc countries which have historically been weak South Africa has, since the 1970s, had a fairly strong and vibrant civil society and this has as a result had a far greater influence on the development of social policy and in keeping social justice on the national agendas (1997: iv). Nevertheless the overdetermination of democratic structures and forums immediately before and after the 1994 elections enmeshed organizations of civil society in a range of fragmented and uncoordinated engagements with the state and this lack of focus was a key constraint on the impact of civil society on policy formulation. The projection of civil society as an all-encompassing movement of popular empowerment with the capacity to shape state policy in the political, social and economic arenas has started to blur considerably since 1994. Organs of civil society must now re-conceptualize their mission and role *vis-à-vis* the state and engage actively and ideologically in the process of re-positioning themselves on the altered terrain of politics and development in South African. This process will, necessarily, involve NGOs in a reappraisal of the normative beliefs and practices inherent in their developmental praxis and their status within the context of a changing South African civil society.

If the construct 'civil society' is used as a means to map out the relations between the state and the broader society then there is a need to define the normative nature of what is in essence a notoriously elusive concept, yet defining the term is problematic in the sense that what may count as a normative definition will depend on the ideological role the definer wants the term to perform. Arguing against the more radical Marxist propositions of both Swilling's "associational socialism" and Mayekiso's "working class civil society" Glaser posits a normative ideal of civil society "as a kind of empty space, protected by formal state guarantees of individual liberty and social order, and open to multiple uses by free and equal citizens" (1997: 5). He distils this proposition from the liberal democratic European notion that civil society must exist alongside a distinctly separate state "which enforces its civility, adjudicates its differences and aggregates the preferences of citizens in programmes of collective action." (1997: 19). There are, however, clear tensions inherent in these definitions of civil society that reflect the uneasy balance between citizen autonomy and state coercion in which citizens are deemed free of the state yet subject to its laws. What underpins these different dualistic conceptions of state-civil society

relations is a discourse of power that sees an inherent struggle for control over the governance of society. In the African context Fatton dismisses the notion of the “bad” state and “good” civil society, seeing civil society instead as a disorganized plurality with often mutually exclusive agendas that are neither homogenous nor unitary but “fragmented by the contradictory historical alternatives of competing social actors, institutions and beliefs” (1995: 77).

The relationship between the state and civil society has been conceptualized from a range of different ideological perspectives and has been assigned varying degrees of importance in political and social theory. The critical issue that needs to be addressed then is to be able to define the transformative role, if any, that a particular NGO has in the recursive interaction between state and civil society where the state is transformed by a changing civil society and civil society is transformed by a changing state. A crucial point raised by Rueschemayer *et al* is to examine how the state–civil society relationship is shaped by the prevailing power configurations in a given country; in other words to what extent is the structure, strength and autonomy of the state apparatus compromised by its inter-relationships with civil society and big business and how globalized power relations impact on the balance of state-civil society relations (1992: 5). In this regard Badat quotes the Italian theorist of democracy Bobbio who contends that within any given social formation there exists “two great blocks of descending and hierarchical power in every complex society, big business and public administration [and] as long as these two blocks hold out against the pressures from below, the democratic transformation of society cannot be said to be complete” (1997: 19).

The Thatcher and Reagan years of the 1980s saw much discussion regarding the ‘rolling back of the state’ and the diminution of state control over its citizenry, yet for Foucault and Giddens the spatial penetration of the state into the realms of civil society and personal experience has increased with the state’s control of sophisticated surveillance technologies. Fatton takes a similar view and notes that “the state penetrates civil society through its multiple economic interventions, its disciplinary regulations of private behaviour and its ideological ‘interpellations’” (1995: 67). Whilst Kirby does not dispute

the growing power of the modern state he suggests that the need for the state to control the growing complexity of civil society as it becomes more diverse and more populous means that the relative power of the state is therefore not necessarily greater than it was a decade ago (1993: 58).

Theorists who have been more familiar with repressive regimes in the developing world tend to take a more pessimistic view of the future possibilities for an autonomous civil society although they are not totally without hope. According to Nandy developing countries in the South that have varying degrees of democratic government continue to be dominated by entrenched or newly ascended power élites that run these countries using surveillance, terror, nepotism, clientelism and patronage as instruments of control over the citizenry and that these societies have come to look like “some kind of specialized coercive apparatus or private business venture” (1993: 264). Nonetheless repressive regimes have, according to Kothari, initiated a growing backlash in the grass-roots of civil society which he believes represent the “stirrings of consciousness and new assertion of power based, on the one hand, on class and ethnicity and, on the other, on nationality and religious identity” (1997: 146). Taking a more optimistic stance Korten views the 1980s as a period which saw an increasing rejection of the long-held belief that the state was the only legitimate agent for development planning and decision-making as well as the implementation and management of development resources and asserts that “it is now widely accepted that civil society has an essential, if not central role in both” (1990: 153).

Having worked through a range of theoretical perspectives on the nature and function of civil society it is evident that the complex structural dynamics of the state-civil society relationship create conditions that are both constraining and enabling for human agency. From here it can be argued that these various perspectives on the nature of civil society link back to the four elements of Giddens’s structuration theory and the four dilemmas of restructuring that Hargreaves raises. Their insights help to give some additional analytical focus in the task of tracing the trajectory of development practice against the dynamics of the state and civil society in a period of transition. Using the elements that Giddens and

Hargreaves propose to map agency across these structural formations it is possible to make some general observations about civil society and its relationship to the state:

- ❖ Firstly it seems apparent that the regulation of private behaviour or the making and implementing of procedural and normative rules create the limits of legal and moral action within which organizations of civil society must operate.
- ❖ Secondly it seems apparent that in many instances ideological interpellations, as the manifestation of power and authority either through decree or policy, have the capacity to either legitimize or delegitimize the work done by agents of civil society.
- ❖ Thirdly it is clear that economic interventions and the control of resources by the state and by state aid agencies puts immense pressure on the ability of civil society organizations to operate effectively.

The problematic nature of this relationship between civil society and the state generates tensions that manifest themselves in a range of interactions both at central and local level. The following section will chart some of these tensions as they have occurred in the work done by ESST in the Northern Cape within the framework of the “structure/culture” dilemma that Hargreaves’s argues lies at the heart of any educational restructuring.

6.6 Working with the Tensions Between “Structure” and “Culture”

Hargreaves expresses the concern that state-driven educational restructuring that relies on politically popular structural solutions makes the crucial mistake of disregarding the traditions, assumptions, knowledge and skilled practices developed both by educators and NGO practitioners over many years (1994: 61). The first implementation phase of the new curriculum at grade one level during 1998 has unquestionably confronted the provincial Departments of Education with a mammoth bureaucratic and logistical challenge under conditions of budgetary constraint, of moratoria on personnel appointments and weak management structures with the result that the process has been thinly and unevenly

delivered⁴⁰. The ongoing series of crises directly related to the educational transformation process have contributed to the creation of an environment characterized by high levels of disillusionment and a corresponding de-motivation amongst the country's teaching corps⁴¹. As a result the process has been viewed critically by teachers who have in many cases experienced these changes as being disempowering as the process is geared to meeting the implementation needs of the state rather than the development needs of schools, teachers and learners. According to Vally and Spreen three issues that have featured strongly in the critique of teachers are "lack of training and information about the curriculum, lack of materials, and the short time scale in which Curriculum 2005 is to be implemented" (1998: 14). These concerns reflect three crucial understandings on the part of educators. In the first instance there is a sense that teacher's own knowledge and teaching practices are being essentially overridden by department officials eager to implement Curriculum 2005 in an evangelical and uncritical manner. In the second instance there is a general acknowledgement that the resources necessary for successful implementation are lacking. In the third instance there is a recognition that the implementation process has been a centrally-driven one that has gone ahead with administrative and ideological inflexibility despite the fact that the national and provincial Departments of Education have failed to prepare schools and teachers adequately for the new outcomes-based approach.

Arguably this poorly-coordinated and rushed approach to implementation, compounded as it appears to be by bureaucratic inefficiency and a lack of clear understanding regarding the ideological and methodological complexities of the new approach, means that the implementation programme runs the risk of achieving the reverse of what it intends. It is Greenstein's view that because the conception and implementation framework for Curriculum 2005 "has been designed in isolation from the concrete context of teaching,

⁴⁰ For example Andrew Duffy reported in the *Mail and Guardian* (5 to 11/06/1998: 6) that the Ministry of Education was to spend R200 million on building leadership skills in the provinces to give the national ministry "far greater control over the often chaotic management of provincial education".

⁴¹ Vally and Spreen (1998: 14) report that up to May 1998 it has been estimated that in rural or under-served areas of the country at least 20 000 primary schools have failed to implement the new curriculum for reasons such as lack of teacher training or shortage of support materials; they also note that provincial report backs from the first term of the 1998 school year indicate that up to half of the primary schools in some provinces have ignored the launch of Curriculum 2005.

learning and training, under state-driven rather than education-driven imperatives” it is certain to face major difficulties (1997: 6). As a result it has the potential to entrench pedagogic inflexibility as one orthodoxy displaces another and can be criticized on the basis that, as Hargreaves points out, “it undervalues the practical insight and wisdom of teachers and requires teachers to comply with the knowledge, expertise and prescriptions that are the property and prerogative of a small cadre of scientific ‘experts’ (1994: 56). Vally supports this view and notes that the present problems being experienced with the delivery of Curriculum 2005 “could have been avoided and time and expense saved if the experience of teachers were drawn into the process from the outset” (1998: 16).

It is within these sets of tensions generated by the struggle between bureaucratic control and personal empowerment that ESST has attempted to develop an INSET programme capable of forging a productive working collaboration with both department officials responsible for curriculum development and teachers. The crucial training task has been to conceptualize, design and implement programmes that can meet both the immediate and practical requirements of provincial educators whilst at the same time introducing educators to the broader conceptual and theoretical issues that give rise to the outcomes-based approach to teaching and learning. The challenge inherent in the task has been to ensure that any INSET programme is designed to meet local training and development needs within the framework of national curriculum norms and standards and of global education trends. This entails the dual task of listening sympathetically to the voices of educators whilst at the same ensuring that the overall vision of Curriculum 2005 is mediated in a way that makes it possible for educators to start internalizing its values.

Taking into account the complexities of the new curriculum and the general level of teacher training this has proved to be a difficult task. The degree of success achieved in this enterprise, certainly in the experience of ESST trainers, is debatable given the frequent expressions of frustrations and acknowledgement by educators of their lack of clear understanding about the new outcomes-based methodologies. In an important sense it has forced ESST and other NGO trainers, unlike their DOE counterparts, to recognize that their attempts to develop innovative solutions to curricular and pedagogical problems can

easily outstrip teachers' abilities to relate these innovations to the every day demands of their schools and classrooms particularly when new methodologies are introduced in single short interventions (Hofmeyer & Hall, 1996: 57). Arguably the notion of a national education vision has encouraged, within the DOE and its implementing officials, a sense of ownership of the process and as Hargreaves points out such proprietary claims and attitudes "suggest an ownership of ... change which is individual rather than collective, imposed rather than earned, and hierarchical rather than democratic" (1994: 54). Whilst NGOs have made a deliberate and considered effort to design programmes that are intensive yet flexible enough to engage cooperatively with the variable range of abilities and understandings encountered in workshop situations DOE training officials continue to operate in an inflexible transmission mode. The irony of this situation, and one encountered frequently by ESST trainers in the Northern Cape, is that many DOE trainers have themselves failed to internalize the very pedagogic principles that they are transmitting. For DOE trainers the power and authority that they have as 'expert' agents of the state is vested in the act of transmission rather than in the process of empowering teachers within the context of shared knowledge and experience.

6.7 Conclusion

The preceding examination of prevailing state-civil society relations has attempted to outline the differential ordering of power and authority within the South African social formation. These knowledge/power regimes and the discourses that uphold them become the structural parameters within which education policy is made and in which educational restructuring and transformation occurs. NGOs, as agents of civil society, conduct their development activities within the constraints of these existing power relations. They can, however, also become implicated, in the Foucaultian sense, in the processes of localized resistance to the centralized implementation of prevailing orthodoxies that do not recognize the differences that exist at provincial, regional and community level. The following chapter then will review the recent formal education policy terrain and track how NGOs have interacted with the power structures that shape this crucial domain of state service provision.

CHAPTER 7

RULES OF PROCEDURE

7.1 *The Formal Policy Terrain*

Social structures are regulated by sets of intersecting rules, both formal and informal, that map out fields of permissible and legitimate action. Giddens argues that social systems involve a multiplicity of institutional rules that regularize relations of interdependence between individuals and groups. These are typified as recurrent social practices within which both constitutive and regulative rules “generate – or are – the medium of the production and reproduction of practices” (Cassell, 1993:119). In Giddens’s sense the rules that comprise structure are embroiled in a continuum of struggle, chronically subject to rival interpretations and continually transformed in the process of their application. At the same time these rules, as Giddens conceives them, cannot be conceptualized in isolation from the resources which facilitate the exercise of power and authority (Thompson, 1989: 63). As an exercise of power and authority the enactment of policies by the state constitutes one way in which formal, regulative rules determine the contours of permissible and legitimate actions within society.

Since 1994 there has been an enormous amount of policy work done by the government to constitute and regulate new practices within the public sectors and in education in particular the government has set out with vigour to transform South Africa and create through new educational policies and practices a just, democratic and participatory society. Motale notes with concern however that the most serious challenge to education transformation continues to be the problem of effective policy implementation, particularly at the school level (1998: 1). The high output of education legislation and policy directives has created a somewhat confusing situation for many educators, especially when clarity of vision and meaning is obscured both by the technocratic semantics and by the contradictions and tensions that are concealed within the contending discourses that shape these policies. In order to keep track of the continually shifting

dynamics of state activity and to function effectively within their particular field, NGOs are inevitably drawn into the web of state policy, either at the direct level of involvement in policy-making processes or at the implementation end of the process. For many NGOs the dynamics of policy-making and the actions that stem from them put pressure on organizations to participate more seriously in policy debates and to engage more effectively in lobbying activities, tendering and advocacy work. Whilst clearly necessary these interventions are costly, time-consuming and place enormous strains on the capacity of individual organizations. These interventions also require sufficient personnel to carry out the various activities which, considering the generally inadequate staff complements of NGOs, take place at the expense of being able to do their work. Such work also carries with it the in-built risk that such time and cost outlays may ultimately result in nothing tangible for the organization.

7.2 *NGOs: Traversing the Policy Terrain in a Period of Transition*

Policies are protean social constructions that are formulated across the political spectrum from idealist to instrumentalist and are put into practice within the flux of a given social formation. In democratic systems of government policies are conceived of as rational activities arrived at – theoretically at least – through open social and political processes which involve all major stakeholders and interest groups. The provision of general public goods such as education is linked to ideals of political and social rights within mass democracy and constitutes part of the state's responsibility to its citizens. In effect however social formations across time and space are fractured by contending political, economic and social inequalities and therefore the making of policy inevitably becomes enmeshed in the conflicts and compromises over power, ideology, strategies and resources that are inherent in most societies. The outcome of this is that policies more often than not reflect the prevailing hegemonic order and become exercises of power and control and the authoritative allocation and reallocation of material and social values between different social groups (de Clercq, 1997: 146). Public policies enacted by the state and its various agencies must necessarily have an impact on agents and organizations of civil society and shape the nature of state-civil society relations. It is essential therefore to examine not only

the manner in which policies create the conditions for development practice but also how policies are recreated by their interaction with civil society.

The relationship between ideology, policy formulation and policy practice has been the focus of considerable debate in the education policy literature. In the 1970s Bowles and Gintis articulated the neo-Marxist analysis that mass state-sponsored education was a response to the economic needs of industrial capitalism. Salter and Tapper believe that the state tends to find itself in an ineluctable double bind when formulating education policy. They argue that on the one hand the state needs to maintain the sets of social relationships that reproduce the economic order whilst on the other the state needs to adapt the education system to meet the demands of changing post-Fordist economies (1981: 8). Nevertheless, even if the state struggles to perform these two functions simultaneously, education still represents the critical institution in the social control function of the state because it can help to produce and to legitimize patterns of social inequality and mobility through its provision of a suitable rationale (Salter and Tapper, 1981: 7)⁴². The seemingly instrumental nature of policy does however reflect the hidden or denied political processes that subvert any official claims that policy-making is open to general citizen influence. A case in point, and one clearly demonstrated in the state's delivery of educational change, is the way in which powerful institutions like the state attempt to shape both the semantic, or constitutive aspect of policy and the public conception of how such policies will meet specific needs. In other words public policy spans a very broad terrain that covers both official enactments of government and the "unofficial" practices that result from them (Cibulka, 1994: 106).

In Troyna and Hatcher's view one of the central features of educational policy sociology is its focus on the conceptions of the state in the formation and effects of policy (1994: 156). Theorizing the nature of education policy has increasingly become a dispute, as Ranson asserts, between pluralists and Marxists and their different analyses of the role of the state in educational policy and reform (1995: 427). The debate centres essentially on the role of

the state in formulating, implementing and monitoring policy and the state's capacity to impose its policies regardless, raising once again the issue of structure and agency. In the context of the South African educational policy process the role of the state appears ambivalent, caught as it is between two sets of antagonistic tensions. The first tension exists between the political imperative to push through its transformation agenda whilst at the same time remaining faithful to its stakeholder model of policy development. The second tension exists between the need to centrally control policy processes and the constitutional obligation to devolve power and authority to the provinces. A key question which arises from this is whether the state's grip over the interpretation and implementation of education policy at the successive levels of provincial, regional and district control is loosened or whether the imposition of policy decisions such as the new national curriculum are locked into place as the hegemonic framework which refuses re-interpretation or evasion.

From a neo-Marxist perspective the state plays a central role in steering educational policy in the direction of its own interests – for example identifying the way in which education plays a critical role in reproducing the 'cultural capital' necessary for maintaining the structure and relations of the economic system. The issue of power is also at stake as Troyna and Hatcher point out in the "struggles over policy that take place on a terrain already structured by power, and above all by the power of the state" (1994: 167). In Ranson's view the capitalist state has as a central concern the legitimization of the capitalist mode of production and its own part therein (1995: 433). This creates a fundamental contradiction for the state policy-making process in that it faces the antithetical demands of reinvesting "surplus value" in the promotion of further capital accumulation or increasing spending on "non-commodity" public goods like education and health care. If, as Jessop argues, economic power under capitalism is fragmented into many specific and competing interests state power will inevitably be exercised to ensure the promotion of particular interests of the party in government (1990: 63).

⁴² Bourdieu describes this as cultural reproduction which refers to the ways in which schools, in conjunction with other social institutions, reinforce certain social and cultural values that perpetuate social and economic inequalities across generations (1994: 267)

Although this can be read as somewhat reductionist if one argues that the State does have a degree of autonomy from the economy and can act in interests other than those of capital. The external imposition of structural adjustment programmes and the dictates of international trade agreements may however modify this view. Nevertheless policies are not imposed on a quiescent population and can certainly be modified or resisted with varying degrees of success by groupings within civil society. As Jules and Apple point out “the developmental direction of the state is subject to shifts and reversals [and] tendencies and tensions within the ranks of those who occupy the apparatus of the state and between the state and civil society affect the trajectory of educational change” (1995: 200). Reading the progress of policy in this way brings the discussion back to the structure-agency debate and the way in which policies, as sets of structured procedural rules emanating from the centres of power, are reinterpreted by social agents at the localities. The crucial task, as Ball suggests, is “to account for agency in a constrained world, and to show how agency and structure are implicit in each other, rather than being two poles of a continuum” (1994: 15). In order to negotiate the policy terrain it is useful for development practitioners to understand the fluid nature of policy and to see this recursive dynamic as a key issue in education policy implementation and one that has a crucial bearing on the work carried out by NGOs working in the education field.

7.3 *NGOs and the Implementation of State Education Policy*

One of the most difficult operational tasks for civil society organizations is having to negotiate the policy terrain because not only is the transition state caught between competing and contradictory imperatives but civil society itself is also in transition. One of the implications of this is the need for NGOs to work constantly at updating their knowledge of policy developments within their field of operation so that they are able to distil the essential policy issues and the discourse that underpin them in a manner that is understandable both to themselves and to their constituencies.

Education was identified by the ANC and its alliance partners as one of the key areas of the South African social terrain most in need of radical transformation. From 1990 onwards there was much research and debate around the issue of new education policy initiatives and the establishment of a new education and training system that would meet the needs of a new social democratic society⁴³. These policy initiatives reflected a broad social and political consensus that supported the role of a transformed education system and its multidimensional relationship with the state in ensuring economic growth, equality of opportunity and social justice and the conception that public goods required collective choice and action. The transformation of education through policy has not, however, been simply a technical, legislative issue but rather a domain of policy consideration permeated by the interplay of global and national politics and values. From this perspective Chisholm argues that South Africa's post-apartheid education policies show a clear correspondence with global education trends and that many of the policy goals constitute a 'global' language about education (1997: 50).

In the context of South African social reform and reconstruction, according to de Clercq, effective policies are those that can successfully conceptualize policy problems, assess contextual potentials and constraints and devise appropriate strategies to facilitate and sustain the implementation of reforms (1997: 143). The policy cycle however, with its specific policy demands, policy statements, policy outputs and policy outcomes, is produced within sets of socio-political and economic conditions prevailing at a particular conjuncture and is shaped by the contestations that characterize the social formation at a given time. The policy cycle is also embedded within the discourse of transformation and the ensemble of policies stemming from it are structured around the political and ideological beliefs currently underpinning educational development in South Africa. By constructing policies around such politically loaded signifiers as 'education for all', 'Curriculum 2005', 'culture of learning and teaching', 'human capital development' and 'massification' the government has signalled its intent that the development of education policy is not simply an act of putting old wine in new bottles, but a process that both

⁴³ Many of the key educational policy debates were reflected in the ANC's *A Policy Framework for Education and Training* (1995) and in the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) reports (1993).

symbolically and materially indicates the imperatives of social justice, historical redress and material redistribution⁴⁴.

If the rhetoric of the development state is set aside, however, it is clear that the success or failure of policy initiatives is dependant on how complete an understanding policy makers have of the structures, processes, actions and interactions between intended policies and what happens in the process of their implementation (de Clercq, 1997: 143). The tensions that exist between different orders of discourse are clearly manifested in policy documents like the *White Paper on Education and Training* and the *South African Schools' Act*. These policy documents contain an uneasy combination of discourses, the most obvious of which are discourse of progressive educational development, the discourse of managerialism, and the discourse of competitive free-market economic rationality. It can be argued that the government's policy proposals on educational restructuring are failing to bring about significant development, equity, participation and redress and that what appears to be happening is that the progressive education vision is slowly but inexorably being eroded by instrumentalist and functionalist pressures in such a way that the form of policy discussion comes to dominate its content, or as Samoff puts it the dominant educational discourse becomes "all mechanics and no soul" (1996: 253).

Since 1994 the ANC-led government has been responsible for a huge output of new policy initiatives, most of it designed to legitimize the transformation from an apartheid state into a democratic state. A central feature of the policy terrain in South Africa is that it is mostly conducted within state structures that are themselves in a process of political and social transition. The structures and policies of the state both inside and outside of education are in formation and as such "are filled with conflict as they seek a coherent way of reconstructing the relations between education and a transformed economy, a radically different political power structure, and a social and ideological agenda that seeks to overthrow the vestiges of the entrenched élites" (Jules and Apple, 1995: 186). It is in this sense that the historical contexts, coalitions, conflicts, opposition and support, constraints,

⁴⁴ De Clercq (1997: 146) asserts that policies can be broadly categorized as being either substantive, procedural, symbolic, material, regulatory or redistributive and argues that "In South Africa at the moment,

and opportunities that surround so many of South Africa's important public issues constitute the vital ingredients in explaining issue formation, policy making and implementation (Grindle and Thomas, 1991: 6).

Although most of the policy has emanated from within government ministries there has been a substantial involvement from the corporate sector, labour, quasi-governmental think-tanks such as the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), as well as policy centres attached to universities. Given the range of stakeholders involved in the policy-making process, the complex of agendas on the table and the contending ideological positions of participants in the process it is not surprising that the current policy terrain is uneven and contested with often contradictory policy discourses in play simultaneously. The policy choices that are made also involve uncertainty and risk as the solutions to and outcomes from any given set of policy problems are not always clear or obvious. This "uncertainty principle" that lies at the heart of policy making arises because the impact of policy cannot always be known in advance, because the logic of economics and the logic of politics frequently do not coincide, and because real costs are imposed on specific groups in society when policies and institutions are being transformed (Grindle and Thomas, 1991: 2). The accuracy of this insight is evident in the problems being experienced by the state in its efforts to implement Curriculum 2005 according to a time frame that in hindsight seems not to have taken these issues into account when drawing up their implementation strategy.

It is not possible, however, to understand the education policy ideas that circulate in high places in one's own country without also understanding what is happening in the international political arena. The socio-economic and political conditions that prevail globally impact on socio-economic and political activities and policy making within individual states; in turn the individual state's level of economic development will impose limits on what government can do in providing goods and services to its citizens. The rapid developments and changes wrought by modernization and globalization have created what Muller terms "the penumbra of uncertainty, doubt and scepticism", a condition that

most of the new education policy documents are symbolic, substantive and redistributive."

extends to and impacts on the activities of policy-makers who are busy designing a “drawing-board” society (1993: 19) and Ball’s notion of policy “*ad hocery*” creates the challenge for social agents to “look for the iterations embedded within chaos” as a prerequisite for any kind of meaningful policy implementation (1994: 15). At the same time if policies are to be legitimated it is imperative that those affected by them have a clear understanding of why particular policy choices are made and how they will impact on their lives (Badat, 1991: 26).

7.4 Deconstructing the Education Policy-Making Process

The policy terrain in South Africa, particularly since 1990, has been marked by the often contentious and sometimes irreconcilable requirement of meeting specific social and economic needs and of meeting the clamour of needs articulated by specific interest groups. This has resulted in policy-making that oscillates between being consequentialist, or needs and preferences-driven, and contractualist, or driven by a series of bargained contracts between various interest groups and the state (Muller quoting Hawthorn, 1993: 16). From a pluralist perspective it often appears that the national interest is served, in a minimal sense, by the bargains struck between interests in the policy sphere and that policy reflects the outcome of group pressure (Vincent, 1987: 189) but this begs the question of level playing grounds and whether all players party to policy agreements operate from an equal position. Post-apartheid change in South Africa was never going to be a simple matter of consensus; the complexities of a society artificially engineered by almost fifty years of apartheid have left the new ANC government and its policy élite with the herculean task of reconciling a range of competing needs, demands and expectations. For Grindle and Thomas the task of altering existing practice through policy means confronting the fact that the ranks of opposition are filled with the beneficiaries of the status quo (1991: 3). These groupings, for example the economic élites supported by existing policies, ethnic and regional groups favoured through the old bantustan system, bureaucrats and bureaucratic agencies holding regulatory power, and political groupings sustained through patronage and clientele networks, inhabit powerful discursive spaces that impact significantly on the policy-making process.

One of the fundamental discourses informing the policy formulation of the state is structured around the 'equity/equality' debate, which is presented at both the political and developmental level as the appropriate response to popular expectations of redistribution and redress. Disillusionment with non-delivery has however had serious consequences for the stakeholder model of policy negotiation, which depends on the conversion of desires, needs and demands into interests which can be negotiated and ultimately fulfilled (Muller, 1993: 50). This has dislocating implications for the recipients of policy when important issues of education policy – for instance teacher supply, utilization and development or student-teacher ratios – are treated as matters of budgeting and accounting or “using the tools of economic analysis to improve the quality of education” (Samoff, 1996: 256). For a modernizing but economically vulnerable state such as South Africa the inability to institute real educational reform can be subsumed into the panoply of fiscal, administrative and symbolic measures that it launches in its efforts to expand and deepen an equitable school system for all its citizens. So, for example, the national Education Ministry's recent *National Norms and Standards for School Funding* policy initiative is an attempt at implementing funding equity for poorer and historically disadvantaged schools⁴⁵. Given the budgetary and capacity crisis being experienced at provincial level however it seems likely that its impact will be far from immediate (*Cape Times*, 10/10/1998).

Jules and Apple argue that in the context of transformation in developing countries educational policy reform becomes a sphere of symbolic action in which the state signals its rationalist, modernizing intent even if it is ultimately unable to meet the expectations generated by these signals (1995: 193). The problem for a developing transition state like South Africa is that its developmental path and the policy initiatives that frame it are placed under strain by both structural and instrumental limitations and constraints. In educational transformation the central structural limitation, which is linked to the formal capacity of the state, is the limited availability of resources to meet the expectations raised

⁴⁵ The Education Ministry's *National Norms and Standards for School Funding* policy will come into effect in April 1999. Based on the principles of equity and redress the aim of the policy is to ensure that whatever funds are available to provincial education departments will be fairly spent so that schools in greatest need get preference (Motala, 1998: 6).

by policy. Also, with an economy that essentially peripheral in global terms, the South African state does not have full control over the processes of accumulation I and is therefore limited in its capacity to raise capital to fund its transformation agenda⁴⁶. The instrumental limitations are not only economic however and can also reflect the constraints associated with the limitations of the dominant class wielding state power, and its capacity to effect internal changes that run counter to globalized hegemonic Western conceptions of knowledge and power⁴⁷.

Another way of looking at the policy-making process is from within the paradigm of ‘game theory’. In terms of this theory Scribner argues that policy is negotiated and made in a constantly shifting socio-political environment where actions and decisions “are highly contested, continuously in motion and played on fields where boundaries are obscured and rules blurred by the exigencies of social change” (1994: 201). In South Africa’s relatively fragile democratic environment this analogy seems particularly apt – policies are made in circumstances that often do not sufficiently take into account the shifting social and economic realities that exist beyond the policy-making chambers. The policy-making process unfolds, both at the structural level and the level of agency, within sets of conflicting contextual realities and the dynamic of change in the transition state is fundamentally conditioned by the character of the transition state itself. In other words the range of possible trajectories, forms and contents of social change are, as Jules and Apple point out (1995: 200), circumscribed by the fluid configuration of power, the resource base, and the ideological positions of the new governing élite. Given the recursive nature of social structures and the unpredictability of human agency it is almost impossible to achieve an unmediated correspondence between policy on paper and policy in practice. Policies are discursively adapted through a process of what Cibulka terms ‘backward

⁴⁶ This scenario is becoming more and more familiar across the South African education terrain as austerity measures at national and provincial level impact on the provision of essential goods and services at school level – school maintenance, substitute teachers, textbooks and learning resources, special needs assistance etc.

⁴⁷ In South Africa these instrumental limitations are reflected in the debates around the “Africanization” of curricula at both school and tertiary level. At the African Renaissance Conference held from 28-29 September 1998 Professor Mahmood Mamdani of the University of Cape Town strongly critiqued the racialized power embedded in the knowledge-industry of schools, universities and the media and argued that the new African intelligentsia needed to be Africa-oriented (Motala, 1998: 18).

mapping' which leads to adaptive implementation in which policy goals may be reinterpreted and altered (1994: 112).

The expansive and transformative visions driving the development of a legal framework for policy development and implementation are being clearly hampered by lack of funds and as Chisholm accurately states the national education ministry is "increasingly beleaguered as it [seeks] to implement policies to increase access, equity and quality within a framework of fiscal austerity" (1998: 4). Policies currently being shaped in national ministries are having to be developed and implemented within the constraints imposed by the government's neo-liberal GEAR strategy that many argue reneges on the government's previous commitment to social welfarist and redistributive policies as outlined in the RDP (Kraak, 1997: iii; Marais, 1998: 191). For Pieterse GEAR represents "the ascendancy of a policy that will render powerless any radical transformatory programme to achieve equity and social justice (1997: 15). For those working in the education sector the harsh reality of the GEAR strategy has entailed sweeping cuts at all levels, a poorly-managed retrenchment and redeployment plan and insufficient resources, both human and material, to effectively manage the implementation of Curriculum 2005. These upheavals in the education sector have fuelled debate and criticism about the government's overall capacity to deliver and its commitment to achieving its social targets.

The process of educational policy making has tended to be a technocratic affair relying heavily on the expertise of educational bureaucrats and academics and which in consequence has produced policies that are written by bureaucrats in a kind of bureaucratese that effectively renders the policy terrain inhospitable to notions of learning and understanding (Sweeting, 1996: 385). This seems to have occurred despite the inevitable claims that policy makers have consulted a fully representative range of stakeholders. One outcome has been that policy documents emanating from these policy forums have been dense at both a linguistic and a conceptual level and are framed in a standardized authoritative discourse-structuring terminology within which are embedded particular conceptions, orientations, prejudices and policy preferences (Samoff, 1996: 265). The effect of this has been to make large sections of the resulting policy texts

inaccessible to large sectors of those intended to be the implementers and beneficiaries of these changes. Instead the process has been effectively disempowering teachers and learners by obscuring the methodological and empirical aspects necessary for clear understanding and practical implementation. At the same time the presence of contradictory discourses set up tensions that are increasingly difficult to reconcile. One example of this results from the state's privileging of a social democratic discourse that calls for equity and redress within the education system. This discourse, however, sits uncomfortably with the neo-liberal market oriented discourse that constitutes education as a consumer good to be marketed and based on the principles of rights and choice designed to enhance the agency of the individual (Ranson, 1995: 427).

The increasingly evident problems being experienced by the state in their efforts to implement Curriculum 2005 effectively at the lowest grades of primary school is a manifestation of this disjuncture between policy and implementation at a discursive level that reflects itself in a fractured competency at the practitioner level. According to Giddens one of the principal dynamics of modernity is the reflexive monitoring of activity as a chronic feature of everyday life and he argues that the agent, under normal circumstances, has the capacity to maintain a continuing 'theoretical understanding' of the grounds of their activity through a "practical consciousness" (Cassell, 1993: 92). This working consciousness is generally limited, in most spheres of life, and in most forms of activity, to the immediate contexts of action or interaction; this is distinguished from "discursive consciousness" through which the agent can rationalize and give reasons for actions and interactions at a discursive level.

The fracture between policy and implementation, between theory and practice, exists at two key levels in the system. The first level exists at the point where the mediators of policy at departmental level – curriculum unit heads and curriculum advisors responsible for transmitting policy from national to provincial and district levels – may have failed to fully internalize the nature and intent of the new curriculum. The second level exists at that point where the implementers of policy at school level – foundation phase primary school teachers at the first level of implementation – fail to be conscious at both a

cognitive and discursive level of the reasons for the actions they are instructed to perform. These factors have profound implications for educational transformation in the sense that the curriculum, at a systems level, is kept operational by bureaucrats and teachers who continue to operate within traditional knowledge and methodological paradigms whilst speaking the language and playing the game of “the new curriculum” at a very superficial level.

7.5 *Centralization or Decentralization: Implications for Development*

One of the key compromises made in South Africa’s political settlement was the devolution of important powers and functions to the newly created provinces. The introduction of this particular model of federal government in South Africa created a central, provincial and local three tier structure giving the national ministries the responsibility for developing broad policy frameworks and the setting of norms and standards whilst the responsibility for administration, governance and policy implementation devolved to provincial and regional or district levels. There is some degree of doubt about the essential nature of this model of governance and the degree of devolution actually involved. Marais refers to the new state governance dispensation as “nominally federalist” (1998: 257), whilst Jeffrey argues that the “combined effect of ‘cooperative governance’ and of other provisions setting out the powers of the provinces is to make it crystal clear that power, in the 1996 constitution, is concentrated at national level even more strongly than under the equivalent 1993 provisions” (1998: 38). The nature of this system and its governance function does however have critical implications for the delivery of social goods at provincial level and the role that is played by NGOs involved in facilitating and enhancing that delivery.

The fact that both central and provincial governments share responsibility for the provision of education sets up a tension in the relationship between them, particularly in Kwa-Zulu-Natal and the Western Cape, where political parties other than the ANC control provincial governments. There have also been clear indications that administrative

capacity at provincial level has not been particularly satisfactory. According to Marais the problematic nature of this relationship has been tellingly revealed in the 1997 and 1998 provincial audits that were released by the Public Service Ministry (1997:12). A steady flow of media reports have indicated disturbing levels of maladministration, corruption, patronage and nepotism within provincial governments and this has led to calls from across the political spectrum for the government to reassess the system of provinces⁴⁸. To a certain extent the problems at provincial level can be ascribed to a shortage of skills and experience, the preponderance of incumbents from inherited apartheid bureaucracies and the incorporation of corrupt homeland structures. According to Marais this has prompted central government to rethink the powers and functions of provincial governments and to look at a greater role for national government departments in provincial administration (1997: 13). Significantly Fowler, drawing on his experiences in central and southern Africa, is of the opinion that it is easier to make major structural changes in social services under unitary governments than under federal ones.” (1995: 96). Two key question arise from this problematic: firstly what is the extent to which, under conditions of political and social transition, decentralization can operate as an effective instrument for reconstruction and change, and secondly in what way is the work of NGOs constrained by these tensions?

From the constitutional perspective it is possible to argue that there is, at the level of policy, an equal and fair distribution of power between the different levels of government and associated interest groups. In the education sector it is clear however that effective power and authority is distributed unevenly and that this results in a policy-making and implementation system that tends to be untidy, incremental and reactive. It can be argued that on paper the present system reflects a pluralist approach to educational governance and policy formation in which a consensual value system reflecting regional linguistic, cultural and historical differences defines the boundaries of state action. A key assumption underpinning this system is that power is divided between educational “partners” in which the national ministry sets policy guidelines, norms and standards, the provincial departments make and implement policy, plan and provide institutions and develop

⁴⁸ The editorial in the *Mail & Guardian* argues that the introduction of a federal system has added “an extra tier of government that has not streamlined delivery or increased accountability, but merely added another

curriculum and teaching methodologies, and local districts administer and adapt provincial policies to specific regional and community contexts.

Whether this happens uniformly or not is a moot point. Ranson argues that this kind of constitutive system of education governance forms “a complex, ‘polycentred’ division of power and responsibility appropriate to differentiated tasks” (1995: 429) and that its effect is to set up a ‘distributed’ system of decision-taking and responsibility that forms a “triangle of tensions” of checks and balances. This view is clearly first-world in its assumptions however, and appears to overlook the reality that in countries with fragile democracies the state may feel it necessary to exercise its power by pushing through *dirigiste* style policy-making and implementation strategies in order to enforce particular agendas. Kruss argues that as a result of these ambivalences the occurrence of contradictions between national centralizing and provincial decentralizing imperatives has been a largely unanticipated and highly significant feature of the post-elections policy terrain” (1997: 87). There is a sense that these disjunctions are a manifestation of both the apartheid legacy and of hierarchical cultural systems that have left a powerful reservoir of authoritarian attitudes and values that remain deeply embedded in the South African psyche. In terms of both structure and agency such values operate in ways that are fundamentally antithetical to the effective functioning of the modalities of decentralized power and authority.

Though masked by the rhetoric of democracy, participation and negotiation these attitudes have created further tensions in the move towards decentralization and impact in a very direct manner on the way in which policy is administered and implemented. As policy moves from central to provincial and then to local it takes on multiple interpretations and can be viewed differently from within the entire system. The point that needs to be made is that local readings and understandings of policy developed by central government impacts directly on the implementation of those policies at different educational localities. Ranson further suggests that we need to add to this complexity the way in which a “grasp of the

ladleful of bureaucratic gravy” (27/02 – 05/03/1998) while *The Star* reports on calls by the Pan Africanist Congress for a reduction in the number and status of provinces (12/02/1998).

way ‘non-decision making’ and ‘disjointed incrementalism’ erode the formal rationality of policy formation” makes the entire system vulnerable to poor decision-making and weak implementation (1995: 430).

Legislative mechanisms such as the *South African Schools Act* commit the state to a devolution of educational governance right down to local school level and through the process of participatory democracy to “uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators, and promote their acceptance of responsibility for the organization, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the State” (1996: 2). It would appear then that educational provision at the provincial and local level has been granted a degree of autonomy unthinkable under the apartheid system of centralized education. The reality however may be somewhat different as educational trends in Britain and the USA would seem to indicate. Scribner, for example, believes that in the American federal system the politically agreed upon devolution of policy-making powers to local level is in fact being reversed. He points out that centralized state power via the policy arena is being expanded to that extent that “policies such as site-based management and decentralization, which are ostensibly offered as tools to provide more local control and freedom of choice to individual schools, will produce opposite effects” and goes on to argue that these policies, though couched in the discourse of participatory democracy, only serve to strengthen the involvement of the state in local affairs (1994: 204). The primary reason for this, according to Scribner, lies in the government’s commitment to neo-liberal economic macroeconomic policies and a strong shift towards a marketplace notion of education. This has led to a blurring of the distinction between the “public” and “private” provision of education.

According to Mitchell there is a need to account for the reasons why the sweeping programmes and policy changes such as those made in public education in various countries over the last few decades are having only a modest impact on the overall learning and socialization of school-aged children (1995: 168). One argument is that the self-serving nature and inherent inertia of bureaucracies creates resistance to radical change. According to Weber centrally controlled, hierarchically structured and rationally

managed bureaucracies are the archetypical modern organizations. Mitchell takes this observation further by arguing that in the postmodern age bureaucracies can no longer be defined in terms of a modernist rational means-ends paradigm (1995: 167) but rather exemplified by their non-rational, idiosyncratic and cultural properties in which “interest expression and interest conflict are seen as commonplace, leadership and decision-making are as much concerned with the preservation of organizational form and the maintenance of power by those who are in leadership positions” (1995: 170). The policies that emanate from policy élites most typically dominate the policy field because they control the flow of information. It can be argued that the ANC-led government carefully controls the education agenda at a political level by managing the flow of information regarding key education issues and at the same time attempting to minimize outside influence on policy decisions. In accordance with this organizations such as state bureaucracies that operate within a common political regime are then drawn towards the standard practices that correspond to the political pressures and formal regulations produced by the regime. This tendency is clearly exemplified by the way in which provincial education departments and their bureaucrats absorb and replicate official policy with an apparent willingness that results in both a reluctance to engage in critique and an eagerness to domesticate or silence any form of resistance or critique.

Yet another fundamental tension exists at the heart of educational reform in South Africa. On one level educational restructuring, which has taken its lead from New Zealand’s attempt to transform its education and training system through the industry-led “Skill New Zealand” strategy, is embedded in the neo-liberal values that privilege high academic standards, orderliness, efficiency and productivity. On another level education policy-makers take their lead from the constitution and articulate education policy in a social democratic discourse that privileges issues of equity, redress and redistribution. Scribner argues that educational reform emanates from conflicts over essentially unresolvable values, one of which concerns the central issue of who has legitimate control over the transformation process. This is a crucial aspect of educational reform in South Africa and one that is situated at the centre of the debate over political decentralization and the extent of powers accruing to the provincial legislatures, district offices and civil society agents involved in supporting the reform process. Scribner suggests that the centrist view now

prevails in American and European education systems and asserts that “because of shifting power bases and changing playing fields, local control has become a myth and representativeness of diverse populations a fiction” (1994: 203). This poses a question that is particularly apt when contemplating the longer-term prospects for provincial autonomy over education in South Africa. Speaking from an American perspective Scribner expresses doubts as to whether the “recent emphasis on restructuring through shared decision making will produce a lasting change in educational governance or whether it represents merely a pause in the movement toward ever greater state and federal involvement in education” (1994: 203).

Countering these arguments Sweeting makes the point that in an era of supposed globalization there is, at the end of the 20th century, a discernable distrust and disillusionment with large and powerful governments and a correlative shift towards smaller regionalized forms of government in which individuals rather than professional politicians make important decisions (1996: 383). Under South Africa’s new budgetary system the power to allocate education budgets from their overall provincial budgets has been devolved to provincial governments and now falls within the ambit of provincial treasuries. This means that provincial governments have the discretion to allocate smaller or greater amounts to education than allocated to it in the national budget. Theoretically financial power relations have shifted in favour of the decentralized provincial governments and this should in effect limit central government’s capacity to shift resources between provinces. There are certain ramifications to this move however. On the one hand there is the danger that provincial budgetary discretion could override the state’s commitment to equity by entrenching regional educational disparities. On the other hand it has provided the national ministry with a convenient excuse for reneging on its commitment to work towards implementing agreed upon pupil-teacher ratios. At the same time serious budget over-runs in provincial ministries have resulted in central government bail-outs with a corresponding disempowerment of provincial governments.

7.6 Working with the Tension Between “Mandates” and “Menus”

The issues involved in the process of policy-making and the degree to which decision-making is devolved to local levels is explored within the “mandates/menus” dilemma that Hargreaves poses. The crucial point that Hargreaves makes is that when educational change is centrally mandated, ideologically inflexible and designed to meet the needs of a bureaucratic system rather than the development needs of educators and schools then the whole change process becomes disempowering (1994: 57). The top-down implementation of any restructuring process will risk failing if it does not take into consideration the fact that the effectiveness of any new system, however well-intentioned it may be, is necessarily provisional and contingent on the existence of particular sets of localized circumstances. Hargreaves, however, makes the caveat that if effective educational change is going to be predicated on the availability of sets of decentralized options or “menus” then the struggle in making that choice is ultimately “a struggle for professional, discretionary control among a community of teachers at school level, against the retention and reconstruction of bureaucratic control by administrators and their system’ (1994: 58). The same point can be made in regard to the educational development and support work done by NGO practitioners who are caught in the same dilemma.

A feature of the national transformation process has been the fact that the discourse of pluralism, with its attendant modalities of democratic consultation, inclusivity and stakeholder participation, has been informing educational policy formulation. The ANC’s 1992 *Policy Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa* makes a clear commitment to democratic principles of consultation and participation and states unequivocally that “the state, together with trade unions, employers and other organs of civil society will play a central role in planning, implementing and monitoring” education policy initiatives⁴⁹. In the post-1990 period consultative bodies and stakeholder forums have proliferated as mechanisms for debate around policy choices and consensual decision-making. Despite this the potential for conflict arising from the ideological and value-laden nature of policy formation and the political imperatives to deliver change as quickly as possible have in

⁴⁹ African National Congress, 1992, *Policy Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa*, Johannesburg, pg. 37.

many cases encouraged national and provincial state structures to deliberately minimize the involvement of civil society organizations within the education policy making process. The problem is, as Badat points out, that the avoidance by state structures of any potential for conflict and contestation arising out of such engagement “is an invitation to closed, technocratic or authoritarian processes of policy formation” (1997: 19).

Discussions with both teachers and NGO personnel have tended to reflect the fairly common observation that the new education system is viewed as a top-down state-driven process that has, in pushing political agendas, effectively circumvented the interests and concerns of ordinary educators. The broad policy initiatives aimed at introducing an integrated education and training system have by and large been driven and controlled by policy experts, academics, corporate heads, labour leaders and state bureaucrats who did not consult widely or sympathetically with the broader education community. The policy initiatives have also been formulated with little regard for the need to construct a national discursive space within which debate around education issues could be carried out by educators, state bureaucrats, parents and students in an atmosphere free from the constraints of ideological posturing and the fear of political censure. Although representatives from teacher unions were present in some of the committees set up to plan and implement Curriculum 2005 Vally argues that this should not be misconstrued as meaningful involvement by teachers, pointing out that “it is not possible for a few teacher representatives to adequately represent a constituency which is so disparate with concerns often specific to particular institutional contexts” (1998: 17). De Clercq expresses similar views and voices the concern that top down policy approaches tend to underplay the role and power of implementers and the policy actors at the lower levels of decision making (1997: 165). In the first two years of its programme in the Northern Cape one of the ESST trainers participated in the monthly planning meetings of the provincial curriculum unit. In most cases these meetings were used as transmission belts for information and instructions from the national department; dialogue and critique were not encouraged and the few representatives from NGOs, teacher unions and school governing bodies that attended were quite deliberately marginalized within the process. These experience are a clear illustration of the concerns expressed by Badat and De Clercq that curriculum change is

developing into a centrally-driven, bureaucratic process that is frustrating the process at the level of implementation.

There seems to be little evidence from interaction with teachers that they are opposed to the notion of educational transformation. Nevertheless, there does appear to be a deep sense of disillusionment with the advocacy and implementation of what essentially amounts to a fundamental paradigm shift away from the manner in which teachers have previously conceptualized their pedagogic practices. In its efforts to steamroller an already faltering curriculum initiative the Ministry of Education has made it clear that criticism is both unwelcome and unpatriotic and though it can be argued that this stance is historically understandable there is a distinct irony in the responses of education officialdom. On the one hand the new curriculum, constructed on the foundations of an outcomes-based pedagogy, makes sweeping claims that epistemological relativism, human diversity and independent and critical thought should be the cornerstones of the new education system. On the other hand these very factors engender a social flux and uncertainty which “continually threatens the stability and endurance of our knowledge bases, making them irretrievably provisional” (Hargreaves, 1994: 55). In a country whose entire modern history has been predicated on entrenched structures of hierarchical authority and traditional belief and knowledge systems the new curriculum, articulated as it is from within a modern/postmodern amalgam that couples efficiency, objectivity and performance with plurality, relativism and fragmentation, tends to render the internalization of such individual and social transformations both threatening and dislocating. This binary tension between stable systems of knowledge and belief and the postmodern condition is reflected right through the system in the tensions that are played out and the terrains that are fought over between policy makers, department officials, educators, learners, parents and other agents of civil society.

7.8 Conclusion

The processes involved in the formulation of policy unfold in a discursive space that is constructed by prevailing normative values and associated regimes of power and authority. Despite the fact that the South African education policy-making process has unfolded in

the politically-charged and highly contested arena of national reconstruction policy has also been informed by educational trends in developed Western nations. It has in many instances made for a strained amalgam, informed on the one hand by progressive human-rights oriented values and on the other by conservative human capital oriented values. Nevertheless the education policy discourse has been constructed around high, and possibly even unrealistic, expectations for educational transformation and the benefits it can bring to national renewal. The policy formulation has resulted in a framework for educational change that is both sweeping and complex and is already exerting extreme pressure on provincial education departments to implement policy initiated at national level. As elaborate time frames and implementation dates pass without being met it becomes progressively more evident that the material and human resources necessary to effectively implement and sustain the changes have been compromised by the state's economic austerity programmes and the rationalization of the civil service. The following chapter will therefore map out the genesis and development of the state's Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) plan and the impact that this had for material and human resources. The chapter will then examine some of the consequences that this had for the successful implementation of the state's education policies.

CHAPTER 8

MATERIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

8.1 *The Impact of Globalization on South African Development*

A key element in attempting to analyze the work done by any development organization is to examine the economic context, both local and global, in which it operates. Clearly the direction taken by the South African economy has a profound effect on the workings of any voluntary organization that relies on external funding rather than self-generated profits for its financial existence. The key concern of this chapter will be to examine whether the South African state, through its economic policies, is creating the conditions necessary for optimizing the financial and developmental capacities of NGOs.

It will be important for this reason to look at the government's attempt to construct itself as a developmental state through the RDP and then to track its ideological shift to the macro-economic GEAR policy. The objective here is to provide a framework within which to view the impact of economic policy and how it impacts on key NGO material resources such as funding, grants, tax exemptions, transport, and on available human resources. The relative strengths and weaknesses of the South African economy impact heavily on local NGOs, for example with regard to the availability of local corporate funding. Section 8.2 will examine the trajectory of the South African economy over the last decade and examine the way in which the shifts and turns in state economic policy has impacted on the NGO sector. The South African economy, however, is linked to global economic patterns that also impact both directly and indirectly on the capacity of NGOs to conduct their development work. These global economic factors impact directly through funding policies formulated by foreign donor agencies and indirectly through the effects that international economic trends have on the local economy. Section 8.3 will look at the way in which the nature of foreign funding has been shaped by international economic trends and the effect that this has had for recipient NGOs.

8.2 *The Economy and its Impact on Development Practice*

The capacity to access funding is the lifeline that keeps NGOs alive whilst the contours of the state–civil society relationship determines the extent to which NGOs are able to carry out their activities. The centrality of this reliance on financial and governmental policy and decision-making renders NGOs particularly vulnerable to changes in local and international economic policies, fluctuations within economic systems and changes in government policy. An assessment of the way these variables impact on the development work done by NGOs can be carried out by tracking in a schematic way the economic directions taken by the ANC-led government and the economic policies that have shaped that course. A key question that needs to be examined is whether the ANC government has committed itself to development in partnership with civil society or whether its development rhetoric masks an embrace of free market orthodoxy to the detriment of national development priorities? At the same time there is a need to question the capacity of the state to chart its own autonomous development path. Under conditions of globalization the sovereign powers of the nation-state are constrained and according to Held “there are clear disjunctures between the formal authority of the state and the spatial reach of the contemporary systems of production , distribution and exchange which often function to limit the competencies and effectiveness of national political authorities” (1995: 127).

The economic policies of the ANC have always been characterized by marked heterodoxy and internal contradictions forged out of the contending political discourses that have shaped its positions and policies at different historical conjunctures. Almost since its inception the ANC has reflected ambivalent and often contentious ideological positions that have ranged from conservative to progressive but since 1945 the organization’s policy pronouncements have tended to reflect socialist discourse best exemplified in the nationalizing rhetoric of the 1955 Freedom Charter⁵⁰. Since 1990 the ANC’s economic thinking has been marked by sudden shifts and turns in policy brought about, as Marais

⁵⁰ Under the chapter entitled “the People Shall Share in the Country’s Wealth!” the *Freedom Charter* announces its socialist vision by stating that “The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly

argues “by threats, cajoling, ridicule and injunctions from business organizations, banks, western governments, activists, trade unions, foreign lending institutions, economists and consultants” (1998: 146). Lipton and Simkins point out that ANC thinking during the interregnum years of 1990 to 1994 was in many ways still influenced by its historical opposition to racial capitalism. They argue that this opposition was manifested in a statist tradition and a belief in privileging interventionist and even commandist economic policies and that as a result of these choices the ANC found themselves “in a state of ideological disarray, especially on the central question of the role of the state and of markets in economic development” (1993: 15).

ANC economic policy, despite its earlier ideological stance was not immune to the twin forces of global economic changes and the economic demands of its rank and file. From a global perspective economic policy-making has been transformed into a uniform and interlinked exercise for all countries, irrespective of levels of economic development, technological sophistication and the maturity of the nation-state. Despite these globalizing economic effects localized pressures, especially from the poor in developing countries, exert an upward pressure on policy-makers to meet development expectations. Maganya points out that in the South African context the ANC’s uneven policy-making processes have resulted from these binary tensions and that their more radical policies have been reshaped in response “to pressures from both local and international forces that preferred a more conservative policy framework” (1996: 3).

During the years of its banning the ANC was demonized by the apartheid regime as a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary organization bent on the overthrow of the capitalist order. Despite the usefulness of Marxist rhetoric in rallying support for the liberation struggle however the ANC leadership came out of exile with little to offer in the way of a structured economic policy which Marais observes was surprising “for an eight-decade-old liberation organization despite efforts to train a cadre of ANC exile economists” (1998: 147). This situation did not exist for long and soon the ANC, along with all the

industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole” (Suttner, R. & Cronin, J, 1986, *30 Years of the Freedom Charter*, Braamfontein, Ravan Press, pg. 263.

other political parties, unions and corporate stakeholders, were fully engaged on the contested economic policy terrain where, as Bond notes “South Africa’s ‘great economic debate’ during the early 1990s revolved around whether growth should precede redistribution or vice versa” (1996: 15).

The lack of clearly defined policy strategies can perhaps be explained by the ANC’s desire for consensus during the 1990 – 1993 period of multi-party negotiations leading to the eventual political settlement and transfer of power, although Bond views it as an “analytical failure of nerve” and a “political retreat, paved with consensus-formation in cozy seminars sponsored by business-oriented thinktanks” (1996: 16)⁵¹. Nevertheless by late 1990 the ANC’s newly formed Department of Economic Policy was working with its alliance partners COSATU, SACP and SANCO on the development of a broad policy framework entitled *Discussion Document on Economic Policy* constructed around the theme of “growth through redistribution”, a framework which evinced strong Keynesian demand-side, redistributive and welfarist overtones. Predictably the document was poorly received by business and industry and Maganya argues that as the ANC came closer to taking power its economic policies became increasingly orthodox and business friendly and more conservative approaches to economic policy-making became the order of the day (1996: 4). This period was also characterized by a series of high profile scenario exercises designed to build consensus between the ANC, labour and big business as a prelude to some form of social contract between them and the development of an economic model that would satisfy all parties⁵².

Since the 1994 transition to majority rule the ANC government’s economic policy has continued to be framed within the context of the contending interests of business, labour and the state. The original version of the RDP, the *RDP Base Document*, had its genesis in civil society. It was conceptualized by elements within COSATU as an instrument for radical social transformation and formally adopted at a special COSATU congress in 1993

⁵¹ This political retreat was typified, in Bond’s analysis, by what he views as COSATU’s sell-out in endorsing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) at the 1993 National Economic Forum.

⁵² In 1993 Nedcor/Old Mutual produced its *Prospects for a Successful Transition* and Sanlam produced its *Platforms for Investment* and the social-democratic *Mont Fleur Scenarios* (Marais, 1998: 150).

and accepted by the ANC in 1994 as a central pillar of its election manifesto. For various reasons the base document underwent a watering down process before re-emerging as the *White Paper on Reconstruction and Development* in November 1994. The government announced in the introduction to the RDP that it represented “a policy framework for integrated coherent socio-economic progress”; in essence it was devised as a policy programme to meet popular demands for a substantial and systematic redistribution of power and resources (1994: 7). Marais disputes this and describes the revised *RDP White Paper* as “an amalgam of developmental approaches – mixing neo-liberal prescriptions with some residual Keynesian regulation, corporatist processes with a ‘people-driven’ approach, ostensibly firm commitments to redistribution with stern macroeconomic strictures” (1998: 179). Whilst the business sector was generally pleased with the moderate tone of the RDP White Paper other sectors were less than enthusiastic. Adelzadeh and Padayachee noted with disappointment that the *RDP White Paper* was incoherent and fragmented and represented “a very significant compromise to the neo-liberal, ‘trickle-down’ economic preferences of the old regime” (1994: 2) and Pieterse lamented the “overly technocratic and instrumentalist character that the RDP has taken on since its unveiling” (1995: 1). Marais quotes a visiting Canadian trade unionist who notes with concern that in implementing the RDP programme the ANC was attempting to consolidate formal development with an extremely non-transformative model of development (1998: 179).

The RDP was conceptualized at a broad discursive level as a policy framework designed to translate the government’s commitment to prioritizing social equity into concrete government programmes and expenditures (Pieterse, 1997: 10). The RDP White Paper embodied basic developmental principles, calling for sustainable, people-centred and collaborative initiatives yet there are strong internal contradictions within the document. Decentralized development strategies are mixed with a strong statist thrust with developmental objectives being subordinated to the need for macroeconomic adjustments and strong economic growth, fiscal austerity and fundamental economic transformation. Marais argues that from 1990 the ANC’s economic policies had been steadily moving in more orthodox neo-liberal direction and that the RDP’s post-1994 theory and practice

“was a perspective that predicated reconstruction and development on liberalization, free markets, and the cultivation of business and investor confidence” (1998: 189).

This factor had definite implications for NGO work as large development projects were put out to tender effectively putting small NGOs into more direct competition with large NGOs and business interests. The 1996 closure of the RDP Office and the abolition of the RDP Fund was premised on the recognition by government that normal budget processes within line departments would enable provincial administrations to allocate and manage resources to priority areas⁵³. This was a set-back for NGOs as government moves at this time seemed to indicate that civil society involvement in state development initiatives was perceived as surplus to requirements⁵⁴. By 1996 however, as Pieterse points out, the RDP had proved to be inadequate “partially because it was thin on programmatic detail, and partly because the institutional form, the RDP Office, proved to be unworkable or indispensable” (1997: 10). Marais argued that the state’s developmental thrust and commitment to “basic needs” were being reduced to ideological and rhetorical devices “aimed at massaging possible tensions within the tripartite alliance” (1998: 189)⁵⁵. As a result the state was put under pressure to enlist support from other sectors in its attempts to meet its massive development backlogs.

Through all of this the position of NGOs within the reconstruction and development process remained unclear. Although the RDP did make reference to the possible role envisaged for NGOs – “Reconstruction and development will be achieved through the leading and enabling role of the State, a thriving private sector and active involvement by all sectors of civil society” - the actual mechanisms for such “effective participation” were not made clear (1994: 40). The *RDP White Paper* also included a chapter on “Consultation, Participation and Capacity Building” in which it was stated that “the

⁵³ This approach is clearly spelt out in the government’s *Growth, Employment and Redistribution: A Macroeconomic Strategy*, (1996: 40)

⁵⁴ In her article entitled “Civil Society after the Transition” Atkinson describes a classic example of prevailing government attitudes at the time in her examination of the controversies surrounding the Department of Health’s 1995 national health plan proposals in terms of what she calls “the hostile state” (1996: 301 – 303).

⁵⁵ The tripartite alliance is the political alliance between the ANC, the South African Communist Party and the trade union umbrella COSATU.

empowerment of institutions of civil society is a fundamental aim of the government's approach to building national consensus" (1994: 39). Yet despite the rhetoric it appeared that at this point in time the value of NGOs to national development initiatives was being downgraded. Marais is of the opinion that certain sectors within the government were prepared to see NGOs subject to "a process of Darwinist attrition (at the hands of market forces), with the survivors working within the ambit of a state-coordinated RDP" (1998: 183).

The introduction of the government's Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) in 1996 initiated an ongoing debate that has centred on the issue of whether an economic policy aimed at stimulating economic growth could be disengaged from the pressing reconstruction and development needs of the country. Whilst government and the business sector claimed that the trickle-down effects of the macroeconomic strategy would benefit the poor critics of GEAR within the voluntary sector argued that it represented a homegrown structural adjustment programme that prioritized economic growth and fiscal restraint over development and redistribution (Marais, 1997: 26). The GEAR document states that its economic vision is a natural progression from the RDP and stresses the state's developmental role by emphasizing that its macroeconomic policy is in essence "a strategy for rebuilding and restructuring the economy in keeping with the goals set in the Reconstruction and Development Programme" (1996: 1) and that the "strengthening of the redistributive thrust of [social services] expenditure remains a fundamental objective of economic policy" (1996: 9). The Minister of Finance Trevor Manuel has emphasized the government's view that GEAR is a strategic extension of the RDP, arguing that the RDP was initially formulated without enough attention being paid to the macro-economic environment⁵⁶.

However a key argument within the debate around South Africa's economic policy choice is the claim that the orthodox neo-liberalism of GEAR effectively compromises the government's development initiative as outlined in the RDP and has led to claims that "the

⁵⁶ The minister was speaking during a debate entitled "Does GEAR still exist?" held on the 26 February 1998. The debate was organized by the CDE, an independent policy and research institute.

degree of austerity for poor people implied by the GEAR strategy is so severe that even some World bank staff are said to have been astonished and repelled" (INTERFUND Mid-Term Review, 1996: 22). Government officials attending the Tripartite Alliance summit in September 1997 were eager to affirm the crucial role of "an interventionist state of a development kind" in achieving the RDP goals, comments which critics put down to the proximity of the 1999 elections (Marais, 1997: 36). The voluntary sector on the other hand has generally taken a negative stance towards GEAR and rebuked the government for privileging economic growth over development. In September 1997 SANGOCO launched its national campaign against poverty and inequality and at the same time called on the government to devise a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy and adapt its economic policies to address this objective (*NGO Matters* Vol. 2, No. 9 September 1997: 8).

This heavy criticism levelled at the government's GEAR strategy has created tensions between the government, the voluntary sector and its tri-partite allies and this may well have been the impetus for President Mandela's unprecedented attack on NGOs at the ANC's national convention in December 1997⁵⁷. Critics within the development sector such as Kraak have taken the more cynical view that because the new ruling structures have been absorbed as new members into the economic elite they consequently have little direct stake in the difficult decisions that will effect more far-reaching levels of social and economic amelioration for the mass of impoverished South Africans (1997: iii). The view from the left is that neo-liberalism is a recipe for continuing human poverty in the Southern African region and Bond believes that these conditions are likely to persist as "the will to succeed will not come from the ruling élites of the region, who are too busy cutting their own narrow, ultimately self-destructive deals with the global powers" (1997: 8). Fine compares the South African situation with the performance of neo-liberal policies in Latin American countries and points to the fact that in 1992 the per capita income was on average about 9% lower than it had been in 1980, and that even in the case of Chile's economic "success story" 40% of the population still live in poverty (1994: 43). That

⁵⁷ The major thrust of Mandela's comments regarding NGOs was that many of the foreign-funded NGOs were under the sway of forces hostile to the ANC and that these NGOs lacked popular support. Although the SANGOCO Executive Director sees no cause for panic others, for example Colin Douglas of the S.A. Institute of Race Relations, believes that Mandela's comments were "a no-holds barred attack on

economic decline in developing Latin American countries took place against drastic reductions in social expenditure in social services, health and education provided by the public sector suggests that such comparisons do little to assuage the doubts of many GEAR critics.

Despite a slight drop in government spending as a percentage of GDP the first post-GEAR 1997/98 budget "development spending" on health, education and social welfare rose slightly as a share of the budget initially, leading some anti-GEAR critics to re-evaluate their stance. The 1997/98 Budget allocated R38,6 billion to education which represented 26,2% of state non-interest spending and 6,5% of GDP as compared to the international average of 5,4%; the 1998/99 budget increased spending on education by 4% to R45 billion which represents 28% of the state's non-interest spending.⁵⁸ On closer examination however the situation appeared less rosy. Whilst the total amount allocated to education, for example, was higher than in previous years, with an unofficial inflation rate of 7,5%, the increases of 4,1% compared to 1996/97, and 4,7% in the combined budgets of the nine provinces, did not keep pace with inflation (Greenstein, 1997: 2). If the officially forecasted 1998 inflation rate of around 7,5% holds then the 1998/99 budget for education has effectively declined by 2,2% in real term (Vally and Spreen, 1998: 6). The 1998 budget was calculated on the premise that the South African economy would avoid the economic slump in the Japanese and East Asian economies and an expected growth rate of 3% was estimated for the 1998/99 financial year.

From May onwards, however, the world economy was battered by the deepening crisis in the Asian, Russian and Brazilian markets and the South African economy suffered a sharp depreciation in the exchange value of the rand. This had consequent negative effects on the money market and prime interest rates, and a marked slowdown in trade and financial flows (*Medium Term Budget Policy Statement*, 1998: 11). These factors have led the government to revise its budgetary projections with GDP growth being recalculated at

independent voices in civil society and a cynical attempt to equate criticism of the ANC with disloyalty to South Africa" (*NGO Matters*, Vol. 3, No. 1 January 1998: 13)

⁵⁸ These figures are taken from the Government's *The Medium Term Budget Policy Statement 1997* issued on 2 December 1997, pg. 20 & pg. 29.

0,3% for 1998 and the inflation rate at 8,1%. It is within this context that the 1998 *Medium Term Budget Policy Statement* points to significant budget over-runs in provincial education departments and warns that on-going rationalization of services is required in order for education departments to function within the present real resource limits (1998: 29). Within the current fiscal climate it seems evident that any real increase in education spending in the foreseeable future remains an unlikely option.

It would appear that development priorities are effectively being held captive to the demands of implementing GEAR although other factors do contribute significantly to resource constraint. Despite the redirection of resources through the RDP fund and the resources accessed through bilateral aid there are a number of inter-related factors that place severe pressure on the availability of funding for development projects. The government's macro-economic goals to reduce the country's deficit from 5,8% to 3% with the accompanying cuts in public expenditure and the overhang of internal debt generated in the final few years of the previous government that absorbs 18% of revenues in the form of debt servicing are a drain on state resources leaving less and less for development projects⁵⁹. Two related issues have also had serious implications for the fiscus. These are the costs of financing the voluntary severance packages that accompanied the wholesale clear out of state bureaucrats and other public servants, and the problems at local government level where the culture of non-payment for services has severely curtailed strategies for mobilizing revenue for the provision and extension of infrastructure.

Some analysts, however, remain unconvinced by these factors. Chisholm questions why South Africa has embarked on what amounts to a standard structural adjustment policy "when its debt is not too high, and mainly to local banks, it enjoys a relatively healthier economy than its neighbours and there has been no imposition of structural adjustment programmes by the IMF" (1998: 5). One glaring, but perhaps rather unavoidable, irony that arises from this emphasis on macroeconomic structural adjustment policies is that whilst the government does have access to considerable funds, primarily from foreign

⁵⁹ These figures are quoted in the Report by the Advisory Committee for the Deputy President entitled *Structural Relationships between the Government and Civil Society Organizations*, March 1997: 8.

governments and local corporations as well as a R700 million roll-over from the defunct RDP, cash-strapped and under-staffed ministries at both national and provincial level are finding it increasingly difficult to physically spend the resources at its disposal. Gilmour notes that the future of such funds is under threat “because of an inability of provinces to absorb the capital, corruption, bureaucratic delays, and ... an information problem around actual detail of disadvantage” (1997: 12).

There is little doubt that the policies stemming from GEAR are impacting heavily on the provision of social services and this in turn has implications for NGOs working in the development field and for welfare in general. The most obvious impact that GEAR has had for the NGO sector has been the shrinking pool of available corporate funding as companies, facing high labour costs, high interest rates and the effects of the weak rand, cut costs in ‘soft’ areas such as social development programmes. These kinds of economic knock-on effects bring into question the wisdom of “growth with redistribution” policies when the contradiction between implementing economic stabilization policies and achieving social targets becomes an apparently unresolvable antinomy. At the same time, however, this situation does create potential opportunities for NGOs to contract out their services in order to assist state departments in implementing donor-funded programmes.

There is a literature that is strongly critical of western neo-liberal notions of development and Berthoud argues that in the orthodox macro-economic view “efficiency is preferred to social justice as a means to an end, but also, sometimes as an end in itself, as is well illustrated by the attempts of the IMF and the World Bank to impose liberalism on a worldwide scale through the process of structural adjustment” (1993: 71). The implications of macroeconomic policies for development and social reconstruction appear to project a somewhat bleak future. As confirmation of this Bond points to the different forms of organic protest from the mid-1990s to the present and argues that these eruptions signify the inevitable result of a successful macroeconomic compromise among policy elites that continues to offer little to the vast majority of South Africans (1996: 33). Chisholm is in agreement with this and argues that the contested nature of GEAR is reflected in “resistance on the part of the labour movement (including teachers) as well as

[the] vigorous debate ... around the merits and demerits of South Africa's new economic policy" (1997: 4).

Reform is in itself problematic and reform-oriented policies, however well intentioned, do not always achieve the goals intended by their proponents and can bring with them unintended and unwelcome consequences. It would appear that in the South African education context the GEAR policies, by incorporating widely advocated reforms within a stabilization and structural adjustment paradigm, are having a negative impact on those sectors of society who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of change. Within the education sector it appears that the issues of finance, governance, and organization that have characterized the education policy arena since 1994 continue to dominate the scene. The current national economic priority involves cutting public spending to curb inflation and control budget deficits and policies linked to this have precipitated an ongoing and often traumatic rationalization of essential services with education, welfare and health being the hardest hit⁶⁰. In Chisholm's view a major constraint on the implementation of new policies in education has been that of resources and the economic policy framework within which policies are being implemented (1997: 5). In a move away from deficit budgeting the government has overseen the introduction of a new system of cash-budgeting for education that forms a part of the state's 'Medium Term Expenditure Framework' policy. This form of budgeting, common to many countries undergoing structural adjustment, stems from the Report of the South African Education Sectoral Team, and reflects the neo-liberal thinking of key officials shaping policy in government.⁶¹

The government's emphasis on financial austerity and budgetary concerns has led some critics to question the state's commitment to improving the quality of education and its ability to handle the transition to Curriculum 2005. Greenstein believes that the hasty

⁶⁰ The 1998 *Medium Term Budget Policy Statement* proposes a series of measures to further cut back on state spending on education. These include keeping salary growth below inflation, increasing educator ratios from 34 to 37 and increasing teacher workloads (1998: 29).

⁶¹ The Sectoral Team on Education, consisting primarily of officials from the Departments of Finance and Education, was appointed by the government in August 1997 to assist provinces in developing the skills and capacity necessary to manage, plan and prioritize within a stringent system of cash budgeting.

introduction of the new curriculum, the lack of involvement of relevant actors, such as NGOs, who are essential to successful implementation, the positive as well as negative lessons from curriculum change in other countries, and the mechanisms of implementation needed to effect the change have “been relegated to the status of rather unimportant technicalities” (1997: 9). Jansen argues that the implementation of the new curriculum will require a complete re-engineering of the education system to support the innovation and that at present “there is neither the fiscal base or political will to intervene in the education system at this level of intensity” (1997: 8). For Chisholm the policy contradictions are stark: she notes that the state justifies budget cuts in terms of equity arguments but that in the period September 1997 to January 1998 “not a single element in the education system appeared to benefit from current budgetary reform, lending some weight to the argument that under structural adjustment programmes finance-driven reforms in education may achieve the target of cutting budgets, but not of achieving the greater goals of equity” (1998: 8).

The limited possibilities of achieving redress and equality from within the existing budgetary framework is undoubtedly a reality but it does mean that there exists, theoretically at least, ample scope for NGOs to support the work of the state in areas where its human and material resources cannot extend. Many NGOs are currently under contract to state and provincial departments to provide services that the state is presently unable to provide, primarily due to staff constraints. Whilst this is beneficial to the NGO sector it can, and often does, place NGOs in a difficult and sometimes invidious position. Whilst NGOs take on work, often as a stark matter of survival, they are often subject to conditionalities imposed by foreign donors that do not always match with their development principles and work practices. The following section will look briefly at the relationship between NGOs and their funders and the impact that this has on their development practice.

8.3 *NGOs and their Relationship with Local and Foreign Funders*

If access to funding is the key enabling factor that allows NGOs to function then there is little doubt that over the last few years many South African NGOs have endured what

amounts to a serious resource crisis. During the apartheid era NGOs and other civil society organizations were generously supported by overseas donors with the result that NGO-led development programmes were often quite generic in scope, politically oriented and ambitious in scope (*NGO Matters* Vol. 3, No. 3 March 1998: 13). Most voluntary sector organizations were heavily dependent on foreign aid, which has since 1994 either declined substantially or become more complex and challenging as foreign donors moved to establish direct bilateral funding relationships with the South African government. One perspective on this is that the crisis can be ascribed to the sector's inability to adjust to post-apartheid modalities and a changing development environment but there have also been some overly hasty and insensitive shifts in foreign donor policy as well as abrupt withdrawals from long-standing voluntary sector engagements. Although there is truth in both views it is clear that the crisis has been caused by the conjuncture of a changed political dispensation, fluctuating economic circumstances and significant changes in both the local and international development aid arena.

The political changes in South Africa and the transition to democracy have prompted changed international aid policies and priorities which have resulted in overseas donors "diversifying their focus from voluntary sector channels to bilateral assistance, multilateral aid, and support geared to enterprise, trade promotion and investment" (Marais, 1997: 105). Boulle argues that the re-conceptualizing of foreign funding criteria stems from a desire on the part of foreign funders to help develop a more sustainable framework for the NGO movement and to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of projects that it funds. The general perception is that NGOs, whilst strong in areas like commitment and innovation, are weak when it comes to areas such as planning and evaluation, accountability and transparency, communication and collaboration with the funder (1993: 8).

This view seems overly optimistic however, as these changes in donor funding policy have included an overall reduction in funding, a rationalization of funding to eradicate duplication, more rigid funding requirements and conditionalities, and a shifting of funding towards bilateral government programmes. There are also clear signs that some

aid agencies will start a progressive withdrawal of their funding after the year 2000. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has indicated that it will pull out of South Africa in 2004 as it believes that democracy will have been fully consolidated by then (*Sunday Independent*, 25/01/ 1998: 15). Although SIDA has committed funding to the Northern Cape up to the year 2000 and has indicated that it may continue with a limited funding programme for an additional three years their 'country programme' policy is to gradually move their funding priorities to the Eastern Cape province. These factors, taken as a whole, have undoubtedly impacted negatively on the capacity of local NGOs to deliver effective development programmes.

There is a sense that some international aid agencies have misread the conditions prevailing in South Africa and the constraints under which the voluntary sector operates. Miller for example points out that many donors are now reluctant to fund "core" costs and believes that this reflects a rather limited understanding of what it takes to run a successful development programme and feels that "project officers employed by donors want to present their Boards with 'easy-to-grasp' development plans which will give the board members a 'warm feeling' and not entail too much detail" (*NGO Matters*, Vol. 3 No. 3 March 1998). ESST's experience with SIDA however has been somewhat different. Whilst SIDA is prepared to pay administrative costs they have imposed extremely onerous planning, budget and reporting requirements on the recipients of their aid which they justify under the rubric of 'capacity-building'. This has, over the last two years, meant that the small ESST staff in the Northern Cape has expended a disproportionate amount of their time engaged in attending regular donor/departments meetings, the drawing up of activity plans and reports, and a range of other time-consuming logistics that do not always have a direct bearing on the actual work of development.

Despite the developmentally-sound logic of implementing capacity-building policies these may in fact work against both the NGO recipients and the communities they hope to work in. The irony is that at a time when many funders are requiring that NGOs move towards a more business-oriented form of sustainability, they impose regulations that actually reinforce certain forms of dependency and tie NGOs to administrative practices that

ultimately diminish the impact of their development programmes (Hallowes, 1995: 13). Marais argues that whilst northern donors have made sustainability and accessing of collateral domestic funding a fundamental condition for their continued support they are “generally vague about what they mean by sustainability, are sometimes wildly optimistic about prospects for local funding and self-financing, and pose arbitrary time-frames for reaching sustainability” (1997: 112). This undoubtedly reflects the ESST experience in the Northern Cape, which has been one of a growing disjuncture between the rational frameworks that development agencies use and promote and the social realities that exist in the communities on which they seek to have an impact. In Pieterse’s view, however, this is a natural corollary of development practice in the sense that there is and always has been a tension between the “inherent ‘disciplining’ of the impulses of development (the need to structure, define, sequence, ‘projectize’, manage, evaluate, and so on) and the constant fluidity and provisional nature of the everyday practices of the poor and vulnerable in ensuring their survival and autonomy” (1998: 3).

Although these changes have a very real impact at a local level they need to be seen as reflections both of the socio-political changes in South Africa and the broad shift in development thinking within the international aid and development community. A number of events have conspired to cause a shift in foreign aid policies in the 1990s that King describes as “nothing short of a paradigm shift for the aid community” (1992: 257). Stokke for instance links this paradigm shift to the collapse of the Soviet hegemony and the ending of the cold war, events which meant that many Western governments felt freer than before to pursue basic political concerns *vis-à-vis* the governments of the South. Stokke argues that the pursuance of predominant Western political norms and interests, in particular liberal governmental systems, human and civil rights and the prevailing neo-liberal economic system, have replaced security policy considerations as the primary concern of donor states (1995: 9). The entrenchment of neo-liberal economic policies in countries of the North and the imposition of structural adjustment programmes on developing countries as a conditionality of aid has been a move away from giving aid as a purely moral obligation. A far greater emphasis is currently placed on the logic of policy-based aid linked with capacity building, governance improvement, strong local commitment and project ownership. Within the field of aid to education King argues that

the 1990s have seen a more judgemental approach by Northern aid agencies. He argues that this has resulted from perceptions that educational development in countries of the South has failed to make substantial progress if measured against indicators documented at the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien (1992: 260).

As the countries of the world move inevitably towards a highly interconnected global order many of the traditional domains of state activity and responsibility are increasingly difficult to fulfill without resort to international forms of collaboration (Held, 1991: 146). In the case of many developing countries governments are increasingly faced with a whole series of policy issues and public expectations that cannot be adequately addressed without co-operating with other state and non-state agencies. Samoff however warns that the acceptance of donor funding and the requirements that are attached to that aid may in fact be counter-productive when applied to specific areas of development such as education. He notes that “in many countries ... the interests and preferences of foreign assistance agencies – what they are and are not willing to fund – may have important direct and indirect influence on curriculum development” (1996: 261). Whilst Samoff warns that “foreign aid may function to limit innovation by stressing feasibility and practicality” (1996: 260) Sweeting argues that widespread acceptance of the globalization thesis in donor dependent countries encourages a more business-oriented situation in which consultancies, massive and well-funded research projects and donor-funded programmes will be in generous supply and the demand for the services of the transnational technocratic educationalists and foreign experts will be most intense (1996: 381). There are clear indications that this trend is taking root within South African education and training research and policy-making circles and it poses a profound challenge to NGOs in terms of the way that they plan, co-ordinate and implement their activities.

A powerful trend that has emerged in the development sector since 1994 has been the attempt to build up partnerships between private sector companies and non-profit organizations as part of a “market-friendly” approach to development. This approach does not appear to offer major benefits for NGOs considering the well-documented fact that most large companies devote negligible amounts to social investment. Allied to this is the

fact that large South African corporations are increasingly entering the global investment markets and acquiring major foreign operations and assets, a situation that Marais believes is unlikely to result in any substantial filtering back of profits from these external operations into domestic social investment (1997: 108). The discourse of this civil society partnership, articulated in altruistic and politically-correct language, in reality encodes two fundamental agendas: for NGOs such partnerships offer a potential and much-needed lifeline for survival and sustainability whilst for the corporate sector these human development projects, generally headed by affirmative action development officers, are a means to purchase legitimacy with the government. Undoubtedly most social investment undertaken by companies and corporations is viewed as part of their marketing and public relations strategy and is generally managed by their public relations departments. Marais notes that many NGOs complain that “corporate social investment policies tend still to be based on idiosyncratic criteria that correspond to companies’ public image campaigns and internal efforts to improve management-worker relations” (1997: 109).

A sad irony of the transition to democracy is that it has brought hard times for many within the South African NGO sector. The state’s interactions with civil society continue to be uneasy and fraught with ambiguities and there has been a clear failure on the part of the state to produce a coherent and sympathetic policy framework within which NGOs can operate. At the same time both foreign and local donors have made it increasingly difficult for NGOs to access funding for development projects. The challenge now for the NGO sector is to develop a sustained vision regarding its post-apartheid role and to define for itself a clearer and more market-oriented development role within the state/civil society/donor nexus. At the level of vision these prescriptions are undeniably necessary for the enhancement of national development. Nevertheless there is a much more urgent need for NGOs to explore practical means whereby a more productive and collaborative working relationship, and one that is built on mutual trust and respect, can be established both with the state and donor agencies. Attempting to formalize such collaborative relationships, however, is a difficult and fragile process yet, as Hargreaves argues, it lies “at the core of the restructuring agenda and all its contradictory possibilities” (1994: 58). The following section will briefly explore the “trust in people/trust in processes” dilemma

that Hargreaves sets up and reflect on the possibilities that this holds for a clearer understanding of the direction in which the state-civil society relationship can move.

8.4 *Working with the Tension Between “People” and “Processes”*

The complex and interconnected forces of power, economics and resource allocation exist in the realm of abstract systems for most educators, state bureaucrats and NGO practitioners. The effects of these interconnected and recursive systems are generally taken for granted and little time is spent on considering how these effects shape educational and development discourse and practice. Giddens argues that this is a function of globalization and that one of its most pervasive outcomes is the deskilling of many aspects of daily life, which he suggests leads to a situation in which “everyone living in conditions of modernity is affected by a multitude of abstract systems, and can at best process only superficial knowledge of their technicalities” (1991: 22). Under these circumstances people choose either to coexist with abstract systems and technical knowledge with a taken-for-granted confidence or they subject such systems to scepticism and critique. Whilst Hargreaves argues that meaningful engagement with the process of change agency requires the establishment of a specific set of collegial relationships that are formed around the notion of trust as a crucial component of educational transformation (1994: 58). The availability of scarce resources – the control and allocation of those resources – undermine relationships of trust – a battle over ownership of resources both material, intellectual and human. South Africa educational transformation has been bureaucratized to such an extent that education departments struggle to respond to local circumstances and changing needs or to enter into relationships with outside agencies on a basis of mutual trust. The establishment of trust-based relationships between agents within state and donor bureaucracies and agents of civil society is however compromised when relationships of trust are subordinated to the inflexible enactment of rules and regulations.

In the Northern Cape the construction of such forms of collegiality have been compromised by the fact that educational delivery and the implementation of in-service

training is still fractured by the old apartheid divisions. In the Northern Cape it is still very evident that there are deeply entrenched levels of mistrust and suspicion constituted along racial and cultural lines and it is clear that these factors are detrimental to the quality of interaction between educators and bureaucrats. NGO practitioners also find themselves caught up in these fragile relationships. Historically NGO INSET provision has generally been well received by black teachers who clearly perceived NGOs as agents working in opposition to the dictates of racially segregated education departments whereas most white teachers perceived NGOs as somehow subversive, politically suspect and anti-establishment.

Through the nature of their work ESST trainers must necessarily be bearers of Curriculum 2005 which, in a Giddensian sense, represents an “expert system” that requires educators, parents and learners to place an implicit trust in its validity as a medium of educational development and social transformation. Arguably however trust in this system is disrupted not only by its own “expertise” but also by the source of its expertise. Encased as it is in a politically charged, technocratic discourse it carries the potential to either alienate or empower its intended audience. Either way it represents a disruption of certitude in the predictability of authority, routine and the autonomy of action and potentially threatens the ontological security of its beneficiaries. In Giddens’s sense the transformative curriculum operates as disembedding mechanism that will potentially fragment the stability of local space and its relations of trust so that the practice of education becomes a passage no longer governed by tradition and certainty but by a set of passages circumscribed by risks, uncertainties and unexpected opportunities (Lash and Urry, 1994: 39).

For the last two years ESST trainers have been working with teachers in what could fairly accurately be described as the trenches of educational change. Practicing INSET strategies and related developmental activities has involved ESST in close contact with the instrumentalities of the state’s implementation programme and the crisis of resources. One of the key concerns for NGOs attempting to operationalize particular programmes is the manner in which the state designs a methodology for restructuring and puts it into practice as the delivery vehicle for educational transformation. Hargreaves believes that the

successful outcome of educational restructuring is mediated by the tensions that exist between structural top-down and cultural grass-roots approaches to managing change. He goes on to suggest that there is a “fundamental choice between restructuring as bureaucratic control, where teachers are controlled and regulated to implement the mandates of others, and restructuring as professional empowerment, where teachers are supported, encouraged and provided with newly structured opportunities to make improvements of their own, in partnership with parents, principles and students” (1994: 51). The crucial question posed here, and one of central concern to NGOs operating as agents on the periphery of state structures, is whether politically determined structural solutions to educational restructuring are more effective than culturally mediated changes at school and classroom level that are grounded in the realities of local conditions.

Despite the rhetoric of decentralization and the empowerment of regional and local authorities the Northern Cape Department of Education has tended to function in the classic Weberian manner as a centrally controlled, hierarchically structured and rationally managed bureaucracy committed to the implementation of centrally determined policies. As Mitchell argues organizations operating within a common political regime and sharing a common discourse are drawn towards standard institutional practices that correspond to the political pressures and formal regulations produced by the regime (1995: 174). The policies that inform institutional political and educational practices at national level are interpreted in a singularly bureaucratic, authoritarian and unmediated way at provincial level, arguably as a result of the demographic and geographical particularities of the province that cut it off from mainstream debate. In ESST’s experience the result has been that local change initiatives at regional and school level are generally discouraged by the state policy makers’ attempts to impose predetermined constraints and limitations on local practice which in turn tend to be passively accepted by schools, teachers and local state bureaucrats. The new NQF, together with the outcomes-based approach to teaching and learning, represents a broad transformational framework that embodies the government’s vision that a transformed state education system will have the capacity to produce high-quality, skilled learners. The success of such an approach depends in a crucial way on a broad national internalization of the fundamental restructuring of current pedagogical practices by everyone who has a stake in educational change. In contrast to this somewhat

utopian expectation Mitchell points out that despite a paucity of explanatory literature the failure in the dissemination and replication of successful educational programmes and techniques through the vehicle of state bureaucracies is universally recognized (1995: 175).

Whilst an awareness of structural change is always part of the development mission NGO practitioners tend to be more concerned with the impact of change on institutions and individuals at a micro or localized level. At the structural level of educational transformation the national DOE has, in the post-1994 period, displayed a marked preference for the human capital education strategies that have been implemented over the last decade by conservative governments in Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia. The conceptual core of this approach is that the development of human resources, both material and human, is crucial for future economic growth and the accumulation of material resources and is an approach that fits comfortably with the state's economic GEAR policy. The missing link in the process, however, would appear to be the current shortage of material and human resources necessary to put the appropriate enabling structures in place. From an administrative point of view the implementation of the new education system appears focussed on the object of educational change rather the subjects who constitute the system. Kallaway goes further and argues that these policies, focussed on economic outcomes rather than human development, have severely undermined traditional educational structures in countries with well-established compulsory mass educational systems and questions whether South Africa can afford to follow this path without compromising the whole fabric of education (1997: 46).

These concerns clearly have a bearing on the successful implementation of educational restructuring in South Africa and have informed the "enlightened scepticism" of the work done by ESST in the Northern Cape. However de Clercq raises a central concern when she questions the capacity of the state in ensuring that a transformed pedagogy "penetrates and transforms practices right through the system, from the inspectorate and colleges of education, through to the curricula, syllabi and the classrooms" (1997: 158). Arguably the implementation of Curriculum 2005 represents what Hargreaves refers to as "a classic

curriculum fix” and that it reflects what he terms the state’s pervasive and deep-rooted belief in the power of structural curriculum reform to secure effective change (1994: 61).

8.5 Conclusion

The allocation of sufficient material resources and the availability and distribution of skilled human resources are key components for the successful implementation of the state’s educational transformation programme. In this review of the state of the South African economy and within the context of current economic policies it is evident that the necessary resources are in short supply and that the implementation of the new curriculum is being slowed as a result. It is also clear that the state education system has a skills shortage that impacts on the speed, quality and sustainability of educational delivery. Although foreign donor agencies have taken up some of the resource shortfall with significant funding inputs logistical requirements, bureaucratic delays and lack of local knowledge often impact negatively on these funding initiatives. These resource issues are major constraining factors in the work done by the state but do not, in the final analysis, threaten the state’s existence. Such resource constraints have a far more serious impact on NGOs and can in many instances lead to the scaling-back or closure of organizations whose financial capacity is not able to absorb the vicissitudes of current resource allocation and distribution. There are no easy answers for the NGO sector but there are certain options available to organizations that will enable them to secure a longer-term viability than is now the case. The last section of this thesis will look briefly at some of the options that will allow NGOs to participate in the developmental process, while at the same time maintaining and developing their character as agents of civil society.

CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION: NGOS AND THE POSSIBILITIES FOR STRATEGIC REALIGNMENT

The *leitmotif* of this thesis has been the manner in which changing state-civil society relations have structured the complex and conflictual conditions under which South African NGOs have practiced their development mission as agents of civil society over the last three decades. In taking this broad perspective there has been an attempt to highlight some of the key factors that have impacted on the NGO sector as a whole and to examine why the sector has been and still is experiencing difficult times. At the same time there has been an emphasis on the recursive nature of these structure-agency interactions and the possibilities that exist for agents themselves to impact on the structures that shape their discursive space and their fields of practice.

In overview this thesis has argued that whilst the state has been consistent, at least at a rhetorical level, in its calls for a strong civil society it has as yet done little to create the conditions necessary to ensure that an active civil society continues as a core feature of democratic life. As Marais points out the NGO sector has been struggling to find its footing in the transition and that few civil society organizations have managed to evade “the dilemmas thrown up by internal dysfunctions, funding crises, political incoherence and overall strategic disorientation” (1998: 206). It is clear, however, that given the extent of South Africa’s development needs civil society has a crucial, if as yet undefined, developmental role to play as the post-apartheid state’s capacity to deliver on its social commitments falters. From a political point of view the existence of a vibrant and independent civil society is a crucial factor in the maintenance of a healthy democracy; correspondingly such a civil society also has an important watchdog role to play in ensuring that the emerging state does not slide into authoritarianism (Keane, 1988: 27; Cohen and Arato, 1994: 472; Pillay, 1996: 345).

The need to maintain a vibrant civil society has been the subtext of this thesis and it argues that this debate should remain a critical part of South African political and developmental

discourse. Nevertheless it is also important to note that under the present conditions of financial austerity and political ambiguity this debate has suffered as NGOs struggle with the twin concerns of survival and sustainability. Although groupings within the NGO sector have organized themselves into an interest-based, sectoral coalition there is still, however, an underlying and as yet unanswered sense of *quo vadis* for NGOs in South Africa. The need to focus continually on matters of financial sustainability places enormous physical and psychological pressure on NGOs and results in a diminished ability to review their development mission and their role as agents of civil society. Conversely, under conditions of national transformation, NGOs are being severely pressured to redefine their developmental and operational focus and create new roles for themselves in the current period of transition and the restructuring of both state and civil society.

At the same time that NGOs form part of the global development discourse they also function within the terrain of everyday life with all its local variations and contextual realities. It is evident that this diversity of experience, of ideology and values produces conflict between economic interests, between political representatives, and between social actors who represent varied and often conflicting interests. As Pillay has pointed out many frustrated NGO experts, development practitioners and others anxious to get on with the job of delivering development question the relevance and role of theory in their daily practice (1996: 345). It is in the context of such perspectives that this thesis has attempted to explore the limits and possibilities of theory and its application to the process of delivering development programmes in a developing country. As has been argued throughout this thesis a key concern for development practitioners should be how to reconcile the global and national imperatives with the purely pragmatic concerns and contextual constraints that currently circumscribe the work of NGOs and through this process build a development praxis that corresponds with the prevailing conditions of post-apartheid South Africa.

At this juncture it is worth revisiting Korten's statement that the development of theoretical models of NGO activity is not a question of academic relevance but a

“condition of survival” (1990: 114). The core observation is that sociological theorizing has the capacity to create frames for looking at the distortions in a given social formation and the resulting interpretations can be used to initiate a reflexive process that enables people to interact dialectically with the constraints those distortions create. It has been argued in this thesis that the difficulties being experienced within the South Africa NGO sector are symptomatic of a democratic order that is malfunctioning on the four structural levels described by Giddens in his structuration theory. The thesis has examined how the prevailing symbolic order (Chapter 5) sends out an uneasy amalgam of ideological rhetoric, contending norms and common sense that has effectively locked local development discourse into the ambiguities that such a situation establishes. The thesis then moved on to examine how these ambiguities are reflected in the modalities of political decision-making and the distribution of power and authority (Chapter 6) and how these ambiguities in turn become embedded in the terrain of policy-making (Chapter 7) and the implementation and allocation of human and material resources (Chapter 8). If, as has been argued, these ambiguities lie at the heart of that malfunctioning then it is not sufficient to focus attention directly on the symptoms that arise from them. If one accepts that the human agent is not only self-conscious but is also engaged in the monitoring of the *durée* of activities and structural conditions then it is important that development practitioners engage critically and reflexively with the dialectical processes in which practice, structure and consciousness are produced. This thesis has been an attempt to engage with the recursive nature of these processes by exploring, in a similarly recursive manner, the complex interplay of state and civil society and the impact that it has on development practice.

Through its examination of NGO activity within the paradigm of structuration theory this thesis argues that the process of critical reflection should form the theoretical matrix out of which individual and organizational action is taken to challenge and transform the institutions and values that have created the structural and material conditions currently undermining the effective functioning of the NGO sector. Without the development of clear theoretical models it seems ever more certain that the crisis for NGOs will deepen for lack of appropriate action. The inter-linked nature of the structural elements described in this thesis and the recursive nature of their interaction do, it is argued, allow for strategic

intervention at the level of agency and it suggests that there is space for NGOs to operate not only as agents of social betterment but also as localized sites of resistance to structural imperatives that work to domesticate their praxis. This reflects Giddens's position that the agency-structure dialectic plays itself out in a historical, processual and dynamic way that creates the possibilities for change and renewal.

Whilst accepting that it is difficult to articulate any clear answers to the current plight of the NGO sector this thesis has aimed at proposing some theoretical approaches that might offer some thoughts for further action and stimulate the development of a revitalized praxis. The work of ESST over the last decade was used as a vehicle to introduce the theoretical concerns raised in this thesis and to point the way towards a more considered set of development practices. As development practitioners the experience gained working for ESST in the Northern Cape proved to be an invaluable aid in the process of conceptualizing new possibilities and strategies for the future of their work not only in the province but also for their work in other provinces. As this thesis has documented there have been enormous constraints on the work done by NGOs in general (Chapter 2) and it has set out to describe how the development work done by ESST in the Northern Cape has evolved in response to some of those constraints (Chapter 3). Whilst the realities of an ambiguous normative climate, shifting regimes of power, uneven policy implementation and state austerity programmes, combined with the unique contextual realities of the Northern Cape province, have made it difficult for NGOs to prosper opportunities for new and more strategically considered development practices have arisen. These changes in the development approach of one small NGO in the Northern Cape are a reflection of the broader, if as yet tentative, reassessment that is taking place regarding the role of NGOs as agents of civil society and the way in which they contribute to the development process in South Africa. This thesis tries to capture the sense of how the volunteer core of NGO work, with its altruistic, people-centred, human rights-oriented development approach needs to be integrated with the thinking and the practices of a new generation of development practitioners. This approach to development recognizes the necessity of operating within a clearly-defined business paradigm in the knowledge that the altruism inherent in traditional human development practices, whilst valuable in itself, is exposed in fundamental ways to the tensions and ambiguities inherent in state-civil society

relations, the pressures of socio-political transformation and the powerful and competitive effects of the globalized neo-liberal market place.

This thesis argues that if NGOs work from the understanding that an organization cannot have a meaningful development strategy within a particular structural nexus without elaborating a social theory rooted in the existing contextual realities at both local and global level then there are possibilities not only for survival but also for renewal, sustainability and growth. The capacity for reflexivity and organizational learning in response to changing internal and external variables are key determinants in enabling NGOs to engage in renewing their praxis and sustaining their work within the context of sound state-civil society relations. The concluding sections will therefore briefly review the three fundamental imperatives that have underpinned this thesis: the need for change, the need for sustainability, and the establishment of a more enabling state-civil society relationship. These final few observations are intended to stand, not as solutions to specific problems, but as pointers to the development of theoretical positions that will guide NGOs towards the establishment of a relevant praxis that is built on the recursive nature of structure-agency and theory-practice.

9.1 *NGOs and Organizational Renewal*

If NGOs are to develop sustainable strategies not only for financial survival but also for effective development practice a holistic approach needs to be taken with regard to their management and development praxis. As Pieterse points out both government and civil society organizations are often guilty of working in a new policy framework within the context of outdated management skills, frameworks and systems (1997: 17). Arguably a first step for NGOs should be the development of a holistic development strategy that takes cognizance of current policy frameworks and the implementation of management and human resource development practices that are appropriate to the changing development terrain. Whilst many NGOs have laudable developmental goals and impressive records in development practice there is a sense that under present conditions

their overall development vision is moribund. NGOs therefore need to become learning organizations themselves, a process that would involve them in continuous organizational reappraisal and realistic reviewing of their development vision so that their practice is in tune with current development trends. Establishing new development visions and organizational structures needs to be based on a process of reflexivity whereby theory and practice are continually subject to revision and new knowledge integrated into ongoing programme development. Smaller NGOs could also look to the establishment of a research and development component within their organization that would in essence be responsible for an ongoing theorizing of their development role, their organizational practices and the contextual realities within which they operate.

9.2 NGOs: Options for Sustainability

As has been explored throughout this thesis the NGO sector is trapped in a series of operational double bind situations. Despite the existence of SANGOCO and moves towards sectoral collaboration there is still a lack of overall unity within the NGO sector and this fragmentation is exacerbated by the scramble for scarce resources and funding. Size, capacity and access to the corridors of power also vary from organization to organization and sector to sector with the larger well-funded or self-sufficient NGOs like Kagiso Trust, JET and the IDT tending to dominate the diverse groupings that make up the NGO community (*Mail & Guardian*, 12/03/1998). The role of these large NGOs has given rise to fears within the NGO sector that powerful developmental alliances reflecting the interests of the more powerful stakeholders have been forged and that these organizations have become the new intermediaries or gatekeepers in the development process (Marais, 1997: 122). At the same time if smaller NGOs with limited capacity marginalize themselves by failing to link up with SANGOCO or other networks or coalitions of NGOs they will find it increasingly difficult to develop the necessary networking skills required to lobby for and access scarce funding. Many advocacy NGOs are also facing significant challenges as they often campaign against particular government or private sector policies with the result that “they are unable to sell their services and the people they represent,

often the poor, are unable to pay for these services” (*Sunday Independent ‘Reconstruct’*, 15/03/1998: pg. 1).

The possibilities open to NGOs in the present conjuncture are undoubtedly limited and the options that are available are heavily dependent on the context within which particular NGOs operate. Whatever the context, however, financial sustainability is unquestionably the crucial concern for NGOs and the bottom line for most NGOs is the ability to develop effective and sustainable strategies for financial survival. This may include strategies such as increased lobbying and advocacy work, involvement in investment programmes and income-generating schemes, consulting and hiring out of services to government, large foreign aid agencies and the private sector and the setting up of trust funds and subsidiary or Section 21 companies. Nevertheless, the adoption of any of these approaches by NGOs that function as voluntary, non-profit organizations does bring into play issues of development ethics for individual NGOs and for the sector as a whole. Marais argues that structural pressures will push voluntary sector organizations towards a crossroads where they will have to resolve “the tension between their ‘ideal’ developmental role and a ‘fast-track delivery’ role imposed by the fiscal and political context in which they operate” (1997: 119).

As a consequence of this there must be an awareness amongst NGOs that various forms of financial strategies and fund-raising operations need to be scrupulously integrated with their status as non-profit organizations, the development ethos of the NGO sector and the circumstances of their working relationships with their different development partners. The experience gained by ESST working in the Northern Cape has been invaluable in the process of mapping out new possibilities and strategies for the future of their work in the province. As this thesis has documented there have been enormous constraints on the work done by ESST in the province and the ‘Learning Adventure’ project, as originally conceived, has evolved in response to those constraints. Despite the realities of state austerity programmes, uneven policy implementation, bureaucratic donor delays and the contextual realities of the Northern Cape province opportunities for new working relations

have arisen and the organization has chosen to run with them despite the fact that they are, in reality, charting untested waters.

The present position is that the Northern Cape provincial office of ESST has established a semi-autonomous consultancy wing with contractual ties to the parent organization. The thinking is that such a working arrangement allows the ESST coordinators to oversee the 'Learning Adventure' project whilst at the same time developing a more business-oriented approach for the organization in the province. This has enabled the coordinators to extend the services of the organization and allowed them to engage in consultancy work, to contract and sub-contract for work arising out of tendering processes and to form strategic alliances with both government, the private sector and other NGOs. This approach has a number of important benefits. The Northern Cape DOE benefits from the availability of locally-based skills and has access to a range of capacity-building possibilities offered by the organization. ESST as a whole benefits financially from having increased access to work possibilities as do the local ESST coordinators who work according to an incentive plan which affords them a percentage share of any services provided. It ensures that the management of the flagship project is maintained through the appointment and training of locally-seconded coordinators whilst freeing the provincial coordinators from day-to-day project management to explore tendering and consultancy options. The next step for ESST is to replicate this model in the other five provinces where it operated development programmes.

9.3 NGOs: Working with the State

The current economic constraints and the general reluctance of foreign donor agencies to fund NGOs directly are the two key factors placing pressure on NGOs to consider strategic realignment. In the context of current circumstances the most expedient option for NGOs is to engage with the state in collaborative or contractual relationships that enable organizations to access earmarked funding via government departments. In terms of practicality, logistics and financial sustainability this is the most realistic approach but it

does, however, raise the possibility that NGOs will sacrifice their independence by entering voluntarily into a dependency relationship with specific government departments. Thus a key area of concern and anxiety for NGOs concerns the terms on which they do business with government and the consequences that this may have for civil society as a whole. Working on the Gramscian understanding that recognizes the differentiated and contested nature of civil society Pillay suggests that such considerations need not be a major obstacle in the formation of a working collaboration between the state and civil society agencies. He argues that the existence of structural ambivalences within such relationships is a crucial function of the democratic process and that it "points towards the necessity of progressive civil society forging a tension-ridden alliance with the emerging democratic state, if only to ensure that its democratic potential is fulfilled" (1996: 344).

The current trend is for civil society agencies to enter into contractual arrangements whereby they receive funding via line departments to implement programmes or to render other necessary services. In essence this has seen NGOs entering into a kind of Faustian pact, sacrificing their independence to a lesser or greater degree in order to secure their longer-term viability. Although Atkinson argues that by going this route the NGO sector will potentially weaken and undermine the autonomy of South African civil society (1996: 296) there are indications that the independence of the NGO sector has already been compromised in particular by donor agency policies that have forced them into a dependency relationship with the state. It can be argued, however, that the issue of dependency works both ways and that there are clear indications that the state is relying increasingly on NGOs to provide basic services in areas that the government cannot cover. The result of this has been an increasing call, both from government and donor agencies, for state-civil society collaboration and for a greater emphasis to be placed on the need for NGOs to become more fully integrated as local agents of development in partnership with government. An approach that already being pursued by a number of South African NGOs has been to identify gaps in state service provision and to create niches where the expert services of specialist NGOs can be utilized on a contractual basis. The advantage of pursuing this approach is that it offers NGOs a certain degree of financial security whilst still allowing them to retain their innovativeness and flexibility. ~

The current problem, however, for much state-NGO collaboration is that it tends to occur through *ad hoc*, project-specific interventions. The shortcomings and flaws that characterize these collaborative efforts are reflected in poor planning, ineffectual project management, inaccurate budgeting and the setting of unrealistic or inappropriate time frames. Many of these interventions also fail because they do not succeed in effectively engaging appropriate community or end-user interest groups in relationships of trust and confidence that are critical to the success of development projects. In theory it would be ideal if state departments and NGOs could establish constructive development coalitions at either provincial, regional or local level and then, as Davies suggests, use the most effective and appropriate agencies and systems in the field to facilitate the initiation of properly designed and funded development strategies (1992: 181). This is an unlikely scenario at present, however, as this approach would need to grow out of an overall, comprehensive regional development strategy that could provide an enabling framework within which such initiatives could be planned, organized and implemented. Pieterse believes that part of the problem is that the inability of the state and the NGO sector to formulate integrated strategies is the absence of “an informed and meaningful public debate regarding social development priorities and targets” (1997: 16). Although the current state of state-civil society relations does not appear to have the levels of trust and sophistication necessary for such an approach it does remain an option for the future and is a strategy under consideration within the ranks of SANGOCO.

9.4 Conclusion

These concluding comments are intended to link back to the broader theoretical perspectives that have been explored in earlier chapters. If, as has been argued, theory and practice linked in a recursive relationship then it is clear that the themes elaborated in this thesis are fundamentally part of that process. The future of NGOs as agents of development and social amelioration has undoubtedly been placed in question but it is also clear that it is not only the future of NGOs that is at stake: the future of an open and democratic polity is also at stake. NGOs must therefore play an active role not only in the

practice of development but perhaps more crucially, at the present juncture, they must engage in a critical dialogue with themselves but also with the state, with funding agents, with foreign governments and with other organs of civil society to ensure that the theoretical foundations for their survival and future sustainability are firmly in place.

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