

# - The Ethnic Knife

A Minor Field Study of Organisations Based on  
Ethnicity in Ghana

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# Abstract

This Master Thesis states that organisations based on ethnicity should be included in the concept of civil society. The argumentation originates in that the existing definitions of civil society exclude organisations based on ethnicity. This proves to have troublesome consequences in an African context, since a large part of the associational life can be derived to ethnicity. Based on the assumption that the definition of civil society needs revising I widen the definition to include organisations based on ethnicity. This revision is supported by a theoretical discussion about deepening democracy through a representation that reflects the composition of the population. Empirically this thesis is built upon a recent field study in Ghana, where I have studied organisations based on ethnicity. These organisations have been examined from the demands that any civil society organisation is expected to fulfil.

I come to the conclusion that the organisations that are based on ethnicity should be included in the concept of civil society. This study illustrates that these organisations are both pro-democratic as well an effective counter power to the state. This indicates a need of reviewing the definitions of civil society, and by using my definition, the concept of civil society broadens and the problem of exclusion is avoided.

Keywords: Ghana, Africa, Civil Society, Ethnicity, Deepen Democracy

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# 1 Introduction

The last two decades have contained a remarkable change for Sub-Saharan Africa, where many of the countries have experienced transitions from authoritarian to more democratic regimes. Ghana is considered to be one of the most successful cases of African transitions and is today regarded as a stable democracy.

Within political science, the civil society has become quite popular as an explanatory factor behind democratization. It started with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the democratization of Eastern Europe. Since then the civil society has been used worldwide to study different democratizations. Although it seems that the use of civil society in an African context can be problematic.

## 1.1 Purpose and Research Question

So far, theories and definitions of the civil society have excluded organisations based on ethnicity as part of civil society. My purpose with this thesis is to examine whether organisations based on ethnicity should be included in the civil society. I mean that the fact that the organisation is based on ethnicity is not a reason to exclude it from the definition of civil society. Therefore I will formulate my definition of civil society. This definition will be based on an exhaustive discussion about civil society, where I also implement logic from a discussion about deepening democracy. On a more aggregated level my purpose is to examine the usefulness of the concept civil society in an African context. The use of civil society in Africa has proven to be problematic. By broadening the definition of the civil society my purpose is to make it more useful in an African context and more analytical valuable. All this will be illuminated through my empirical field study of ethnical organisations in Ghana.

In this thesis I have formulated some research questions that I intend to answer in the following discussion. My research questions are:

*How can organisations based on ethnicity strengthen the democratic development in Ghana?*

*How do organisations based on ethnicity fulfil the functions that are expected from the rest of the civil society?*

*How would an inclusion of organisations based on ethnicity affect a pro-democratic civil society in Ghana?*

## 1.2 Theoretical Approach

To study the civil society within the frame of democratization has become very popular in political science. Especially transitional analyses have attributed civil society a vital role as a pressure group for democratization. This was last exemplified in Georgia where massive demonstrations at last got Eduard Shevardnadze to resign. Despite civil society's widespread use there has been very little critic addressed against its use outside its origin context.

In Africa, a large part of the associational life falls outside the definition of the civil society, and in the long run there is a risk that the civil society can lose its value as an analytical tool. This is why I will revise and broaden the definition of civil society so it will adjust to the African context. To revise the definition I will use a discussion about deepening the democracy.

Lately, there has been a discussion about how representation in the national assembly reflects the composition of the population and how this can lead to a deeper democracy. According to this discussion half of the members in parliament should consist of women and all ethnic groups should be represented. However this is the case neither in the west nor in the third world. To achieve a better representation, guaranteed representation for women and ethnic minorities are discussed. I want to implement the logic in this argumentation, and apply it to the theory of civil society.

## 1.3 Methodological Considerations

### 1.3.1 Methodological Discussion

In this thesis I use a qualitative case study as method, more specifically I use what Eckstein (1992: pp.138) calls "disciplined-configurative" case study. This type of method is suitable for a study that seeks to further develop theories. He means that this method is adequate when the theory is not entirely completed. The case study shows if there is a need to redefine the theory. I will do some adjustments to sharpen the civil society's usefulness in an African context.

Case studies are often considered to be too descriptive and the researchers tend to overestimate variables, which are not really relevant. Critics mean that the biggest weakness of the case study is that it is not possible to make generalizations out of a single case, which makes it less effective than comparative and statistical methods (Yin, 1989: 21). Adherents of case studies however, argue that even though you might not be able to make generalizations out of a single case, the case study still has a great value for testing and building theory. Even though the result of a case study is not directly valid for another case, the result of a case study can indicate shortages in a theory. Further benefits are that the case study gives the researcher an opportunity to slowly approach the

case and take different contexts into account. This type of deep analysis can also give the researcher new ideas about the issue he or she is studying (Boussard, 2003: 12, see also Eckstein, 1992: 119-120). Since case studies often examine specific problems or a specific theory, the results should be considered within the theoretical context (Lijphart, 1975: 160).

### 1.3.2 Material

This study is based on the empirical material that I gathered during my field study in Ghana between April and June 2004. My purpose with this thesis is to study ethnic organisations and democracy. The prime objective during my time in Ghana was of course the organisations based on ethnicity, but I also interviewed people from NGOs, academics and government representatives to get opinions from several perspectives. I have focused on three ethnic organisations or home-town associations as they are called in Accra, namely Obomeng Youth Union, Mpraeso Youth Club and Dzita New Generation Action Forum for Development. I conducted interviews with both executives and members to get a top-down perspective and to see how well the response correlated. All of these three organisations are called youth unions, which mean that they consist mainly of young people. A member has to enter the association before the age of 35<sup>1</sup>, and if you become a member you can stay forever. There are similar unions for the elderly. I chose to focus on youth unions because I could easily identify myself with the members of these associations since I am young. I believe that organisations for the young generation have a more open mind towards democracy. Many of the members have lived the main part of their lives in a democratic system. The three organisations which I have focused on are randomly selected and are, as far as I understand, representative for the home-town associations in Ghana.

During my stay I conducted interviews with 31 persons and the time for each interview was approximately 45 minutes. During my interviews I used a recorder which was agreed upon with the respondents before the interview. All of my interviews were conducted in English and no interpreter was necessary.

The interviews I conducted were of a qualitative in-depth nature. The technique that I used for my interviews is called semi-structured. This means that when the interview starts the questions are specified, but the interviewer is free to probe beyond the answers. To gain more information about the topics the interviewer can seek both clarification and elaboration on the answer given. This type of interview allows people to answer in their own words (May, 1997: 111). May sets up three conditions that must be fulfilled for a successful interview. First, he speaks of accessibility. This refers to whether the person being interviewed has access to the information the interviewer seeks. Second, he refers to cognition, that the person being interviewed understands what is required of

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<sup>1</sup> The age limit in the associations varies between 30 and 40 years old.

him. The third is motivation. The interviewer must make the subjects feel that they are participating and that answers are valued (May, 1997: 116).

When collecting empirical material by using interviews, there is always a risk of me as an interviewer affecting the respondent to give me the answers I want to hear. This depends on who is asking the questions as well as the whole situation (Esaiasson et al, 2003: 293). I believe that the fact that I am a young student made it easy for most of the respondents to identify themselves with me, especially when I did the interviews with people from youth unions. The fact that I was writing my master thesis about the Ghanaian civil society seems to have made academics and NGOs very positive towards me. During my meetings with government representatives, however I sometimes felt that I was not taken completely serious.

My empirical part of the thesis is based on interviews, but the theoretical part is based on secondary material. I have studied a vast amount of articles and books to create a theoretical groundwork for this thesis. The literature consists generally of theories on civil society, democracy and democratization.

### 1.3.3 Operational discussion

Validity is one of the hardest and at the same time most essential problem in empirical research. The problem is rooted in that research questions are formulated on a theoretical level, while the empirical studies are done on an operational level. A validity problem occurs when there is a difference between the two; i.e. am I studying what I am claiming to study? Validity is defined as agreement between the theoretical definition and the operational indicator, or as absence of systematic faults (Esaiasson et al, 2003: 61).

Since my study concerns organisations based on ethnicity and democratic development in Ghana, I will first see how this works theoretically. Since Ghana is classified as free (Freedom House, 2004) I believe that it would be relevant to focus on the civil society in a post-transitional society. The civil society affects democracy in two functions, namely the pluralist and educational functions<sup>2</sup>. This is however two broad functions that need an operational definition. As an analytical tool will I use two more specific functions as pro-democratic indicators and they are the civil society as an agenda setter and the civil society as an educator. Both these functions contain elements of the countervailing power and of the civility generating versions of civil society (Boussard, 2003: 102).

As an agenda setter, the civil society can contribute to democratic development by setting priorities for agendas. By raising issues, writing proposals to governmental institutions or to politicians directly, the civil society can draw attention to certain deficit (Boussard, 2003: 102). In my case, the associations will draw attention to the need for development in certain areas. I will investigate if

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<sup>2</sup> Note that this will be further discussed under chapter three.



these organisations are writing proposals to governmental institutions and how these institutions handle the proposals.

As an educator, the civil society can contribute to a democratic development through educating citizens and creating awareness of the democratic system. The organisations' internal structure is important to fulfil this function since the members are supposed to absorb the democratic values and norms they meet. This function develops a democratic competence among its members that is necessary for participation in the political process (Boussard, 2003: 104). In my thesis I will investigate how the organisations are internally structured. I will also examine if these organisations create awareness among their members and if they improve their knowledge of democracy.

With these operational tools I hope to examine my case and answer my research questions. A high reliability is necessary in order to accomplish reliable results. Reliability is defined as the absence of random and unsystematic errors. In empirical research, careless mistakes during data collection, such as illegible notes or mishearing during the interview are often the main source of unreliable results. (Esaiasson et al, 2003: 67-68). To avoid this I recorded all of my interviews and typed them out in my hotel room shortly after my meetings.

## 1.4 Ethnicity

This thesis reflects over the concept ethnicity, therefore I want to discuss how to define ethnicity. In the field of ethnicity numerous definitions exist, however I have chosen to focus on the definitions accounted for below. Originally, ethnicity was used to define what others are and to distinguish what you not are. There is a dichotomy between a non-ethnic 'us' and ethnic 'others'. From this term, the term ethnic identity later emerged. This form of ethnicity rests on an individual level of identification with a culturally defined collectivity, the sense of him or her belonging to a particular cultural community. There is also a sense of solidarity involved. In an ethnic association, members develop common interests and express these at a collective level (Hutchinson et al, 1996: 4-6). Ethnicity can be understood as a behavioural category, often meaning culture, or as a subjective category, often meaning identity (Ernfors, 1993: 15).

In attempting to come to grips with the roots, meanings and implications of 'ethnicity', one is faced with a conundrum. I say conundrum because, in all its manifestations, ethnicity cannot be defined as a single thing 'out there' which we – as anthropologists, political scientists, historians, sociologists and others – can observe, analyse and interpret or explain. Rather, we are faced with the complexity of human existence and behaviour which defies simplistic definitions and explanations (de la Gorgendière, 1996: 1).

As stated above, ethnicity is not a simple concept to theoretically define. Operationally, however ethnicity or an ethnic group can be defined as a collective

of people who share some patterns of normative behaviour and form a part of a larger population that are interacting with people from other collectives. In this way, ethnicity refers to the degree of conformity by members of the collective that share norms (Cohen, 1993). I view ethnicity as individuals identifying themselves with a collective of people with whom they share patterns of normative behaviour and feel solidarity with. Through ethnic organisations, these individuals form a part of a larger population.

## 1.5 Delimitations and Disposition

To be able to finish this thesis within the limit of time and space a quite narrow purpose is necessary. The purpose of this thesis is to actually investigate what the chosen organisations do to strengthen the democracy in Ghana. My intention is to bring the research down to an empirical level and to analyze the mechanisms of civil society. It would be very interesting to compare organisations based on ethnicity with more typical organisations within the civil society, for example; trade unions or student organisations, and see how they differ. This is however not within the scope of this thesis.

The next two chapters will involve my theoretical framework with a discussion about democracy and civil society. In my discussion about democracy I use theories of deepening democracy to point out the logic that I will use in the next chapter. Chapter three discusses civil society and its utility in an African context<sup>3</sup>. In this chapter I also formulate my own definition of civil society. Chapter four covers my empirical part and here I will present the material I have collected in Ghana. Chapter five consists of my analysis of the ethnic organisations and civil society. In chapter six I will sum up my thesis and also present some concluding remarks. Chapter seven consists of references.

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<sup>3</sup> This chapter is partly based on my Bachelor Thesis, for further reading see Hauer, 2004.

## 2 Democracy

Political science researchers have studied democracy intensely for a very long time and still have not agreed on how to define it. If we are to empirically recognize a democratic system in the world, depends on how we define democracy theoretically. I will also discuss democracy and its relationship to ethnicity. Further I discuss the democracy in Africa and how a representation that reflects the composition of the population can deepen the democracy.

### 2.1 Democracy – A Definition

Within democracy literature there are two outlying definitions that stand against each other. One is a very broad and detailed definition. Using this definition of democracy would result in finding none or very few democracies in the world. Even though this definition is not empirically very useful, it still contributes with normative elements about democracy. On the contrary there is a minimalist definition, advocated by Joseph Schumpeter among others. This definition is intimately associated with the free and competing election. This definition has reduced democracy to the procedure around the free and frequent election, i.e. free and fair elections produce democracy (Sartori, 1987: 151-155).

It is important to not underestimate the minimalist definition, because the procedural framework is very important to democracy. Most researchers would probably agree that the minimalist definition is not enough to define what democracy is. A broader perspective is therefore necessary to attract attention to the democracy's scarcities (Rindeljäll, 1998: 50f). One political scientist that argues for a definition of a more institutional character is Robert Dahl (1989). His definition of democracy, or polyarchy as he calls it, has gained support in political science.

Dahl means that the polyarchy is a political order that has two characteristics. The first is that the citizenship is expanded to almost every adult and the second is that the citizenship gives the right to object to and to vote against the political leaders. This way the polyarchy separates itself from other political systems, as authoritarian. The polyarchy can however not make sure that the politics of the government agrees with what the majority of the people would want it to be. On the other hand is it unlikely that a government in a polyarchy would conduct a policy that the people do not support. Dahl argues that the polyarchy's seven institutions are indispensable to make democracy work on a national level (Dahl, 1989: 220-221).

The first of the seven institutions that Dahl points out is elected officials. The control over government decision making constitutionally belongs to the elected officials. The second institution is free and fair elections, which frequently elects the officials. The third is inclusive suffrage that includes practically all adults. The fourth institution is the right to run for office in the government, though there might be certain age limits. The fifth considers the freedom of expression. Citizens have the right to express themselves without any risk of punishment, even when criticizing the government. The sixth institution is the right to alternative information. Citizens have the right to alternative sources of information that are able to exist and are protected by law. The seventh institution is associational autonomy. It gives citizens right to form autonomic associations and organisations, including political parties. This institution is tremendously important for a functioning civil society (Dahl, 1989: 221).

## 2.2 Ethnicity and democracy

Most authors regard the connection between ethnicity and prospects for democracy in Africa as problematic. Some indicate the positive aspect of cultural diversity in relation to democracy, but most agree that multi-ethnicity has a negative influence on the stability, which is considered a condition for democracy. This however, is a very simplistic picture of the relationship between the two terms. The explanation of a poor performance of a democratic government in Africa does not necessarily have to depend on ethnicity. It might be a contributing factor, but recent research suggests that this is just a cultural expression of negative conditions, such as poverty and competition of too scarce resources (Ernfors, 1993: 21).

To prevent antagonism between different ethnic groups and strengthen democracy, the formation of the state structure becomes important, especially that of the local government. In many African countries the local government system was designed by their colonial masters and this resulted in that local people and politicians had little commitment to it. A local government system based on smaller units could give local people a more positive attitude towards the government and democracy. Ethnicity plays a crucial role when it comes to political mobilization on local levels (Hydén, 1983: 94-96, see also Markakis, 1996: 299-301). Another proposed solution to fuse democracy and ethnicity is to ban political parties to be regionalized or to express the interest of a distinct ethnic group (Ernfors, 1993: 22).

Richards (1999: 22-23) mean that the tension between the concepts of ethnicity and democracy is best seen over the issue of citizenship. Most societies in Africa have a great mixture of ethnic groups within them and this is in itself not a danger to democracy. The real danger for democracy is when the ethnic identity is used to deny minorities their civic rights. The question of who is to be a citizen becomes central, because citizenship can become related to ethnicity.

## 2.3 Democracy in Africa

To me it is important to emphasize that when we are discussing Africa, we are discussing a continent approximately the size of the moon and with a very heterogeneous composition of population. In certain contexts, Africa is referred to as a country with shared values and norms. This is however not the case, which makes it reasonably hard to make all too large generalizations. It is possible however to point out certain problems that seems to be valid for the whole of Africa.

In the post-cold war era in the beginning of the 90s winds of change blew over the African continent. It started with massive student marches in the small West African country of Benin. The protest grew stronger and threats of general strikes were made by civil servants and school teachers. In December 1989 Mathieu Kérékou, Benin's military-installed president, surprised the world by stating that Benin would abandon both ideological commitment to Marxism-Leninism and its monopolistic grip on political affairs. Four days later he accepted the principle of a return from single-party to multiparty politics (Bratton – van de Walle, 1997: 1). By 1995 a pluralistic party system were in place in more than three-quarters of sub-Saharan Africa's 46 states, and in thirteen of them, change of government through the ballot box had taken place (Grugel, 2002: 172).

Even though it is clear that Africa has experienced a positive development towards democracy, the democracy has been questioned. It seems as there are some systematic scarcity in most African democracies. First, in many African democracies there are shortages of a working accountability. The parliament must possess the power to enforce political accountability on the government. This means that the government must answer to the parliament and that the parliament has the right to dismiss the government through a vote of no confidence. In Africa this is not always the case. Elections are only meaningful as a method of accountability where the politicians are recognized as embodying the legitimate political will of the people (Chabal, 1998: 297).

The second democratic shortage is the neo-patrimonial form of rule that exists in African politics. In neo-patrimonial regimes leaders maintain authority through personal patronage, rather than through ideology or law (Bratton et al, 1994: 458). Neo-patrimonialism is an informal political system that personalized rule and organized through clientistic networks of patronage, personal loyalty and coercion. Characteristic for neo-patrimonialism is a lack of separation between public and private spheres. In the neo-patrimonial system the leaders take resources from the state and donate to kin and followers to establish and sustain patron-client relations. Political and administrative power becomes, instead of impersonal and a professional, a personal power. Because political power gives access to economic resources, politics becomes business. As a way of governing, the neo-patrimonial system tends to engage a type of vertically accountability between the rulers and the ruled. The vertical accountability is a matter of ensuring personal favours and benefits at the expense of public concerns and resources (Lindberg, 2003: 123; Braathen et al, 2000:11).

In practice neo-patrimonial favours may involve school fees, electricity supply, wedding and funeral expenses. In exchange the patron gets political loyalty transferred into votes in democratic elections from its clients. This way the politicians are not held accountable for their action in public matters, but rather based on provision of social-economic benefits in personalized networks. The personal character of neo-patrimonialism violates the norms of democracy (Lindberg, 2003: 125).

## 2.4 A deepening democracy

Lately the discussion of how to achieve a deeper democracy has gotten more attention. One of the main arguments in this discussion is that the representative assembly reflects the composition of the population. This can be of importance in segregated countries with heterogeneous population, where minorities tend to be marginalized. This segregation concerns ethnic groups as well as women's exclusion from the national politics. The argument for all excluded groups has great similarities and they all touch upon the same problems (Elofsson, 1998).

Elofsson<sup>4</sup> means that to achieve a deepening of the democracy the composition of the national parliament is crucial. She has a number of arguments on how an improved representation can deepen the democracy. First, a representation that better reflects the composition of the population can reduce the difference of power between men and women, and also between ethnic groups in the country. By acting as role models politicians from segregated groups can make the people they represent feel more involved and strengthen their confidence in the democracy. The society also decreases the welfare loss it implies to exclude the peoples experience and knowledge because of their gender or ethnic belonging. Elofsson points out that the marginalized groups' opinions are ignored in the political debate, which leads to an even further exclusion from politics. This argument is often criticized from the liberal school of democracy who states that elected officials represent the citizens and that the citizens' preferences govern the political debate. The problem that liberals overlook is that women and ethnic groups do not have the opportunity to get elected. An improved attendance of segregated groups would change the political debate and the issues discussed. Elofsson's last argument is that it can never be fair that the political power is monopolized to a few groups in society (Elofsson, 1998: 80-83).

The liberals in their turn criticize that guaranteed representation could undermine the accountability that is vital for democracy. What they mean is that if members of the parliament are guaranteed seats in the parliament they might not feel the same responsibility as if they were elected. Critics also mean that too much emphasis on descriptive differences can lead to that politics is run by the

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<sup>4</sup> Elofsson writes her article from a gender perspective.

different groups' interest, instead of public matters. In addition there is the difficult question of which minorities should have a guaranteed representation. All above criticism is justified. The representative democracy is built upon people voting on officials from their own preferences, but in countries where whole minorities do not vote because they are excluded from politics it is hard to argue that the national assembly reflects its people. Elofsson means that guaranteed representation will probably lead to politics described above. This representation will not lead to that specific decisions are made, but rather to a change of the agenda (Elofsson, 1998: 82-85).

Phillips (1995: 1-5) also draws attention to the political exclusion as a democratic problem. To explain this phenomenon she points out two schools, namely a politics of ideas and a politics of the presence. The politics of ideas can be described as the form of party politics that many established western democracies utilize. Citizens vote for parties depending on how well they match the individuals' preferences and values. The citizen focuses more on the party's message than on the individual politician that will represent her or him. In many places in the third world parties have been misused to attain higher status. Parties turn into organisations for political elites that enjoy a vast variety of privileges.

Burnheim (1985: 108-109) means that the citizens' interest is best protected, if the person representing her or him share the same experience and interest. If the representative and the voter do not share their background, the voter's interest will not be protected the same way. Therefore Burnheim means that it is important for the democracy that all groups in society are represented in the national parliament. The only composition in parliament that he considers good is a statistical cross section of the population.

Representing "means acting in the interests of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (Hanna Pitkin quoted in Phillips, 1995: 4) and a just representation can not be guaranteed in advance. This is one reason to why demands of politics of presence have been raised. With politics of presence Phillips means that the representation in parliament should reflect the population. Not only based on opinions, but also based on gender, ethnicity and race; i.e. that the legislative assembly contains of a more unbiased mixture of all groups. In this way the politics of presence modify what democratic equality means (Phillips, 1995: 5-8).

## 3 The Civil Society

When it comes to civil society it is practically impossible to find a definition that is recognized by more than one author in political science. Just as with definitions of democracy, there seems to be as many writers as definitions. Further, the concept of civil society has been used by democracy researcher to hide results that could not be explained. The consequences of this is that the concept of civil society has become vague and imprecise (Boussard, 1998: 149). For this reason I will discuss definitions and functions of the civil society and its relationship to democracy. Further, I will discuss the concept's analytical value in an African context, which leads me to a revised definition of the civil society.

### 3.1 The Civil Society – A Definition

Most researchers in this field would probably agree on that the civil society is separated from the private sphere, the economic sphere and the political sphere. The civil society consists of individuals who voluntarily organize themselves in a public sphere with the object to act collectively. The civil society must have an autonomic relationship with the state, this is very important since the civil society is expected to limit the states influence and exercise of power. This could be seen as an interaction between the citizens and the state. Diamond (1999: 221) argue that individuals, families and introvert groups should be excluded from the civil society and belong to the private sphere (se also Sjögren, 1998: 8-11). Apart from these groups organisations based on kinship and ethnicity are also excluded from the civil society. Mainly two arguments are addressed against these organisations. First, they are not considered to be voluntarily formed since they discriminate people because of their ethnicity and secondly they are considered to represent too specific interests (Azarya, 1994: 94-96).

As mentioned earlier the civil society is separated from the economic sphere and all its organisations are non-profit making. Profit making organisations are not concerned with collective matters and can not fulfil the definition of civil society. Organisations within the civil society can however pursue businesses to finance its activities (Diamond, 1999: 221). The civil society is also a separated political sphere and in a representative democracy that mainly means the political parties. Even though the civil society is separated from the political sphere, it still tries to affect the political agenda as a lobby organisation. The difference is that the political parties are trying to win conventional power over the state, while the civil society is trying to draw attention to its objectives and put them on the political agenda. To be able to affect the state, it is very important for the civil



society to have autonomy from the state and to have its own financial and administrative resources (Boussard, 2003: 82). At the same time as the civil society is superintending its interest and limiting the state, it needs protection from the state in form of a judicial system (Hadenius et al, 1996: 1622, see also Diamond, 1999: 221). The state plays an essential role when it comes to the character of the civil society and vice versa. White (1994: 381) means that the two spheres can overlap each other, for example a person can have an elevated position in both spheres. White asserts that to understand the civil society you have to consider international pressure and the state itself. Another vital object when it comes to organisations within the civil society is that they are voluntarily formed. This means that no person will be excluded from the organisation (Boussard, 2003: 82).

“Civil society is the realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by legal order or set of shared rules [...] it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere” (Diamond, 1999: 221).

Boussard (2000: 7) points out two problems with the conception of the civil society. First that the civil society as a concept is used in three different areas; as an analytical concept, as a normative ideal and as a political punch line. The problem with this is that these three fields of application often are mixed up, which creates a sense of confusion. The second problem she sees is that many definitions comprise of two versions of civil society, whose compatibility can be discussed. On one hand the civil society is expected to foster democratic citizens and support the democracy. On the other hand the civil society is expected to act as a counter power towards the democratic state and can contribute to authoritarian regime fall. This issue, according to Boussard, is based on a unification of two concepts; “civic society” and “civil society”. Civic society includes all types of organisations, in the sense that its structure is based on trust. Civil society on the other hand is a sharper concept that only includes organisations that promotes and protects a collective interest.

One fundamental problem with the definition of the civil society is that it is created in a western context, but is considered to be universal. Definitions of the civil society presume a modern society, where no classes or minorities are excluded from the political sphere. This can lead to troublesome consequences when the civil society is used outside contexts where this is the case (Mouzelis, 1995: 225).

[T]hat autonomous agentic individual freed from communal, ethnic and class loyalties is nowhere to be found in Africa. The conception of civil society to which that individual gives rise has little analytical value for the study of African politics (Fatton, 1995: 72-73).

The term civil society originates from a western political tradition and is generally associated with citizens' action in an established constitutional system. Looking at

the civil society in Africa offers a tremendous challenge of the common assumption about civil society. Applying the term civil society involves a great cultural and historical shift (Zuern, 2000: 100). Some researchers mean that the civil society as an analytical concept is universal and can be used outside the western context as well as elsewhere. Others take a more relativistic position and state that the concept can not be moved from one context to another. In other words the civil society's usefulness outside the western context is disputed. Bratton (1994: 52) explains that, even though the civil society's analytical ability has been questioned it is still useful in an African context. This is because the concept embodies universal values about the legitimating of and restriction to state power.

The relativists on the other hand assert that it is difficult to empirically operationalize a conception that has different normative and political roots than object of study. This can make the civil society useless as an analytic tool (Harbeson, 1994: 297, see also Zuern, 2000:110). Karlström (1999: 105-106) writes that today's research of the civil society in Africa always ends up with a very poor result. According to him, this is because researchers are trying to apply the concept of civil society, even though it is not designed for an African context. Karlström means that there is a rich organisational life that supports the democracy, but these organisations do not match the definition of the civil society and is therefore not analyzed. This argument illuminates the problem with the definition of the civil society.

## 3.2 The Civil Society and Democracy

Earlier I have discussed what defines civil society and now I will discuss the civil society's relationship to democracy. International pressure on non-democratic governments has in many cases led to a political liberalization. Once there is enough freedom and autonomy the civil society has a very important role in the democratization of authoritarian regimes. The objectives of civil society differ between the transitional phase and the consolidation phase. During the transitional phase its primary role is to de-legitimize the ruling authoritarian regime. The criticism against the regime often starts among a minor group of intellectuals and reaches a broader mass during the democratization. During the consolidation phase the role of civil society is mainly to contribute to the development of a political culture (Boussard, 2000: 8-10).

Theories state that the civil society affects democracy in two ways, the pluralist and educational functions. The pluralist function concerns the distribution of power in society and in political life. By joining and combining people together in voluntarily formed organisations civil society can reconcile differences and neutralize polarization. These organisations, that protect and promote their interests, can also prevent the state from misusing its power and therefore become a counter power to the state. It is important that the organisations within the civil society are sensitive to public opinions and that they

are necessarily autonomous. It is also very important that there are many organisations protecting all interests and thus safeguarding that there is a plurality (Hadenius et al, 1996: 1622-1623, see also Boussard, 1998: 160-161). When people are organizing themselves around interests, negotiating and building networks, democracy has a good potential of being strengthened through civil society (Diamond, 1999: 232).

The second function is the educational and it mainly focuses on the organisations' internal structure. The organisations within the civil society are expected to raise good and democratic citizens and must therefore be organized in a democratic manner. The individuals that organize themselves should absorb the democratic values and norms they meet. Through participating in democratic organisations and sharing collective resources they learn to listen to and discuss with other people and through that the basics of democratic decision making. They also learn to how to settle conflicts in a democratic way and that their own interest often coincides with the public good, which creates a sense of belonging. Since this function points out the organisations' internal structure as important, organisations with a strong hierarchy should not be considered a part of the civil society (Hadenius et al, 1996: 1622-1623, see also Boussard, 1998: 160-161).

Even though the civil society is separated from the political sphere, the civil society is a complement to the representative democratic system through protecting and promoting certain interests. By supporting organisations' financial and administrative capacity the state can improve the democratic development. Minorities that have difficulties to be represented in national elections can promote and protect their interests through the civil society (Glickman, 1998: 49-51; Diamond, 1999: 243).

### 3.3 Is there a Civil Society in Africa?

When analyzing the civil society in Africa a historical perspective is necessary. Before Africa was colonized by the Europeans, some parts had a functional civil society. There was a political system that realized the importance of the people's participation. During the colonization these organisations were prohibited from the public sphere and were not allowed to work as lobby groups for its members. Instead the state appointed groups to act as the civil society. After independence, many African countries experienced long periods of authoritarian rule, which oppressed the civil society. Together with the political changes and Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika*<sup>5</sup>, in the end of the 80's, a new spark of life for civil society, even in the African countries, was lit. In the beginning of the 90's the wave of democratization hit the African shore and the civil society acted as a

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<sup>5</sup> Glasnost and perestroika is Russian. Glasnost means publicity and perestroika means structural reorganisation and was also the name of the reform program that Gorbachev introduced when he became the Soviet President 1985 (Nationalencyklopedin, 1994 No. 7: 511 and No. 15: 49).

strong pressure group, some claim that these political changes would not have taken place without it (Makumbe, 1998: 306-307). Civil society organisations that represent the middleclass have proved to be a vigorous actor in the process of democratization and political change, but in most parts of Africa they are weak and anonymous. This can be derived from the political and economic crises that Africa experienced during the 70's. In many countries these organisations lost most of their members and their organisational capacity because of years of authoritarian rule (Gyimah-Boadi, 1996: 125).

However civil society in Africa seems to suffer from certain essential shortages. In general, organisations within the civil society are facing the same problems as the rest of the society, such as poverty, corruption and nepotism. The first disadvantage for these organisations is the lack of autonomy. Poverty makes the civil society dependant on financial means from the state or international aid organisations, which could lead to problems when trying to be a counter power. The state will only give financial backing to the organisations they feel comfortable with (Gyimah-Boadi, 1996: 123, see also Makumbe, 1998: 311). The organisations that become dependant upon subsidies from international aid organisations stand in front of the same dilemma. Some organisations pick up the donors vocabulary and whatever activities that fits the donors objectives and they tend to exclusively devote its resources so that it fits the donors. Another aspect of becoming dependent upon financial means from aid organisations is that if the organisations loose contact with its members, it further looses the possibility to internal financing. This may lead to enormous problems if the aid organisation withdraws its support (Boussard, 2000: 11-12). The role of the civil society is in both of these scenarios strictly limited and these organisations are running the risk of becoming marionettes for the financier.

A further obstacle is that many organisations within the civil society lack internal democratic structures, which is necessary for the civil society to strengthen the democracy. Organisations that are non-democratic can not push democratic changes and loose their legitimacy through this. Many of the organisations in the African society are based on ethnicity or kinship and are by current definitions not included in civil society. Researchers also point out that many organisations are deficient in method of accountability, which makes it possible for leaders to misuse resources. Despite these negative factors in Africa there are existing organisations that live up to the current definition and are working for changes (Makumbe, 1998: 312, see also Darnolf, 1997: 21 and Boussard, 2000: 11).

It is striking how little of African politics this concept of civil society captures. Much associational life and all unorganised protest or demands must occur outside civil society. Direct participation by ethnic or religious social forces, however momentous for political decisions, is not part of civil society (Kasfir, 1998: 127).

One of the organisations that handled the years of authoritarian rule best is the Christian church. The churches still have many members, large national organisations, sophisticated leaders and stabile international relations, however

they have some weaknesses. Nationalists observe the churches with scepticism because of their colonial heritage. Churches are fighting each other to get recognition from the state, and this can question their credibility. Many churches have a strong elitist structure and are run in a top-down spirit (Gyimah-Boadi, 1996: 125).

Further Gyimah-Boadi (1996: 126) points out that the neopatrimonial system that exists in large parts of Africa makes the civil society very vulnerable. Organisations often have the choice of putting up with autonomy and suffering repression or allowing themselves to be subordinated to the state in order to secure inclusion and enjoy patronage. The patrimonialization of the politics also raises the risk of the civil society organisations being used for personal gain or that the organisations use their relations to get more influence.

### 3.4 A Revised Definition

The concept of civil society should include all organisations that superintend and limit the state from misusing its power. Many organisations based on ethnicity and kinship is doing just that and should be comprised in the concept. To exclude these organisations would be a great loss (Ekeh in Drah, 1996a: 11). Kasfir (1998: 127) indicate that only a small part of the total organisational life in Africa is in fact included in the prevailing definition of civil society. Most organisations that arrange protests and demands changes are not considered to be a part of civil society. Karlström (1999: 110) writes that organisations based on ethnic identity or solidarity are excluded from the civil society, even though they are autonomous organisations acting in a public sphere. This is because they do not promote unbounded solidarity. Karlström means that instead of excluding these organisations from civil society, one should acknowledge what these organisations can bring to the state and society. The civil society loses its analytical edge if these organisations are excluded from the definition. Since, to some extent, ethnic solidarity will continue to exist it is better to include these groups in the concept of civil society and see to how they can strengthen the democracy. Karlström takes an example from Uganda, where the state has shown confidence in ethnic organisations which has been good for the democratization.

Obviously there are difficulties with using the definition of civil society in an African context, which the discussion above has proved. It appears as if a theoretical rewriting of the civil society is essential for the concept. For my further work I will formulate a new definition of the civil society that I mean can be used in an African context. My definition regards the argumentation above, and I will also incorporate the logic from my discussion on democracy; i.e. that representation based on sex and ethnicity can strengthen and deepen democracy. If the civil society should support and strengthen democracy, it should also sustain the same principles and values. The current discussion about how the civil society can strengthen the democracy seems to be based on different definitions of democracy. A revising of the definition of civil society can partially redefine how

a pro-democratic civil society will act. Therefore I mean that organisations based on ethnicity and kinship supporting democracy should be included in the civil society. On principle I would argue that there is no difference between a labour union that organizes around its members' rights and an organisation based on ethnicity doing the same thing. Labour unions exclude people that have the wrong profession, such as employers and illegal workers, and are still considered a part of civil society.

My definition of the civil society is: *The civil society is non-profit making organisations, which are acting openly in the public sphere, with the purpose to promote and protect collective interests. These organisations do not seek formal power over the state, but affect the political agenda as lobby organisations. They are open, voluntary, and autonomic from the state and recognize the prevailing rules and regulations.*

Further I will make this definition a bit clearer and show how it differs from other definitions discussed in this chapter. First, the organisations must act collectively, which exclude all organisations acting for purely private purposes. To act collectively, organisations must represent a group in society, which could mean protecting and promoting the interest of an ethnic minority. Sport clubs will be excluded using this definition, because of their private character. Secondly, the organisations are supposed to be non-profit making which excludes all business firms and economic groups, which belongs to the economic sphere. The third clarification concerns the voluntariness and openness; i.e. the organisations can not be based on compulsion. Other definitions have pointed out that ethnic organisations have excluded people because of their ethnicity and are therefore not considered voluntary. My opinion on ethnic organisations is that in order to be included in civil society, people from other ethnic groups than the one they are representing have to be able to become members on the same conditions. If people from other ethnic groups are refused to join the organisation, then the organisation can not be included in the civil society. Fourth, organisations that seek formal power over the state, such as political parties, are not considered a part of civil society. Fifth, all illegal and criminal organisations are excluded, because they do not respect the prevailing rules and regulations.

## 4 Ghana – An Empirical Overview

In 1957 Ghana was the first Sub-Saharan colony to achieve independence from the colonial power Great Britain. The fight for independence was led by the legendary Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who also became the country's first president. Nkrumah had pan-African visions and helped and inspired many African freedom fighters. As many other leaders in post-colonial Africa, Nkrumah had a dream of a united African socialist state. After independence Nkrumah and the CPP<sup>6</sup> had problems to fulfil their promise of a socialist democracy, and by the mid-60s Ghana was a regular one-party state<sup>7</sup>. A coup d'état 1966 put a stop to Nkrumah's domination and he had to flee to Guinea (Musah, 2000: 1). Below I give a brief political background. After that, I discuss the Ghanaian civil society in general and the organisations based on ethnicity in particular.

### 4.1 Political Background

Ghana experienced numerous regime changes, both democratic and authoritarian during the next 15 years. Simultaneously, Ghana also experienced economic decrease, high inflation and dizzying corruption. At the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1981 Jerry J. Rawlings at last took power and formed Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). Rawlings was running clear socialist politics and was trying to put a stop to Ghana's economic disaster. By the mid-80s Rawlings reversed the populist policies and adopted the Economic Recovery Program with strong encouragement from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. A dramatic currency devaluation, removal of price controls, privatization of state-owned enterprises and strict limits on government spending led to generous assistance from donors. In the end of the 80s Ghana was considered to be a role model for the rest of Africa and enjoyed the confidence of the donor community and attracted foreign investors (Lyons, 1997: 67-68; Musah, 2000: 5).

In January 1991 Rawlings announced that a committee of experts was established to draft proposals for the constitution of the fourth republic. The proposals should provide directive principles of state policy that ensure participatory democracy (Jebuni et al, 1998: 21). After debate, the government-appointed National Commission for Democracy issued a report concluding that

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<sup>6</sup> The CPP stand for Convention People's Party and was formed by Nkrumah.

<sup>7</sup> Schapiro classified Ghana as a totalitarian state under Nkrumah's rule up to 1966 (Brooker, 2000: 13 and 19).

the “generality of Ghanaians were not against party politics” (Lyons, 1997: 69). Rawlings and the PNDC did not resist the conclusions and presented a multiparty constitution to a referendum in April 1992. Even though the constitution was granting full immunity to all PNDC members it passed with 93 percent. In connection to this referendum it was decided that the president election would be held in November the same year and the election for parliament one month later. After the referendum, the government lifted the ban of party activity, which made it possible for the opposition to start acting. Rawlings quickly formed a new party called National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the strongest opposition party was New Patriotic Party (NPP) led by Adu Boahen (Lyons, 1997: 69-70).

The constitution is a model with separate elections for president and parliament, both elected for a period of four years. The 200 members of parliament are elected in single-member districts according to the first-past-the-post system. The constitution also states the right to form political parties, but the parties must be rooted in the country’s ten regions. Further, the use of ethnic or regional symbols is forbidden. This is to try to prevent parties promoting regional or ethnic interest, instead of national interests (Smith, 2002: 520-521).

Both in the election 1992 and 1996 Rawlings won the presidential election with a convincing margin and the NDC won a majority of the seats in the parliament. In the 1992 election the opposition boycotted the elections for parliament in order to undermine the new government’s legitimacy. This was done because of irregularities in the presidential election, and resulted in that the NDC got 198 out of 200 seats. Some observers concluded that Ghana had experienced a ‘transition without change’. Observers reported that children had voted, mostly in the most remote areas. Another issue is that the two elections had revealed a worrying pattern of voting based on ethnicity (Gyimah-Boadi, 1997: 83-84; Lyons, 1997: 70-74).

In the 2000 election’s second run-off John A. Kofuor won the election with 56.9 percent against the NDC candidate Atta Mills<sup>8</sup>. In the election for parliament the NPP got 100 and the NDC 92 seats. Again both sides immediately accepted the result and the NDC organized themselves as opposition (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001: 103-104). This meant that the nineteen year long rule of Jerry J. Rawlings was over, and for the first time in Ghana’s history power was peacefully transferred from one democratically elected administration to a competing party (Smith, 2002: 519).

## 4.2 Civil Society in Ghana

The ruling regimes in Ghana have always understood the power that the civil society possesses. Many regimes have tried to control civil society in different

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<sup>8</sup> In order with the Constitution Jerry Rawlings could not run for a third term as president.



ways. Nkrumah integrated the largest organisations for instance trade unions, farmers associations and women's organisations in the CPP. Acheampong only allowed organisations friendly to his regime and to achieve this he founded several government friendly associations. The PNDC was quite hard on civil society, especially the churches. During Rawlings' era a pattern of patron-client relationship between the state and many organisations within the civil society was established. Many of the civil society organisations also lacked in internal democracy (Drah, 1996a: 16-18; Ninsin, 1998: 51-52).

Ninsin (1998: 51-55) categorize the Ghanaian civil society under the PNDC and the transition to democracy into three categories. The first category he calls the pro-democratic civil society. This is the autonomous civil associations that are acting as a counter-power to the state and demands a return to constitutional multiparty democracy. This category was under the PNDC virtually reduced to one organisation, but managed to recover the strength in the end of the 80s (see also Musah, 2000: 8-9). The second category is called the alternative civil society. This is civil associations created and founded by the military regime as an alternative to the pro-democratic civil society. These organisations were used to show support for the PNDC for instance through marches, but also to counteract against the pro-democratic civil society. These organisations were also working as rewarding patronage networks, which made them attractive to people. The third category comprised mainly of apolitical and development oriented civic associations, often ethnic associations. These organisations, he means, only occasionally interact with the government and only when it becomes absolutely necessary. This was motivated by developmental concerns of their respective communities for which they acted as agents<sup>9</sup> (Ninsin, 1998: 52-55).

The civil society was a major actor in the Ghanaian democratization process. Immediately after Rawlings and the PNDC's coup d'état the civil society mobilized against the new military government and called on the government to return the country to constitutional rule. It was a key breakthrough when the different associations joined together and formed the Movement for Freedom and Justice (MFJ). Through the political reforms in the end of the 80s MFJ could be formed and work as a strong pressure group for democracy and human rights. The formation of MFJ also inspired other associations to join (Ninsin, 1998: 67).

In the fourth republic a constitutional environment was created to protect and to encourage the civil society to act. Constitutionally, the civil society was given good conditions to develop and to work for a consolidation of the democracy (Drah, 1996b: 32-33). Also after the transition Ghana's civil society has exposed its strength as a counter power to the state, for instance massive demonstrations were arranged in 1995 to complain against the government's new tax policy. Several organisations took part in the demonstrations, among them Trade Union Congress (TUC) and professional groups. The demonstrations led to that the

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<sup>9</sup> Note that neither the second nor the third category of civil society would be included by the current definitions.

government had to withdraw its policy change only three months after it was implemented (Amankwah, 1996: 132; see also Jeong, 1998: 225-226).

The civil society in Ghana has also shown its strength as a pro-democratic power. After the election in 1992 the number of independent newspapers and radio channels started to rise. With this, the media coverage of the politics got better and more people challenged and criticized the government. This clearly spread a political interest among the Ghanaian people (Gyimah-Boadi, 1997: 79-82). Before the election in 1996 many organisations from the civil society joined together and founded the Network of Domestic Election Observers (NEDEO). These domestic observers began their education five months before the election and on the Election Day over 4200 observers monitored the election. In the 2000 election the civil society played an even more active role and proved to be a main actor in the Ghanaian democratic development. Together they recruited, trained and deployed more than 15000 observers. Donors choosing to give funding to civil society organisations are one reason why these could have a more autonomous role (Gyimah-Boadi, 1997: 88-89; Gyimah-Boadi, 2001: 109-111).

It is clear that the civil society has had and still has a central role in Ghana. Despite this positive development there are some crucial weaknesses and mainly there are two linked problems that occur, namely funding and autonomy. Several of the organisations are dependant on external funding from either international donors or the state (Denkabe, 1996: 137-139). Even today this remains the case. The private sector in Ghana is still very weak and is not able to support and provide resources for non-state actors. The civil associations can either choose to get funding only from members, which is a very weak ground to stand on, or they can get support from the state or international donors. If the associations have objectives that are not culturally popular, they can get problems to attract sympathizers and funding, even though they have an important agenda. The government of Ghana is not very broadminded in their judgment and would not support an association that could criticize them in the future (Gyimah-Boadi, 15-05-04).

### 4.3 Ethnicity in Ghana

Roughly about one hundred linguistic and cultural groups are recorded in Ghana and the foremost ethnic groups are Akan, Ewe, Mole-Dagbane, Guan, and Ga-Adangbe. No part of Ghana is ethnically homogeneous and the urban areas are the most ethnically mixed, because of migration of those in search for employment. Even though, Ghana is spared from civil wars as for example the Ivory Coast has experienced, ethnicity continues to be a potent factor affecting political behaviour (Ghanaweb, 2004). During the time I visited Ghana there was an ethnic conflict going on in the north. Many of the NGOs working with development in that area has pulled out because of the risks involved. Otherwise Ghana is a very peaceful country and the democratic process to some extent has worked as a solution (Kumbour, 04-05-04).

In Africa in general, democratic breakdowns and regressions have often been blamed on ethnic differences. Also in Ghana people tend to blame ethnicity for the problems that the democratic consolidation is having.

[E]thnicity is like any weapon, any instrument. You can use it for positive purposes, but it can also be used for a negative purpose. It is like a knife; you can cut meat or fish, but you can also kill a human being with it (Jonah, 20-04-04).

To achieve a fully developed democracy in Ghana, a decentralization of power to local government is necessary. When decentralization of power to the local areas is implemented the government will meet the ethnic groups there. It is therefore crucial that the ethnic groups have a tradition of democratic self-governance from before. Giving confidence to ethnic organisations might be necessary to succeed with the decentralization process (Jonah, 20-04-04). Ethnicity is considered taboo in politics in Ghana and that is not a good sign, instead ethnicity should be used in a positive sense. For many people ethnicity is the most important identity and therefore it is not healthy to leave it out of the political discussion (Anyimado, 20-04-04).

#### 4.4 The Organisations Based on Ethnicity

During my stay in Ghana I studied, what I call organisations based on ethnicity, but they are also referred to as home-town associations. These are based on members who all have connections to the same community and the same ethnic group. In Ghana every major city has these types of ethnic organisations and normally they have their meetings in the weekend. In Accra, where I conducted my study, hundreds of these home-town associations meet on Sunday afternoons at public locations, such as schools and collages. The associations serve mainly two purposes; first they provide welfare services to their members. The ethnic group provides its members with welfare services as a place to live when they arrive to the city, help to afford medical and health costs and sometimes they even help members to find jobs in the city. Second, the associations contribute to development of their home community. For instance they arrange fundraisings and formulate proposals to government institution to build hospitals, schools or other community projects (Jonah, 20-04-04).

The three home-town associations that I came in contact with were Obomeng Youth Union, Mpraeso Youth Club and Dzita New Generation Action Forum for Development. The first two have branches both in Accra and in the closest city to their home community. To have two or more branches are quite common among home-town associations (Osafo, 02-05-04). All three of these organisations are youth unions, meaning that they especially look to the interest of the young generation. In their constitutions it is stated that aspiring members should be between the age of 18 and 35 years at the time of entering the club. However, once a member, there is no upper limit of age, so members can stay in the youth

club for the rest of their lives. These three organisations have an even mixture of young and old persons. All of these associations also have their own constitutions that they themselves have formulated and the constitutions are updated frequently. To make amendment to the constitution a two-third majority at a general meeting is needed (Constitution for Mpraeso Youth Club).

#### 4.4.1 Autonomy and Networking

The organisations that I have studied during my time in Ghana enjoy autonomy from the state. They define themselves as non-governmental organisations with the objectives to create welfare for members and to develop their home community. The organisations are neither bound to the state nor do they receive frequent funding from the state. However, these associations are trying to use good personal contacts with MPs and members of a district assembly<sup>10</sup> to get access to government funds. They are also autonomic towards international donors and development NGOs. These associations have one or several patrons that occasionally give funds to development projects and sometimes attend meetings to give advice (Akyemfour, 05-05-04; Nyarko 05-05-04; Osafo, 02-05-04).

These associations are also autonomic from the political sphere. There is no cooperation or joint agenda between the home-town association and any political party. Home-town associations do not strive for political power, but to draw attention to their communities' need for development. In order to prevent divisionism in the organisation the constitutions do not allow the members to discuss politics during meetings to (Akyemfour, 05-05-04).

There do not exist any cooperation or networking between home-town associations. None of the associations I interviewed had heard of any joint projects between associations, but would consider it if they were asked to (Nyarko 05-05-04).

#### 4.4.2 Accountability and Openness

The home-town associations all have an executive committee that are responsible for administrating the organisation. This executive committee consists of approximately twelve members and they are elected at the general meeting (Constitution of Obomeng Youth Union). The members who wants to be in the executive committee have to, either themselves or by way of an agent, show their interest for the post, which can be done both written or orally. The executive committee have the right to decide whether a candidate is capable to hold a position or not. The candidates will later be nominated by the present executive

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<sup>10</sup> The government on local level is called district assembly. Ghana has 110 district assemblies (Ayee – Amponsah, 2003: 49 and 57).

and after the nomination the election is held<sup>11</sup>. Before the election the candidates have the right to argue why they should be elected and tell the associations about their visions. The actual election is either done with hand raising or through the ballot box (Ahiaku, 08-05-04; Nyarko, 05-05-04). The competition seems to vary from year to year and the latest years the organisations have had a shallow interest for recruiting executives, especially among women. An executive is elected for a term of two years and can after that be re-elected once. But during this period, if the association loses confidence or the elected does not fulfil the expectations, an executive member can be voted out. Further, if the union cannot agree on some matter, the union can ask the executive committee to make the decision for them. The executive have to motivate the decision and if the union is not satisfied with the decision, they can challenge it (Osafo, 02-05-04).

The executive committee has a meeting before the entire association meets, where they set the agenda based on issues discussed the previous meeting. If there is a need of discussing something particular, members can always raise this when the agenda reaches “other matters”. Other matters mean a free forum for all members to raise issues they want to discuss (Tetteh, 08-05-04). At all meetings the association’s financial situation is discussed and every cedi<sup>12</sup> that is spent has to be accounted for.

#### 4.4.3 Voluntary and non-profit making

These organisations are voluntary in a sense that you have to become a member to belong to the organisation and people are not born into it. The home-town associations differ when it comes to the issue of who can become a member. To become a member in Mpraeso Youth Club, a person has to either originate from that community or be married to someone who does (Akyemfour, 05-05-04). To become a member in Dzita New Generation Action Forum for Development a person must have at least one parent originating from the community or the person must identify himself or herself with the aims and objectives of the association (Ahiaku, 08-05-04).

The home-town associations are separated from the economic sphere in the way that it does not try to make profit. The organisations are seeking funding in different ways, mostly from members, and all money is used in the action to achieve their objectives.

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<sup>11</sup> In Mpraeso Youth Club the candidate are put on probation for a period to prove their capability as an executive member.

<sup>12</sup> The Ghanaian currency is called Cedi.

## 4.5 Organisations Based on Ethnicity as Educators

As an educator these organisations are trying to raise their members' knowledge about issues concerning democracy. All of the home-town associations that I have been in contact with had elements of civic education, both in a formal way and through learning by doing. As far as I have observed, all three of these home-town associations have internal democracy. The organisations all have constitutions that follow democratic guidelines and every member receives their own copy when they become member. This is done in order for the member to know his or hers rights and obligations to the association. The associations are run by an executive committee that consists of elected members. The executives are elected for distinctive terms and can only be re-elected once. Free and fair competitive elections are held every year or every other year at congress or a general meeting. All members in the association have the right to vote in the elections and all members also have the right to candidate for the executive committee. As have been discussed earlier any member has the right to express themselves and to question the work and the decisions of the executive committee.

Even though these associations have adopted internal democracy, they still do support neo-patrimonial structures. The organisations attempt to use personal relationships to increase their access over resources. For instance they can use their connections inside the district assembly to get access to governmental funds (Ayee, 27-04-04).

At meetings issues are discussed and the discussion can get quite intense among members. Home-town associations are not homogeneous and monolithic groups and members often differ in their personal opinions. This makes the organisations a vibrant venue for debate. This is a way for the home-town association to educate its members about the value of deliberative democracy (Gariba, 17-05-04). Members that I have interviewed believe that their knowledge about democracy has improved since they joined the home-town associations. When asked how their knowledge has improved they answered that they can better understand the value of debating and also how important elections as an institution are. Many were also making comparisons to Ghana on a national level and argued that it is not very different. They have further been skilled in debating and expressing themselves in front of people and they have also learned to compromise and to find solutions to problems (for instance: Ansong, 09-05-04; Asare, 09-05-04).

You know it is a human society, so sometimes we don't solve the problems we have. That is democracy; the world doesn't have one mind and everyone has his or hers problem. But when we meet, we sit down and we have to come up with a compromise and we always find solutions to our problem (Apau, 09-05-04)

All of the home-town associations educate and encourage their members to get involved in the upcoming election<sup>13</sup>. The organisations teach the members how to register and how to vote. Some of the members are illiterate and to them this is very important, since they cannot read the written information of how to vote. Members are also encouraged to register in the home community, because a development project is calculated based on the number of people registered there (Apau, 09-05-04).

The home-town associations also try to create general awareness among its members. Normally this is done by a consultant that comes to the meeting and educates the members. Mpraeso Youth Club has invited lawyers, doctors and bankers do discuss certain issues, for instance women's health (Akyemfour, 05-05-04). Home-town associations also go to their home communities for instance to educate children in normal school issues. This is a good way not only to teach, but to inspire children and get them to understand the value of education (Ahiaku, 08-05-04).

## 4.6 Organisations Based on Ethnicity as Agenda Setters

As an agenda setter these organisations are trying to set priorities for the agenda, particularly concerning issues that the government otherwise would not have discussed. All three associations that I studied were actively trying to affect the agenda of their local government by writing proposals. The home-town associations as agenda setters play an important role to their district assembly. The organisations are very active when setting the agenda and they do this through a perspective of progress and modernization. The agenda for the associations are often created in cooperation with the chief (Ayee, 27-04-04; Gariba, 17-05-04).

The associations are using the democratic system to make sure that their community's development is discussed by the local government. At meetings they formulate proposals to ministries, MPs and district assemblies concerning different development projects. They also write invitations to district assemblies, ministries and MPs to come and visit the ongoing projects. Often these proposals lead to joint funding between the organisations and the authority in question. For instance, if the organisation applies for funding to build a house, the foundation first has to be built by the association and then the district assembly will fund the house. The responsibility for the actual building is the home-town associations. One of the associations has written proposals to NGOs to obtain support for development but without result (Osafo, 02-05-04; Nyarko, 05-05-04). The districts assemblies recognize these proposals written by home-town associations as serious documents directed to an authority. These proposals are later discussed

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<sup>13</sup> The election referred to is taking place in December 2004.

at the districts assembly's meetings and it is here the decisions are made. This procedure is no different than any other case that the district assembly deals with (Scott, 01-06-04). Most international donors do not recognize these ethnic associations as potential partners and are consequently not involved in their development programs (Kwawukume, 22-04-04). The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida, 2004: 26) means that organisations based around ethnicity are hard to cooperate with because of their primitive or tradition character.

The home-town associations work as a mouthpiece between the community and the government. By cooperating with the chief and being sensitive to the people's opinions, these organisations can work as agenda setters. Since the organisations have its origin in a particular community, they understand the needs of the people (Kumbour, 04-05-04). The home-town associations arrange congress or other larger meetings in the home community where the community members and the chief can articulate the needs of village. The associations use this guideline for their own development agenda. Most members believe that their home-town association is working as a mouthpiece of the community (Apau, 09-05-04).

These associations also represent an effective power check on local governments. The associations live in urban areas and have members that are well educated middle class and often have good knowledge about the local administration. When the associations turn their attention towards local matters it helps to balance the power at the local level. Some district assemblies can be quite dictatorial, home-town associations ensure that these assemblies are controlled and balanced (Gyimah-Boadi, 15-05-04). In some associations the persons with the most money is the most influential. Even though people with limited assets also join these associations, they rarely speak their voice in matters. There are only very few home-town associations of the masses (Ayee, 27-04-04; Gariba, 17-05-04).



## 5 Discussion

My purpose with this thesis is to investigate whether organisations based on ethnicity should be considered a part of the civil society. Today's theories on civil society exclude these organisations for a number of reasons, for instance for not being voluntary formed or being too narrow based. To support my argumentation I refer to a theory about deepened democracy through a representation that reflects the population. This means a better representation from a gender and an ethnic perspective. If a representation in parliament based on the ethnic composition of the population could deepen democracy, I argue that organisation based on ethnicity should be a part of a pro-democratic civil society. A civil society that intends to strengthen democracy should reasonably be expected to support the same values and principles as the democracy. Consequently, I argue to include organisations based on ethnicity in the concept of civil society.

*How can organisations based on ethnicity strengthen the democratic development in Ghana?* These organisations strengthen the democratic development in Ghana in several ways. Firstly, the home-town associations work through the pluralistic function. The associations join these people together in voluntary organisations. As far as I have observed, almost every community has their own home-town association, which assures the plurality among these associations. The home-town associations protect and promote the interest of development in their home community. I created an operational definition that further investigated the associations' role as agenda setters. The organisations are constantly writing proposals, trying to affect the agenda of local government, ministries and MPs. The purpose with these proposals is to set their interest high in the prioritization. These proposals are recognized by the authorities as serious documents and are discussed at sessions. The organisations that I have studied are all working in close relationship with the chief and the village. To understand people's opinions, the associations frequently arrange congresses as a free forum for the village to articulate their needs. This is a way for the home-town associations to work as mouthpieces for their community. When the home-town associations promote and protect their interests, they simultaneously perform an effective power check on the local government. They tend to act as counter powers and balance the power on local level.

Secondly, these organisations work through the educational function. For this function to work the assumption of internal democracy is important. I mean that the three organisations that I have studied all have internal democracy. They all have constitutions based on democratic guidelines, they frequently arrange free and fair elections that elect the members of the executive committee. The executive members are administratively responsible for the association and are also accountable for their actions. If the association loses confidence or the executive

members mismanage their task, the association can vote for him or her to be expelled from the executive committee. At meetings there is a complete freedom of speech. I have personally visited four meetings and can assure that it is a vibrant arena of discussion. I created an operational definition that further investigated the associations' role as educators. Since the organisations have internal democracy their members encounter a democratic system that they easily can relate to and identify themselves with. By actually experiencing democracy at an associational level the members can better understand democracy at a national level. The members also learn how to settle conflicts in a democratic manner and the value of a substantial debate. Through meetings, democratic norms and values in the organisation foster the members to democratic citizens. These associations also formally educate their members to raise their knowledge about democracy. During the last year there has been education about the upcoming election, for example registration and election proceedings, but also lawyers, doctors and bankers has been there to lecture about their specific areas.

Thirdly, the home-town associations also have a role to play in the decentralization process. When working in cooperation with the community the democratic behaviour of the association can create a democratic tradition. This is a crucial development for a successful implementation of decentralization. The associations also create a healthy competition between ethnic groupings in an open arena where it can be controlled.

There are further some negative aspects to consider in this discussion. First these associations seem to reproduce neo-patrimonial structures within the Ghanaian society. The associations make clear that they attempt to use personal relationships to achieve development in their community. Neo-patrimonialism is not a healthy sign and has a negative impact on the democratic development in Ghana. Furthermore, these associations maintain patriarchal structures. Even though most of the members are women, most of the attention is directed towards the men. In the associations that I investigated, no women were represented in the executive committees, which I consider troublesome. Third, these associations are not cooperating or networking in any way. Cooperation would probably improve the associations' possibilities to receive development funds from local governments, since it would favour a larger population. Further, an extended cooperation would also increase the understanding of other communities' need for development which may lead to improved trust between ethnic groups.

*How do organisations based on ethnicity fulfil the functions that are expected from the rest of the civil society?* All organisations in the civil society are expected to fulfil some functions and demands. Firstly the organisations are expected to act collectively, which means representing a group in society. In my case the organisations are representing an ethnic minority by promoting and protecting their interest. Secondly, these organisations should not be profit making businesses. None of the home-town associations that I studied was making any profit, all money was spent on their activity. Thirdly, these organisations should be voluntary formed associations, meaning that anyone can become member if they want to. Theories that have excluded organisations based on ethnicity has pointed out that these organisations are organisations that one has to be born into.

These theories believe that organisations have been excluding people because their ethnicity. In my case, however, these predictions do not seem to be true. People are not born into the home-town associations, on the contrary they have very precise rules about memberships. However, some of the home-town associations have conditions that a person has to fulfil before they can become a member. For example, Mpraeso Youth Club has a condition stating that to become a member a person has to either originate from the Nkew<sup>14</sup> community or be married to someone who has at least one parent from Nkew community. According to me this is not the same as excluding people because of their ethnicity. By putting up conditions for a membership, people with different ethnic backgrounds can still become members and enjoy full benefits from the association. This can be compared to women rights groups that only allow female members. Further examples of conditions from the civil society could be student organisations that only allow students to become members, or labour unions that demand a full-time job to become a member and enjoy full benefits. However, I do realize that the conditions question the demand that a civil society organisation is supposed to be voluntary, but I still argue that these home-town associations are voluntary.

In Africa many civil society organisations have been criticized of lacking in internal democracy, methods for accountability and autonomy from the state and donors. As I have discussed above, I consider the home-town associations to have internal democracy and methods for accountability. When it comes to autonomy from the state, I am also optimistic. Autonomy from the state and funding are closely associated. The home-town organisations that I have studied are almost entirely financed by member fees and occasionally they receive external funding for development projects. None of the associations that I have been in contact with have ever had any collaboration with donor organisations. Therefore I regard these associations as autonomic from both the state and donors. Because of their autonomy the home-town associations also act as counter powers towards the local government. However, many of these home-town associations have patrons that give financial support to the associations' development projects. These patrons are not members of the association, but still seem to have a rather large influence. For example, the patrons have the last word to settle conflicts that the associations are not able to settle themselves. From this approach the home-town associations are not completely autonomous.

As I have demonstrated in chapter three, organisations based on ethnicity are not considered a part of civil society. By using the logic of the discussion about democracy, that a representation that reflects the composition of the population can deepen and strengthen democracy, I argue that organisations based on ethnicity strengthen democracy and should be included as a part of civil society. From a democratic approach a representation that better reflects the composition of the population can strengthen democracy, especially in a heterogeneous context as in many parts of Africa. The representation should not only concern ethnicity,

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<sup>14</sup> Nkew is the name of a larger geographical area, in where Mpraeso village is located.

but also gender. I do not suggest ethnic groups to be allocated quotes in the parliament, but for these ethnic groups to have an alternative representation through civil society. From a civil society approach, I point out that theories actually exclude ethnic organisations and I therefore formulate my own definition of civil society. I have investigated the organisations based on ethnicity from the functions that are expected from any pro-democratic civil society organisation. To accomplish this study I have conducted interviews and participated in meetings and I believe that these organisations, despite some weaknesses, fulfil the expectations rather well.

Consequently, I therefore conclude that organisations based on ethnicity should be included as a part of civil society. I do not mean that all home-town associations automatically are part of the civil society. It is up to each individual association to fulfil all the expected demands to be considered civil society. But I argue that being an organisation based on ethnicity is not a reason to be excluded from civil society.

*How would an inclusion of organisations based on ethnicity affect a pro-democratic civil society in Ghana?* This is perhaps my most difficult research question and I can only allow myself to speculate. I believe that an inclusion of ethnic organisations in the Ghanaian civil society can have a positive result. The inclusion would broaden the concept of civil society, which would increase the concept's analytical value in an African context. It would also mean that the activities of the home-town associations would no longer be a part of the private sphere but the collective. Empirical research in Africa would find considerable larger samplings when analyzing civil society.

If these organisations would be considered a part of civil society they would have been given more confidence by the state and international donors than today. They would also be seen as potential aid receivers, which would improve their chances to promote and protect the interest of an ethnic minority. As a recognized part of civil society, these organisations would be able to push harder for democratic changes.

## 6 Concluding Remarks

This thesis is a case study of ethnic organisations in Ghana. Even though the case study as a method has been criticized and said to have a limited ability to make generalizations, I still believe that this method is suitable in my study. Although the result of my case study is not directly valid for another case, the results can still indicate shortages in a theory. Further benefits are that the case study gave me the opportunity to slowly approach the case and to take the Ghanaian context into account.

I believe that my result in this thesis is valid in an African context. I do not suggest that all ethnic organisations in Africa are a part of the civil society, but I mean that excluding organisations because they are based around ethnicity is wrong. I suggest that these organisations should be included in the concept of civil society. If these organisations are anti-democratic there are other mechanisms that disqualify them from civil society. Even if no country in Africa has the same conditions as Ghana and no organisation is identical with another, I mean that an inclusion of ethnic organisations in civil society would have a positive effect on the development of democracy. To conclude I want to summarize some positive and some negative signs regarding these associations.

### 6.1 Negative Signs

There are several things the home-town associations need to improve to become healthier civil society organisations. Firstly, and perhaps most important, the home-town associations seem to reproduce neo-patrimonial structures in the Ghanaian society. The associations make clear that they attempt to use personal relationships to achieve development resources to their community. The organisations that have a good relationship with the current MP of their constituency or members of the district assembly clearly had a more optimistic view of the future than the ones that did not. Further, the associations have patrons that have influence on the associations' development projects since he or she stands for a significant part of the funding.

Secondly I have found that the home-town associations are fairly elitistic in their design. Anyone can become a member, but the associations have a monthly member fee that has to be paid in order to continue the membership. Even though these member fees are not very expensive the poorest can not afford it and as far as I could observe most members belonged to urban middle class.

Thirdly, these organisations seem to reproduce patriarchal structures. Although most members in the associations were women, no women were

represented in the executive committees. Several persons I interviewed said that the women did not speak at all during meetings and did not want to become executive members. I am however convinced that this is not the whole truth. I think the women's reserved attitude is a result of an antiquate view of women.

Fourthly, these organisations appear to lack cooperation and networking between each other. I have not heard of any joint proposals or mutual projects from the interviews that I conducted. An extended cooperation would increase the understanding of other communities' need for development which may improve trust between ethnic groups.

## 6.2 Positive Signs

Firstly, the associations that I have studied are practicing what is called internal democracy. This means that the associations are run in a democratic way. By practicing democratic elections and using debate as an instrument to reach joint resolution, the members meet and understand democratic norms and values. Through the internal democracy the association also works as a democratic educator for its members.

Secondly these associations act as agenda setters for the local government, certain ministries and MPs. By writing proposals to the authorities in Ghana the organisations try to keep their interest prioritized. The ethnically based organisations are using democratic means to promote and protect their interests. These urban based home-town associations are also exercising an effective power check on local government. By being concerned about local matters they carefully observe how the local government uses its resources. By acting as a watchdog for its interest the local government cannot misuse its power unnoticed.

Thirdly the home-town associations create a general awareness among its members and inhabitants in their home community. For the upcoming election in Ghana all three associations had educated and encouraged their members on how to register and vote. These organisations also educate its members by inviting for example doctors, lawyers and bankers. Occasionally members of the association go to the home community to educate people in different subjects.

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- Ayee, Joseph R. A., 27-04-04. Professor at the Department for Political Science and Dean for Faculty of Social Studies at University of Ghana, Legon.
- Babinah, J. S., 24-05-04. Head of Northern Regional House of Chiefs.
- Duorinaah, Eric, 19-05-04. Coordinator of Northern network for Educational Development.
- Gariba, Sulley, 17-05-04. Executive Director of Institute for Policy Alternative (IPA).
- Gyimah-Boadi, Emmanuel, 15-05-04. Executive Director of Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD).
- Howard, Jonathan A. F., 14-05-04. Lieutenant Colonel, Defence Adviser British High Commission in Accra<sup>16</sup>.
- Jonah, Kwesi, 20-04-04. Head of the Governance Section at Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA).
- Korang, Vida Afua, 09-05-04. Member of Obomeng Youth Union.
- Kumbour, Victoria, 04-05-04. Head of issues concerning civil society at the West African Network for Peace Building (WANEP).
- Kwawukume, Smile Dem, 22-04-04. Public Sector Management Specialist at World Bank Accra.
- Mason, Kirsty, 14-05-04. Department For International Development (DFID) in Accra<sup>17</sup>.
- Nyarko, Kwaku Abrah, 05-05-04. Vice Chairman of Mpraeso Youth Club.
- Oduro-Aboagye, Victor, 09-05-04. Member of Mpraeso Youth Club.
- Osae, Erica, 31-05-04. Programme Facilitator at IBIS Local Governance Program in Tema.
- Osafo, Michael, 02-05-04. Secretary in Obomeng Youth Union.

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<sup>15</sup> This brief interview was conducted in connection with a speech he held at the African Security Dialogue and Research the 20<sup>th</sup> of April.

<sup>16</sup> This was a group interview with Jonathan Howard, Kirsty Mason, Farida Shaikh.

<sup>17</sup> See 15.

Osafo, Richard, 09-05-04. Organizer in Obomeng Youth Union.  
Owusu, Ernest, 09-05-04. Member of Obomeng Youth Union.  
Owusu, Faustina, 09-05-04. Member of Obomeng Youth Union.  
Rasmussen, K. Birgitte, 19-05-04. Programme Director for IBIS Northern Ghana  
Office in Tamale.  
Rasmussen, Steffen, 11-05-04. Regional Director of IBIS West Africa.  
Scott, George, 01-06-04. Coordinating Director Tema District Assembly.  
Shaikh, Farida, 14-05-04. British High Commission in Accra<sup>18</sup>.  
Tetteh, Tony, 08-05-04. Member of the Dzita New Generation Action Forum for  
Development.

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<sup>18</sup> See 15.

# Appendix 1: Maps of Ghana

