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CIVIL SOCIETY AS A RHETORICAL PUBLIC RELATIONS PROCESS

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The field of public relations has been growing in both breadth and depth during the past decade. While the contributions of Excellence theory (J. Grunig, 1992) cannot be ignored, the field of public relations is now benefiting from broader theories that help us to understand its role in communities across the world. Excellence theory, the first comprehensive normative theoretical framework in public relations, has now been joined by other theories including accommodation theory (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999), relation management theory (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2000), and dialogue theory (Kent & Taylor, 2002). These theories provide alternative frameworks to think about organization-public relationships. Another theoretical framework that may hold value for understanding the broader societal contributions of public relations is civil society theory.

What is civil society? Civil society means many things to many different people. To some, it is a normative model of how people should participate in their communities. Civil society can be understood through a common community debate about scarce resources. For instance, one group of community members organizing to build a teen center. This group includes teens, parents, teachers and law enforcement officers. They argue that teens cause less trouble after school if there is somewhere for them to go that involves activities and supervision. They create flyers, post their arguments on their Facebook pages, and write letters to the newspaper. The group wants to communicate the key message that teens need a space to be safe and be teens.

Another side of the debate is comprised of groups fighting for a senior center. Older citizens are the fastest growing group in the United States and senior centers play an important role in their lives. The seniors have paid taxes for decades, vote, and know the town's decision makers. The group wants to communicate the key message that seniors deserve a space in town to pursue their interests. A third group also has an interest in the debate. The anti tax group, comprised of vocal citizens wary of tax increases, wants to stop public funding of any center. This group wants to communicate the key message that special spaces for any group should be funded by the private sector such as local businesses. The local business community, a fourth group with an interest in the topic, has been silent on the issue but the Chamber of Commerce is planning to discuss the situation at its upcoming

meeting. Once they decide their position, they will distribute a news release to the local media organizations to explain their position.

The competing groups need to form alliances, reach out to the media, and meet with government and business leaders to garner support. Each side needs to frame its message, inoculate the public against counter-arguments, and persuade decision makers that their desired end will be the most beneficial to the community. The existence of debate and decision is the hallmark of civil society.

This example shows civil society as the process of groups advocating for a desired end. Civil society creates the conditions that allows individuals and groups to advocate. This idealized perception of civil society describes a process where people interact and negotiate decisions. Civil society is the "evolution of cooperation and trust among citizens" (Hadenius & Uggle, 1996, p. 1622). Civil society can be understood through activities such as civic education, media development, and conflict resolution. Civil society may also be understood when it is absent from a community. For instance, who amongst us has not read about the violence in Darfur or Iraq and wondered what processes and structures need to be in place to stop the violence?

Civil society is not without its critics. Some scholars claim that civil society is merely a catchphrase that perpetuates top-down relationships among groups and nations (Dutta-Bergman, 2005a, 2005b). In this perspective, civil society activities are intended to maintain relationships between the dominant and the dominated. Dutta-Bergman's depiction of the marginalized in the subaltern challenges a public relations approach to civil society. It is the intent of this chapter to show that civil society as a rhetorical public relations process may be able to overcome such criticisms.

This chapter proceeds from the assumption that civil society is a desirable and empowering process. It facilitates relationship building among members of a society and can also build international relationships. Civil society is a requisite for what Heath (2006) termed fully functioning society theory (FFST). Civil society is the process of interactions that lead to relationships, build trust, and create social capital. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how public relations can inform civil society theory. Civil society is not an outcome; it is a process grounded in rhetoric. More specifically, this essay argues that civil society could be understood as a socially constructed process that can be created, maintained, and changed by rhetorical public relations activities. The first part of this chapter explores how civil society has been discussed in different academic fields including political science, sociology, mass media, and organizational communication. The second part puts forth a public relations approach to civil society based on the different partners in civil society. Civil society as a public relations theory has not fully been explicated and it is hoped that this essay will provide the historical and theoretical contexts necessary for situating it within a rhetorical framework.

Disciplinary Approaches to Conceptualizing Civil Society

Various academic fields have considered the topic of civil society. Each approach reflects the values and paradigms of that specific field of study. Some fields have

studied civil society from the individual acting in a society perspective (Hauser, 1998). Rhetoricians, for example, have sought to understand how citizen rhetors frame public policy and debate. Political scientists and sociologists have explored the concept from more macro, societal perspectives looking at the intersection of public participation in organizations that creates trust and social capital (Barber, 1998; Gellner, 1994; Putnam, 2000; Seligman, 1997). Media theorists have argued that the media are a foundation of national (Gross, 2002) and international (Jacobson & Jang, 2002) civil society. Each perspective that addresses a different dimension of civil society will be discussed in more detail below.

Civil Society's Greco-Roman Roots

Many scholars point to the Greeks and Romans as the first groups to conceptualize and practice some form of civil society. Gerald Hauser has written extensively about the concept of civil society and the public sphere. Hauser traced the concept of the public sphere back to the Greeks and Romans seeing it as a "discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them. It is the locus of emergence for rhetorically salient meanings" (1998, p. 21). Hauser is not nostalgic for the days when only free men could participate in the public discourse that would determine how individuals would live their lives. Hauser is quick to admit that the concept of the public sphere in ancient times was hardly perfect. Rather, he simply sought to show that the concept of the "public" influencing the "private" has historic precedence. The Greco-Roman period is the beginning of how individual rhetors used language to advocate or refute policy decisions.

In Hauser's historical perspective, rhetorical democracy is premised on civil society. Hauser and Grim (2004) prefaced their volume dedicated to rhetorical democracy and civic engagement with these words: "One lesson from our ancient forbearers endures, however: the idea that democracy and rhetoric are inextricably linked. Tending to the business of democracy means tending to its rhetorical practices" (p. xi).

Hauser (1997) initially defined civil society as "the network of associations independent of the state whose members, through social interactions that balance conflict and consensus, seek to regulate themselves in ways consistent with a valuation of difference" (p. 277). Hauser (2004) later noted that "civil society's character is inherently rhetorical" (p. 9). Political agents operate in a rhetorical space and that space is what allows civil society to function. In ancient Greece, the public and the political were often synonymous.

Civil Society as a Political Activity

The field of political science has also considered the concept of civil society. Political science theorists including Gellner (1994) have linked civil society to economic development. Gellner saw political civil society linked to economic activity and argued that the strength of a nation could be found in the intersection of the two. Barber (1998) has also examined civil society as public participation in community

life and policy decisions. As evidence of the growing interest in civil society research, Benjamin Barber now serves as an endowed chair of Civil Society at the University of Maryland. Civil society might have become one of those concepts that was discussed mostly by academics lamenting the ills of society; yet, one of the best-known contemporary political scientists, Robert Putnam of Harvard University, has bridged the academic-popular culture gap. Putnam published *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* in 2000. Putnam's research was based on both primary and secondary data about membership in community organizations. Putnam's research showed how Americans have become disconnected at two levels. First, they are disconnected from democratic institutions and processes that form the basis of decision making in America. The number of citizens voting in local and national elections is at an all time low. Participation in the political parties is also down from earlier years. Putnam's research noted a loss of faith in the political system and in government's ability to serve public needs.

While this is troubling for democracies, Putnam's other finding hits closer to home. Putnam's second research finding suggests that the loss of social capital is linked to a concurrent lack of trust in family, friends, and neighbors. At almost every level of society, there is a loss of trust and thus a loss of social capital. Putnam's work raised alarms because he warned that social capital created by "connectedness" is diminishing. Social capital is the invisible wealth of a community. While it can help to create tangible outcomes associated with economic wealth, in the civil society sector, social capital is best understood as an intangible asset. Social capital is a community benefit that is created by a system of trusting and supportive interconnected organizations (Burt, 1997; Doerfel & Taylor, 2005; Putnam, 2000; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005; Toth, 2006). Toth (2006), building from Hazelton's work on social capital and public relations, considered social capital as how "individuals in organizations build relationships to lead to overall decision making" (p. 514). Social capital is created when organizational members communicate and enter into relationships with others. The wealth of a community is in its relationships that provide new opportunities, information, and access to a variety of resources (Monge & Contractor, 2000).

Putnam provides an example of the enormous value of social capital (or the tragic consequences when there is a lack of social capital in a community). In an interview with Jason Marsh of the magazine *Greater Good*, Putnam reflected on the real outcome of diminished social capital in the United States. Using Hurricane Katrina as the backdrop, Putnam said that if the storm had hit an area of the country with a history of greater social capital (such as Minneapolis), then:

the folks in St. Paul wouldn't have been standing with guns on the bridges across the Mississippi up there trying to keep people who were trying to flee devastated Minneapolis from getting into St. Paul. And that's exactly what happened in New Orleans.

(Marsh, 2005-2006, p. 5)

Putnam added: "In some sense God aimed that hurricane exactly at the part of America that was most vulnerable: the place that has low social capital and

ineffective government" (Marsh, 2005–2006, p. 5). Putnam's work has joined other scholars who fear major societal implications from the loss of social capital and trust.

Sociological Approaches to Civil Society

The activities of the "Chicago School" are an early example of how some researchers in the field of Sociology have studied civil society. During the early years of America's urban transition, graduate students at the University of Chicago went out into their community to help solve real social problems. Students sought to identify the root causes and cures for social ills in cities. This type of proactive sociological research is a foundation for later sociological work in civil society.

Sociologist Seligman linked the concept of trust with the development and sustaining of civil society (1997). Seligman argued that trust is a requirement for civil society. Like Putnam (2000), Seligman's research shows that individual trust is disappearing in America. In place of trust, Seligman noted that societies have enacted rules, constraints, and systems of control that now determine how interpersonal and organizational interactions should occur. The loss of individual, organizational, and political trust is a significant problem for the development of civil society. Trust in government, media, and other institutions is at an all time low (Seligman, 1997). Some have blamed the media for this diminished trust while others actually see the media as playing a role in enacting civil society.

Mass Media's Role in Civil Society

Alexander (1998, 2006) is one scholar who advocates for the important role of the media in building civil society. "The news is the only source of firsthand experience they [citizens] will ever have about their fellow citizens, about their motives for acting the way they do, the kinds of relationships they form, and the nature of the institutions they might potentially create" (2006, p. 80). Civil society assumes a free and independent media system that serves the public interest. The existence of such a free and independent media, however, may not be sufficient for civil society development.

Moy and Pfau (2000) presented their results of a multi method "inter connected" study in a book about civil society and trust in American institutions. Moy and Pfau studied how Americans viewed local government and political parties through the lens of media coverage and media consumption patterns. They found that the media's coverage of governmental and political issues may be actually undermining public trust in these institutions. Moy and Pfau's work specifically focused on a small Midwest city (Madison, Wisconsin), but it also has implications for global discussions of civil society. At the international level, two factors in particular underlie the mass media's role in civil society—globalization and the economic transitions of post communist nations.

Globalization has prompted many scholars to think about how traditional media outlets and traditional journalistic practices can remain relevant in a globalized world. Bardoel (1996) argued that the advance of the information society could

actually be the end of journalism as we know it. Bardoel (1996) noted that in traditional models of media, journalists provided objective information and content that became the basis of community-based civil society discussions. Today, media organizations may find their niche in directing the flow of information to community members and facilitating public debates. Newspapers and electronic broadcasters now regularly invite citizens to voice their opinion through their outlets. The media have become the *space* for the discussion rather than the *providers* of the content that shape the discussion. The emergence of blogs, citizen journalism, and interactive websites now brings people from all across the world to facilitate new ways of processing information.

The traditional media, now joined by the new media formats, have the potential to bring media into the center of civil society. Jacobson and Jang (2002) have explored how the media can contribute to a globalized civil society through promoting peace and covering democratic struggles. Corry (2006) has problematized civil society and asked if civil society actions were merely limited to actions within a specific nation state. Corry argued that a transcendent civil society movement has emerged that extends beyond national borders. Thus, because of media coverage and media organizations, civil society is no longer just limited to activities within one nation.

A second factor influencing research about media's role in civil society has come from studying media transitions in post communist media societies. The former Soviet Union and its East Bloc allies all controlled their media sector and placed it under the direction of the government. Gross (2002) reported on the various ways that media, popular culture, and democracy are now being played out in Eastern Europe.

Media studies can reveal the potential of mass communication to affect change, the constraints or opportunities of the sociopolitical reality, and nature of social culture. In the Eastern European case, media studies reflect a process of political, social, economic, cultural and individual transition, transformation, and adjustment.

(Gross, 2002, p. 26)

It is the media's role in what Gross called "transition, transformation, and adjustment," that has prompted multiple studies about media and public opinion in post communist nations. There is considerable evidence from the newly formed nation of Bosnia on the role of the media in this transition and transformation. For instance, Taylor and Napoli (2003) and Botan and Taylor (2005) examined how much the public (as a complex of publics) trusts politically motivated and independent media in Bosnia. Their findings suggest that the independent media, those media not formally associated with a political party or government, are most trusted when Bosnians need information to make decisions. The media, however, require content for their news stories. What may seem like a reasonable relationship, however, could be flawed. Bentele (2004) reminds us that media and public relations "render each other possible" and thus need each other to foster a fully functioning society (2004, p. 491). However, rather than cooperating, media and

public relations professions may actually be competing with each other to the detriment of both parties. This is unfortunate because content, or information subsidies (Gandy, 1982), come from different types of organizations operating in the civil sphere. Organizational communication scholars are now beginning to study these civil society organizations.

Civil Society as the Social Capital Created by Organizations

Social capital is created when organizations cooperate and work toward shared goals. Social capital, as Kennan and Hazelton (2006) noted, can be understood at the individual, organizational, or societal levels. Inherent in social capital are many structural, relational, and communicative dimensions. Alexander (1998) has conceptualized civil society as "private and public associations and organizations, all forms of cooperative social relationships that create bonds of trust, public opinion, legal rights and institutions and political parties" (p. 3).

Recently, organizational communication scholars have become interested in civil society. Lewis (2005) showed how the term "civil society" has gained increased interest in the organizational communication literature. According to Lewis, the civil society sector is the fastest growing sector across the globe. There are 1.8 million registered non-profits in the United States alone and millions more around the world. This growth provides unique opportunities for public relations research about civil society. Lewis suggested that organizational communication scholars should study topics including social capital, mission effectiveness, and accountability, governance and decision making, and volunteer relationships. The organizational communication literature has many examples of how civil society is enacted when organizations work together. For instance, Shumate, Fulk, and Monge (2005) examined networks of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as they worked on HIV prevention. They concluded that how effective an NGO is in gaining access to power networks predicts their ability to influence policy and engage in relevant dialogues. M. Stohl and C. Stohl (2005) found that NGOs are playing important roles in shaping debate and policy in both national and international contexts. NGOs are also providing services, information, and relationships that complement, rather than compete with, governmental activities. Doerfel and Taylor (2005) and Taylor and Doerfel (2003) specifically measured how these relationships create social capital in Croatia. They found that when organizations cooperate, social capital, in the form of relationships and information sharing, is enhanced.

Synthesis of Previous Civil Society Research

The scholarly considerations of civil society mentioned above are by no means representative of all of the different ways that civil society, social capital, and the civil sphere have been conceptualized. A complete analysis of all articles and books in these disciplines falls beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the assumptions of communication, relationships, and political participation already mentioned do provide clues on how civil society has been studied. What becomes apparent is

that civil society has been viewed as an *outcome* of different types of activities. For instance, one could sum up the previous sections by focusing on how the existence or failure of civil society creates certain outcomes. Some might argue that trust in government (or diminished trust) is an outcome of media coverage. Others seem to be arguing that social capital (a desirable outcome) has been lost because people do not join bowling leagues or play bridge anymore. What is missing from these perspectives is the idea that *meaning making and relationships* enact civil society. Civil society is not an outcome; it is a process grounded in rhetoric.

Civil society, although most often conceived of as a sociological, economic, or political activity, is based on discourse. Discourse, and more specifically the use of language to persuade and create shared understanding, is at the heart of all aspects of civil society. It is through discourse that individuals and organizations can participate in the "wrangle of the marketplace" of ideas.

Civil Society as a Rhetorical Public Relations Process

Botan and Taylor (2004) argued that the best way to understand the emerging trends in public relations theory development is to look at the theories through the lens of a cocreational perspective. This perspective sees meaning and communication as that which makes it possible for people and groups to agree to shared meanings, interpretations, goals: "The major relationship of interest is between groups and organizations, and communication functions to negotiate changes in these relationships" (p. 652).

The strategic use of language and symbols forms the basis of the cocreational perspective. Using Kenneth Burke's view of rhetoric as identification in the *Rhetoric of Motives* (1969), Heath (1992) foreshadowed the important role that public relations plays in civil society in his "The Wrangle in the Marketplace" chapter for the 1992 volume of *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations*. The opening paragraph tells us:

Rhetoric is vital to society. Society could not exist if people did not use words and visual symbols to share and evaluate information, shape beliefs and establish norms for coordinated social action. Through rhetoric, people—individually and on behalf of organizations—influence opinions, understanding, judgment, and actions. (p. 17)

Public relations uses language and other symbolic forms to inform, persuade, and to build identification and coalitions. Organizational use of language (and identification) creates a competition for media and public attention. These rhetorical activities are at the heart of the civil sphere. Heath described this nexus as a "rich mix of voices" (p. 25).

Perhaps the best way to explain civil society as a rhetorical activity is to focus on how organizations contributing to the "mix of voices" use rhetoric in the public sphere. Organizational systems, created by humans to achieve some goal, are a foundation of civil society. Communication, information exchange, and the coordination of activities are core functions of organizations. There are many partners

in civil society. Taylor and Doerfel (2005) identified seven key partners in civil society initiatives in Croatia. This chapter expands on that list and elaborates on the rhetorical public relations processes of these Croatian and international organizations as they participate in civil society. It also ties the partners together in an example of civil society in Croatia.

Civil Society Partners

The foundation of civil society is *the public*. Civil society is premised upon an informed and empowered public. In a civil society, the public has the right and, more importantly, the desire to participate in local, regional, and national decisions. Moreover, the public feels safe when participating in all levels of community decision making. Believing that all voices in a civil society are heard can be considered a bit naive. Indeed, one of the major critiques of the concept of civil society is that while it can be empowering to individuals, it can also be used to silence voices. Individuals are empowered when they join societal institutions.

Societal institutions, such as religious organizations, professional groups (associations of doctors, lawyers, educators), universities, unions, and political parties, create the organizational fabric of civil society. In many societies, there is no mediating group or institution between the individual and the government. In other words, there are very few opportunities for individuals to influence those who govern them. Organizations and institutions independent of government control provide a means for citizens to articulate their needs.

Institutions can use rhetorical public relations to define issues and because these institutions are respected, their positions on issues are weighed carefully by those still deciding on their position. More importantly, through issues management, institutional definitions of the issue and its solution can influence policy makers. In a civil society, institutions must operate at both micro and macro levels of the society. Community groups, professional groups, activists, and others all use language to inform, persuade. Their public relations tactics such as news releases, media events, and positions on issues allow them to participate in civil society.

Sometimes the success of these organizations is influenced by how they build relationships with other likeminded groups. For instance, Taylor and Doerfel studied how a civil society network was able to push the public agenda and work toward democratization in Croatia. Taylor and Doerfel found that certain institutions gain influence when they cooperate with the media to set the public agenda.

The *media* are also key partners in ensuring that there is a civil sphere. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1963) first codified the different types of media systems. Some media outlets are state-run and reflect the priorities and policies of the government. Other media organizations are owned by political parties. They reflect the positions of that group. Some media organizations are owned by wealthy oligarchs or corporations and reflect certain priorities. Some nations enjoy a variety of media organizations showcasing different perspectives, opinions, and agendas.

Media outlets have the potential to perform an important function in strengthening the civil sphere. They are expected to disseminate accurate information

that citizens use to make decisions. Where do the media get this information? According to Gandy (1982), the media gain much of their content from public relations practitioners. Taylor (2000) noted the important role that NGOs play in providing information subsidies to independent media. This news content comes in the form of research, statistics, access to the people who are featured in human interest stories, and insight into policy issues.

The value of an independent, multifaceted media to the creation and maintenance of civil society is clear. The independent media also serve as watchdogs to ensure that government officials and businesses are held accountable for their actions. Government-run media cannot embody such a role. The independent media are "the most critical of all civil society institutions" because they allow for communication between institutions, NGOs, the government, and the public (Shaw, 1996, p. 31). Shiras (1996) summed up the role of the media when he noted: "given the media's critical role in mobilizing public support and influencing public policy, they are both observers and participants" in the civil society process (p. 109).

Today, newer forms of media have emerged and are participating, for better or worse, in the rhetorical sphere of civil society. The traditional concept of media was that of television, radio, or print outlets that covered news for a community. The dominant mass communication media had wide dissemination and allowed for shared interpretations of local, regional, national, and international events. Newer forms of media, with more niche audiences, are now competing outlets for news users. For instance, alternative newspapers that may only exist online are now attracting large numbers of readers. Web logs, now known as blogs, have emerged as watchdogs and commentators on current events. Many times the news coverage of these personalized news outlets is ahead of the corporate news media.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and social cause groups also use rhetoric and public relations to advocate for their positions. In the U.S. this organizational type is most widely known as nonprofits. Given the capitalist framework for organizing in the U.S., these organizations are categorized by their pursuit of service ends rather than economic ends. In the former communist countries that did not have a history of profit-seeking organizations, the term nongovernmental organization has emerged as the dominant way to describe organizations without a profit motive or government control.

There is incredible diversity of NGOs. Across the world, groups have organized to protect the environment, children, animals, consumer safety, women's rights, and minority issues. In other nations of the world, especially in societies that have been dominated by repressive governments, there is no tradition of social cause groups acting on behalf of social issues. Today, there is an emergence of NGOs throughout the world. When any type of media select a frame provided by a societal institution, the media extend that group's influence in the public sphere. These grassroots organizations work on behalf of issues, not profit. Rhetoric is their currency.

The *business community* plays a role in the development of civil society. Business organizations have opinions on issues such as regulation, licensing, and access to natural resources, price controls, immigration laws, and legal reform. It is to

their advantage that their voices also be included in the civil sphere. And, an ancillary benefit gained by the civil society is that with business participation, communicative links with other civil society entities (government and media) are formed. The emergence of professional business associations performing watchdog activities (e.g., the Better Business Bureau), pro social activities (e.g., the Rotary Club), and advocacy activities (e.g., the Chamber of Commerce) are an important step in ensuring civil society. However, too much influence from the business community may impede civil society development.

Another partner in civil society is *governance*—the local, regional, and national leaders that participate in policy formation. This group also includes the class of civil servants in a nation that execute the day-to-day activities of governance (such as those who graduate from France's elite Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA) or the *nomenclatura* of Russia). Government leaders, as well as members of the bureaucracy that support government, need to be accountable to the aforementioned partners. Government leaders need to carefully monitor public opinion and be willing to adapt to the publics' changing needs. In a normative model of civil society, government leaders at all levels understand issues and resolve them in a manner that benefits those they lead. Government leaders take their cues from the civil society discourse.

Finally, *international organizations* have an important role in fostering civil society (INGOs). There are two types of international organizations: donor organizations and regulatory agencies. In developing and post crisis countries, the United Nations (UN), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the George Soros Open Society Institute (OSI) provide financial and human resources to help facilitate development. These international donor organizations fund local groups that work to achieve societal goals. For example, in the wake of the tsunami disaster in Asia in 2004, INGOs such as UNICEF, World Vision, Oxfam, and Save the Children immediately opened offices in affected areas. These groups asked people and governments around the world for donations and assistance to serve those affected by the tsunami. They provided what the government of Indonesia could not deliver: rapid, nonpolitical aid to those who had lost everything. INGOs are especially important during the initial stages of a civil society transition because they work directly with indigenous organizations and provide important training to local civil society leaders. Other international organizations such as the World Bank, World Trade Organization and other regulatory groups also can shape discourse in the civil sphere.

M. Stohl and C. Stohl (2005) highlighted the relationships among NGOs and INGOs that shape policy at the national and international level. In areas such as international law and human rights, INGOs are defining issues, creating debates, working with the media, and using public relations tactics and campaigns to get citizens to pressure their governments to enact change. M. Stohl and C. Stohl reviewed some of the problems associated with policy making in the international arena. Their article showed how a network of "INGOs provided watchdogs, the expertise, databases, and the basic bureaucratic work for the UN, which was often immobilized by its inherent organizational contradictions" (p. 452). This network was able to accomplish an objective that the UN could not accomplish on its own—

passing the historic Universal Declaration of Human Rights. NGOs pressured governments, rallied citizens, and organized their efforts to shape the language of one of the most important documents in history.

These seven partners—the public, societal institutions, media, nongovernmental organizations, the business community, governance, and international organizations—create the foundation of civil society. While each partner has its own issues, its own needs, and will represent different citizen interests, it is the goal of civil society to have interrelated objectives among these different groups. When the rhetorical discourse of two or more partners converge, then there is a much greater opportunity for those groups to achieve their goals. An effective civil society rests in the intersection of all of these partners' interests. It is in this intersection of interests that the role for rhetorical public relations activities become most clear.

An important implication of these seven partners is that the structure of civil society is not hierarchical. Individuals often share multiple identifications and memberships among different civil society groups. For instance, a teacher may be in a teachers' union and belong to a religious organization. The small businessperson may serve as a locally elected official while at the same time belonging to the Chamber of Commerce. By looking at civil society from the rhetorical public relations perspective, it is evident that civil society structure is the antithesis of the centralized hierarchy in which power is reserved for the elite few. More importantly, looking at civil society from a rhetorical perspective allows us to understand the individuals and organizations that negotiate meaning and work toward shared objectives.

Civil Society Exemplar from Croatia

Perhaps the best way to illustrate civil society as a rhetorical public relations process is to provide a real world example. In 1999, Croatia was still recovering from the break up of the former Yugoslavia and a war with its neighbors. President Franjo Tudjman, although quite ill, still exerted control over the Croatian people and political system. The HDZ controlled most media outlets in the country and opposition candidates and reformists could not get media coverage.

When President Tudjman died in early December 1999, democracy activists in Croatia sought to disseminate balanced information about the January 2000 elections. Several international organizations (INGOs) worked with local media and NGOs to increase public access to balanced and objective information. A partnership of local community leaders, NGOs, professional associations (trade unions), media outlets, political candidates, local business owners, and INGOs emerged to create a balanced media environment and an active civil society community. Together, these seven partners cooperated to identify key issues, create public awareness, and motivate Croatians to hold their government accountable. This coalition held news conferences, worked with the media, held debates, sent out information about election registration, and outlined the platforms of *all political parties*.

American and Western European governments paid for information campaigns to educate voters about election issues. More specifically, donors funded new, independent media that challenged the news coverage of the politically controlled state media monopoly. Donors created the media channels that featured civil society messages and helped pay for the development of civil society campaigns. Donors provided support for organizations to *communicate their agendas* and *fostered the development of a media* that carried this content. For the first time, there was a rich mix of voices in Croatia advocating for different positions.

The elections in 2000 were a watershed moment for Croatia. The Croatian people elected a new parliament and the nationalist HDZ party lost power. Voter turnout was well over 90% of all eligible voters. With the election of a new parliament and President Stjepan (Stipe) Mesic, Croatia became a democracy. Croatia soon entered into discussions with the European Union and applied for membership in the EU. Croatia is expected to become a member of the EU in 2009. There were many different civil society partners that had to cooperate for Croatia to make this type of progress in such a short amount of time. The Croatian transition is an example of the enormous power of the social capital created by relationship building between civil society partners and the media.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to explicate a discourse-based framework of public in civil society. At the heart of civil society is discourse. This discourse is the nexus of civil society when it allows all interested parties to participate in the public sphere. There are critiques, however, of how public relations has been used to foster civil society. These critiques are valuable in that they remind us that theories almost always come with some baggage that begs the question of their ultimate value to theorists and practitioners.

Dutta-Bergman (2005a, 2005b) has pointed out that many foreign donor activities that fall under the guise of civil society assistance are actually imperialistic activities. This particular civil society assistance serves the interests of the nations donating the money rather than benefiting the people in the country. Dutta-Bergman's examples from the Philippines, Iraq, Chile, and Nicaragua are indeed troubling to those who see the great potential of public relations in civil society. Yet, his examples provide evidence as to why we should view civil society as a rhetorical process.

This chapter argues that the potential co-opting of civil society can be minimized if we focus on the *cocreation of meaning through rhetorical discourse*. When we view civil society as a process where all parties can use language and symbols to persuade, then public relations scholars, practitioners, and critical theorists have a rationale and a method for critiquing instances of anti civil society activities.

The role for public relations in civil society is quite clear. When we focus on meaning making, language, rhetorical argument, and persuasion, then we have enormous potential to see how public relations theory can serve civil society interests. The focus on meaning making also ensures that if one group, through money, access, or media ownership, tries to dominate the civil sphere, then other actors or

organizations may be able to moderate the self-serving interests. The dominant theories of public relations can be complemented by civil society's interest in how individuals and organizations can participate in what Burke (1969) and Heath (1992) called the "wrangle of the marketplace."

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