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**Re-Thinking Civil Society and Democratization:
Micro-Political Relations Among Women's Organizations in Ecuador**

By

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A thesis submitted to

the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Norman Paterson School of International Affairs

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Abstract

The deepening of democracy presents an ongoing challenge for many countries in Latin America, where a majority of citizens continue to be excluded from meaningful participation in social, political, and economic life. Civil society is attributed a key role in this regard, considered to be a key site of citizen participation in both discussions on development and the consolidation of democracy.

This paper explores the implications of micro-political relations among civil society organizations for ideas about civil society and democratization in the context of development. In order to do so, it draws upon theoretical perspectives on civil society, democracy, and difference as well as primary research on the micro-political relations among women's organizations engaged in, or seeking to be engaged in, policy processes at the national level in Ecuador. It argues that context-specific analyses of the relations among organizations are important in overcoming homogenized, depoliticized conceptions of the civil sphere and re-thinking its role in deepening democracy.

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List of Acronyms

ALAI	Agencia Latino-Americana de Información
CEDIME	Centro de Investigación de los Movimientos Sociales del Ecuador
CEIME	Centro de Estudios y Investigaciones de la Mujer Ecuatoriana
CEPAM	Centro Ecuatoriano para la Promoción y Acción de la Mujer
CIAM	Centro de Información y Apoyo del a Mujer
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CONAIE	Confederación de Nacionalidades Indigenas del Ecuador
CONAMU	Consejo Nacional de las Mujeres
CONMIE	Consejo Nacional de Mujeres Indigenas de Ecuador
CPME	Coordinadora Política de Mujeres Ecuatorianas
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DINAMU	Dirección Nacional de la Mujer
FORO	Foro Permanente de la Mujer Ecuatoriana
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ONM	Oficina Nacional de la Mujer

Introduction

Clearly, if we are to build anything—and something as important as democracy—on the concept of civil society, we need to deal with the problems of exclusion, difference, diversity.

(Flyvbjerg 1998:211)

It may be useful—without seeking to give any advice—to inquire into likely possibilities of conflict and overlap or coalitions among different social movements.

(Fuentes and Frank 1989:189)

In current debates on democratization and development in Latin America, a significant role is attributed to civil society (Linz and Stepan 1996; Schmitter 1997; Habermas 1996; Mouffe 1995; Fraser 1997; Van Rooy 1998; Robinson 1998). Considered to be a key site of citizen participation and the promotion of democratic norms, civil society has emerged as a favoured child in mainstream donor discourses on good governance and democratization (Fisher 1997; Van Rooy and Robinson 1998; Robinson 1998). With a focus on strengthening the institutions within the civil sphere to achieve these ends, these discourses closely parallel democratic consolidationist perspectives on civil society's potential roles in political democratization in the region. One of the weaknesses of such a focus on institutional forms however, is the lack of attention to the challenges that inequality and difference pose to citizen participation

within civil society and the public sphere¹ (Melucci 1998; Fraser 1997; Mouffe 1992; Cohen 1999; Honig 1996).

The challenges of inequality and difference within the civil sphere and beyond are particularly acute in Latin America's thin democracies² in which all are legal citizens, yet a majority are excluded from meaningful participation in social, political, and economic life (Vilas 1997; Oxfhorn 1999). As Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar (1998) point out, "civil society is a terrain mined by unequal relation of power wherein some actors can gain greater access to power, as well as differential access to material, cultural and political resources.." (1998:18). Yet most contemporary approaches to civil society, in the context of development, do not include systematic analyses of the power relationships within and among associations (Fisher 1997:456). Feree and Roth (1998) agree, arguing

¹ For the purpose of this paper, civil society is seen to encompass the public sphere. Oxfhorn (1999), provides a useful clarification of both the overlap and distinction between civil society and the public sphere, concepts, he argues, that are often conflated in political theory (1999:3). He agrees with Calhoun (1993), who notes that the public sphere is "an operationalization of civil society's capacity for self-organization" (Calhoun 1993:271 in Oxfhorn 1999:5); and that it is through the public sphere that civil society interacts with state institutions. He states that from this perspective, the public sphere is the "definitive demand of civil societies" (Calhoun 1993:271 in Oxfhorn 1999:5); and that exclusion and fragmentation within civil society necessarily translates into the public sphere as well. Chandhoke (1995) takes this argument further stating that civil society can be considered as the public sphere of society (1995:169) - as a site of public discourse (p.169); as a site where the state "intervenes to shape public opinion" (p.179); and as a site where individuals are given "face of citizenship" (p.183). For the purpose of this thesis, therefore, and particularly the analysis of the concept of civil society in Chapter One, the term civil society includes the public sphere.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the conceptualization of the public sphere is a current topic of debate in critical and political theory. Some theorists suggest that the idea of multiple competing publics (or counter-publics) is more useful than the notion of a single, comprehensive, overarching public sphere, in understanding collective action (see Fraser 1995; 1997; Jakobsen 1998). Such alternate conceptions of the public sphere and civil society are relevant to the thesis topic and will be addressed in the analysis of the case study.

² The concept of "thin democracy" was coined by Benjamin Barber to describe a system that does not provide the opportunity for citizens to participate meaningfully in public life (Barber 1984 in Conaghan 1996:50).

that the presence or absence of organizational or movement interaction is a “crucial fact” that needs to be explained, that has “hardly begun to be studied” (Feree and Roth 1998:627). The implications of micro-political relations among organizations for ideas about the role of civil society and democratization in discourses of development are the focus of this paper.

Specifically, this paper explores the implications of the roles attributed to civil society in deepening democracy in discourses³ of development and democratic consolidation, drawing upon theories of civil society, democracy, and difference,⁴ as well

³ Discourse, in this context, is taken to be a practice that systematically forms the objects of which it speaks (Foucault 1972:49). In this sense, discourse creates knowledge (Mills 1997:17), which reflects implicit relations of power. As Crush (1995) points out, development discourse, usually seen as self-evident and unworthy of attention, *is* significant as it “promotes and justifies very real interventions and practices with very real (although invariably unintended) consequences...” (1995:3).

⁴ In contemporary debates on democracy, difference connotes plurality—of ethnicity, values, beliefs, identities, language, religion and so forth. However social plurality has often been translated into political and economic relations of domination and subordination. That is, the differences that constitute plurality are frequently manifested in the forms of hierarchy and marginalization. Mouffe (1996) points out that most analyses of democracy and participation ignore the ways in which certain differences are “constructed as relations of subordination...” (1996:247). Honig (1996) agrees, stating that difference within a democracy is not simply about “orchestrating multiple and conflicting group needs” (1996:258). Rather, differences reflect underlying power relations that manifest in exclusionary rather than participatory democratic practices. Fraser (1995) notes that the misrecognition of difference is intertwined with, and often the source of, social exclusion and the unequal distribution of political rights and economic resources, particularly as “cultural differences can be freely elaborated and democratically mediated only on the basis of social equality” (Fraser 1997:188). Therefore debates on democracy and difference address not only issues of recognition, but also the resulting social, political, and economic exclusion (see Kiss 1999).

Also, it is broadly recognized that difference, regardless of the form (e.g. class, race, gender, sexuality), is never essential or given, but is constructed, multifaceted, “blurred, awkward and ambivalent...” (Pile 1997:27). This absence of ontological identities presents a dilemma for democratic theory which “speaks in the language of groups.” (Nicholson and Seidman 1995:21; Young 1995). A further dilemma regarding difference and democracy is raised by Phillips (1995), who reminds us that the key question about difference is which is *the* difference that counts i.e. what are the differences that make a difference for democracy.

as primary research on micro-political relations among women's organizations in Ecuador.

The research reveals that even among organizations with similar mandates, strategies, and other bridging conditions,⁵ inter-organizational relations are characterized by division, primarily along boundaries of ethnicity, reinforcing social patterns and structures that challenge deeper social democracy. The paper explores the factors underlying these divisions, and based on this research, posits that micro-political relations among organizations, and political processes within particular civil spheres, must be considered for a more useful conceptualization of civil society and democratization in the context of development.

The paper consists of four chapters. Chapter One sets out the theoretical and conceptual framework of the paper. It explores the conceptual history of civil society, before turning to its contemporary uses in discourses on development and democratization. The parallels between the roles attributed to civil society in deepening democracy in both discourses of development and democratic consolidation, in Latin America are highlighted. Drawing upon critical reflection about theories of democratic consolidation, both perspectives are problematized for homogenizing and depoliticizing the civil sphere.⁶

⁵ Feree and Roth (1998) argue that with the existence of certain conditions, such as common concerns, agendas, and discourses, inter-organizational differences can be bridged to form broader alliances.

⁶ Discourses on the consolidation of democracy continue to dominate political theorizing on democracy in Latin America (see Diamond, Plattner, Chu and Tien 1997; Linz and Stepan 1997), and, as noted above, are similar to discourses of development with regard to civil society's role in strengthening democracy. Theorists in this area generally consider democratic consolidation to be achieved once a transition to democracy is complete (Linz and Stepan 1997:14). Three "minimal

Chapter Two provides background information to the case study, which connects the theoretical perspectives explored in Chapter One to an on the ground analysis of associational life presented in Chapter Three. It provides a detailed review of the methodology applied in the primary research process in Ecuador during the fall of 1999, and also explores some of the broader issues surrounding qualitative research, including representation, legitimacy, and researcher positionality. A qualitative research strategy centered around semi-structured interviews was used to gather information from thirty-three participants in fifteen organizations. Details of the methodology used, as well as personal reflections upon the methodology and research limitations, are outlined in this Chapter.

Chapter Three presents the case study information generated during the primary research process. It examines the complexity and significance of relations within civil societies in specific contexts through an exploration of the micro-politics within one small sector of associational life in Ecuador—women’s organizations engaged in, or seeking to be engaged in, policy processes at the national level. Similar agendas among these organizations, combined with shared concerns and discourses indicated a potential for inter-organizational solidarity and alliance formation (Feree and Roth 1998). Yet research revealed that this small sector of the so-called women’s movement in Ecuador is characterized by fragmentation, both along and between boundaries of gender and

conditions” or benchmarks of consolidation are the existence of: a state, “free and fair” elections, and “democratic governance”— i.e. when “democracy as a complex system of institutions..and rules has become the “only game in town” (Linz and Stepan 1997:15). Ideas about democratic consolidation are explored in more detail, and problematized, in Chapter One. The exploration of ideas about, and problems with, consolidationist theory are useful in illuminating (and problematizing) mainstream development (donor) discourses on civil society and its role in democratization in Latin America, which have tended to be under-theorized / problematized.

ethnicity, two key aspects of difference in Ecuador's exclusionary democracy.

The first part of Chapter Three looks briefly at some of the historical, socio-political, and economic factors that underlie the problems of democracy in Ecuador's contemporary post-transition period since 1979. A historical perspective of women organizing in the region precedes a specific focus on the current organizational landscape for women in Ecuador. Three specific sets of inter-organizational relations are examined—among *mestizo* (or not explicitly indigenous) women's organizations, between *mestizo* organizations and indigenous women's organizations, and among indigenous women's organizations themselves. Sources of division in each of the three cases are analyzed. They include the particularistic relations that certain organizations had formed with politicians or political departments, cited differences between *mestizo* and indigenous women's organizations, as well as different conceptions of the relationship between gender and ethnicity, and the relation of indigenous women's organizations to the larger indigenous movement.

Chapter Four, "*Analysis and Final Reflections*," links the discussion on civil society and democratization in development and consolidationist discourses, reviewed in Chapter One, with the context-specific findings presented in Chapter Three. It explores the implications of micro-political relations among women's organizations seeking participation and policy change in Ecuador for claims made about the role of civil society in deepening democracy in development / consolidationist discourses. In order to do this, it first examines the ways in which the case study problematizes fundamental assumptions about civil societies' role in deepening democracy in the context of development. It is then argued that although these assumptions about civil society are

problematic, organizations can still be perceived as democratizing forces despite the differences and exclusions that pervade the civil sphere. Finally, the need for a more theoretically informed, context-specific analyses of civil society organizations and actors is emphasized, particularly if the concept, so central to contemporary mainstream development discourse, is to be given equal primacy in practise.

Chapter One: Theoretical Perspectives on Civil Society and Democratization in the Context of Development

As noted in the Introduction, Chapter One sets out the conceptual framework through which ideas about civil society, democratization, and difference are approached. It first provides a historical overview of the concept of civil society in European political philosophy, in relation to changing conceptions of state and society. Its contemporary use on both sides of the political spectrum, and its emergence in discourses of development, specifically good governance and democratization, are then examined. Considered to be a site where democratic culture and social capital are fomented, civil society is attributed with assisting in democratic institutional consolidation—providing a vehicle for citizen participation in policy and political processes. The parallels between the roles attributed to civil society in discourses of development and ideas about the consolidation of democracy in Latin America are subsequently explored. Critical thinking about consolidationist models, is then drawn upon to problematize some of the assumptions implicit in development discourse on civil society and democratization. Specifically, the impacts of difference and inequality on inter-organizational relations within the civil sphere, and the importance, and continued absence, of attention to these micro-political relations and processes are highlighted.

1.1 Conceptual History of Civil Society

A historical perspective of the concept of civil society is helpful in understanding its present usages. As Chandhoke (1995) points out: "...conceptual histories are

significant because they help us to tease out the diverse and contradictory strands of understanding that mark a particular concept. A theoretical history of a concept seeks to unearth the various significations and meanings which have been attributed to that specific notion. This in turn provides a theoretical context for one's own understanding of the concept..."(p.76).

The term civil society has a long history in European political philosophy dating as far back as classical antiquity. Although its meaning has changed significantly over time, it has consistently been connected to ideas about society and the state. Up until the 18th century, civil society was synonymous with political society or the state (Keane 1988:35). The distinction was not between civil society and the state, but rather between civil society and the state of nature. This juxtaposition was apparent in the writings of Rousseau, Hobbes and Locke:

Wherever, therefore, any number of men so unite into one society as to quit every one his executive power of the law of Nature, and resign it to the public, there and there only is a political or civil society...For the end of civil society being to avoid and remedy those in conveniences of the state of nature ...
(Locke 1690:89,90).

Chandhoke (1995) notes that although civil society is not specifically defined in contractarian writing on state and society, later liberal formulations on civil society are found in an "embryonic form" in these theories (1995:85). She points to the emergence of four themes in particular, the primacy of the self-interested individual; the notion that individuals possess inherent rights independent of the State (and the implicit inviolability of private property); the idea that the relation between individuals and the state is contractual; and the notion of a limited government responsible for protecting individual

rights, all take hold at this time (Chandhoke 1995:86). These ideas place the individual, the bearer of citizen rights, at the centre of political theory, and identify civil society as the site of citizen interaction.

A shift in the interpretation of the phrase civil society occurred during the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, with its focus on reason and material progress. In this context, civil society is equated with the polite society of morally and materially advanced, civilized people. This view is evident in writings of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, notably Adam Ferguson. In Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), civil society, rather than having a political connotation, represented polite society, the sector that exhibited socially appropriate behaviour:

The members of every community are more or less occupied with matters of state, in proportion as their constitution admits them to a share in the government...A people are cultivated or unimproved in their talents, in proportion as those talents are employed in the practice of the arts, and in the affairs of society.

(Ferguson 1767 (reprinted 1971:209).

Ferguson, and other classical political economists of the Enlightenment period, significantly situate commercial activity within the civil sphere, effectively separating economic from political life. "The concept of civil society, therefore, provided a measure by which the progress of individual societies could be evaluated....Civil society accordingly, became the measuring rod of progress and accomplishment." (Chandhoke 1995: 90-91).

During the same period, Adam Smith expanded upon the idea of a division between political and economic life, to develop his theory of a self-regulating economy

and society (Hyden 1997). For the classical political economists of the Enlightenment, the state's only role was the promotion and protection of individual rights and private economic interests. Civil society had become the sphere of human freedom and commercial interaction, foundational to contemporary liberal and neo-liberal theories.

If civil society was the sphere of commercial interaction in classical political economic theory, it became the sphere of association in the writing of Alexis de Tocqueville, which continues to inform many contemporary understandings of civil society with regard to democracy and development. De Tocqueville identified the regulatory and administrative power vested in the state as a potential threat to the individual rights and freedoms abound in the civil sphere. Drawing from his travels in the United States during the mid 19th century, he perceived the formation of a plurality of associations within society to be a crucial element in ensuring political accountability, and limiting state control (de Tocqueville reprinted 1988; Hyden 1997:7). For de Tocqueville, only free and voluntary associations could accommodate the contradiction between individual rights, including the right to *not* participate, and the need for a strong civil society to prevent the state from encroaching upon these individual rights.

In contrast to de Tocqueville's conception of a domineering state, Hegel argued that it was civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft* or bourgeois society) that required restraint (Held 1996:132). For Hegel, civil society was a conflicting arena of competing, particular interests over which the state had to maintain order so as to prevent its disintegration. Historical processes, in this case the capitalist mode of production and resulting division of labour, were the key sources of conflict within civil society, according to Hegel. Hegel significantly altered theorizing on civil society, for it is in his

writing that a dichotomy between state and civil society, and civil society and the household, emerges and persists (Held 1996:132).⁷

Although Hegel recognized the influence of the capitalist economy in shaping relations in civil society, he considered the civil sphere to be distinct from the economy (Chandhoke 1995:117). He also made a clear separation between the state, the family and civil society. If the state was the site of ethical universality (Neoclaus 1996), civil society was the site of particularity, where individual needs and interests were defined. For Hegel, the state was responsible for reconciling the dialectic between civil society's particular interests and society's universal or common will.

Marx agreed with the Hegelian view of civil society, as a sphere characterized by conflict among self-interested individuals. However rather than giving primacy to the state in the resolution of such conflict, Marx saw the potential for revolutionary transformation within the civil sphere itself. Marx not only recognized the capacity of the working classes for social transformation, but also rejected the Hegel's "universality of the state," instead perceiving it to be an outcome of specific social / industrial relations. His inclusion of the working and poor classes as actors in civil society is considered a benchmark in the discussions on civil society (Neoclaus 1996; Van Rooy 1998). Despite this significant contribution, Marx's interpretation reduced civil society to the material organization of society, with economics being the determining principle, and the state playing a purely coercive role (Chandhoke 1995: 149-151).

⁷ De Tocqueville had previously highlighted civil society as an third, intermediary sphere located between state and society. However, unlike Hegel, and similar other early liberal thinkers of the time, de Tocqueville's focus was on the state, and concern with limiting state power, rather than on the dynamics within civil society itself.

Nearly one hundred years later, Gramsci substantially thickened the Marxian conception of civil society with the inclusion of the notion of hegemony, the almost imperceptible strategies through which the state maintains power.⁸ Whereas for Marx, the state was solely an apparatus of government, ruling by coercion, for Gramsci the state also included more complex political organization, and the activities by which the “ruling classes” maintained power through consent, including religious, cultural, and educational systems (Chandhoke 1995:151). Accordingly, for Gramsci, civil society was the site where hegemonic consent for the state was both produced and contested. From this perspective, associations are mechanisms through which people can exercise counter-hegemonic influence within society, challenging the power of the state. Through Gramsci, civil society acquired a more dynamic meaning, consisting not only of material relations in capitalist societies, but of ideological and cultural practices as well. Cohen (1999) summarizes the significance of Gramsci’s contribution to the conceptualization of civil society:

Civil society is construed both as a symbolic field and as a network of institutions and practices that is the locus for the formation of values, action-orienting norms, meanings, and collective identities.... Its associations and networks are a terrain to be struggled over and an arena wherein collective identities, ethical values, and alliances are forged. Indeed, competing conceptions of civil society are deployed in a continual struggle either to maintain cultural hegemony by dominant groups or to attain counter-hegemony on the part of subordinate collective actors. Accordingly, no conception of civil society is neutral, each is part of a project to shape the social relations, cultural forms, and modes of thought ... (Cohen 1999:214)

⁸ Cohen sees hegemony as “the dominant action-orienting symbols, beliefs, values, identifications, and social constructions of reality” (1999:214). Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) nuances this definition, describing the process of hegemonic struggle as “never merely an assertion of order, it always involves an effort to redress contradictions. It is from such tensions that new ideologies arise that point to the discrepancies between received world views and the worlds they claim to mirror”(p.314).

Accordingly, civil society is not conceived of as a single model, but rather a space defined by the practices of the actors within it (Chandhoke 1995:154).⁹ Following Marx, Gramsci considered revolution as the primary means to achieve socio-economic transformation, but unlike Marx considered not only the working classes, but other alliances and movements within civil society as potentially able to carry out such a revolution.

These various historical threads inform contemporary conceptions of civil society in the context of development and democratization. Although there exists no single accepted explanation of civil society in contemporary scholarship,¹⁰ in mainstream development discourses, civil society is assigned a variety of normative and spatial characteristics (Van Rooy 1998; Hyden 1997; Rutherford 1997; Cohen and Arato 1992), which at a minimum includes "groups and individuals who are at the interface between the state and the rest of the social order" (Rutherford 1997:9). The following section reviews the contemporary re-emergence of civil society in discourses on development,

⁹ For Gramsci and his predecessors, as well as contemporary political theorists, civil and political society are generally seen as complementary but distinct (Linz and Stepan 1997; Chandhoke 1995). For Gramsci, political society was where the coercive apparatus of the state was located (involving explicit mechanism of enforcing power, including police and armed forces). In contrast he saw civil society as the site where the state operates through more subtle forms of (hegemonic) power, enforcing by consent through social institutions. This split is echoed in contemporary divisions between civil and political society. For example, Linz and Stepan (1997) consider civil associations as often laying the ground for more formal political associations, but whereas civil society includes all forms of self-organizing autonomous groups, political society is composed only of political actors competing for formal control over state apparatus (Linz and Stepan 1997:17).

¹⁰ Wood (1990), in light of the variety of current applications of the concept, describes civil society as a "...conceptual portmanteau, which indiscriminately lumps together everything from households and voluntary associations to the economic system of capitalism, that confuses and disguises as much as it reveals" (p.65).

governance and democratization and its parallels with consolidationist perspectives on civil society and democratization.

1.2 Contemporary Conceptions of Civil Society

Contemporary use of civil society on both sides of the political / development spectrum tends to be defined in terms of oppositions, proceeding from the distinction between civil society and the state, and focusing on the liberal concern with political legitimization (and limitation) (Wood 1990:63-64). Hyden (1997), identifies four contemporary schools of thought with regards to civil society, which resonate with other authors' interpretations of contemporary thinking on civil society including Rutherford (1997), and Macdonald (1994). The first, heavily informed by de Tocqueville, is the associational school which emphasizes the importance of autonomous organizations for citizen participation and the strengthening of democracy. This school focuses on the institutional framework within which civil society can flourish (Hyden 1997:8). As will be explored below, it is this interpretation of civil society upon which most mainstream development discourses and theories of democratic consolidation in Latin America, are based (Linz & Stepan 1997; Diamond 1994; Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1989).

In contrast the "regime school" focuses not on the structures of civil society but rather its content, and the way in which "state-society relations can be organized to promote democracy" (Hyden 1997:10). Theorists writing in this vein include O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) with regard to the Latin American transitions to democracy, and Bratton and Van de Walle (1997) (with respect to regime transition in Africa (Hyden

1997). Within this framework, civil society is not necessarily assumed to be democratic, and the constitutionalization of relations within the civil sphere is equally as important as “containing and constitutionalizing state power” (Hyden 1997:11).

The third school identified by Hyden is the “neo-liberal school” which views autonomous civil society organizations as the evidence and site of economic freedom and flexibility (Hyden 1997:11; Rutherford 1997:8). In the tradition of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, from this perspective the strengthening of civil society takes place hand in hand with the weakening of the state’s grip on the economy, increasing prospects for long term growth and flourishing of (liberal) development and democratization.

The final school identified is the post-Marxist school, which tends to look at civil society in terms of broader relations of power and subordination and the transformative potential of counter-hegemonic movements within civil society in this context (Hyden 1997:12; Rutherford 1997:8; Macdonald 1994). In its efforts to overcome reductionist, economistic aspects of Marxism, post-Marxist scholarship in this area focuses less on “old solidarities” and more on pluralism, and the ways in which new movements can counter state / capitalist hegemony and coercion (Wood 1990:63). (As Wood points out however, the emphasis on pluralism, difference, and new social movements is not restricted to the post-Marxist perspective, but actually unites the various “new revisionisms” of civil society (1990:74)).

Despite normative differences, all four schools consider civil society potentially able to contribute to development and democratization in two key ways: through the mobilization of resources and subsequent increase in citizen participation, and in creating

a culture of democracy in which citizens are socialized (Hyden 1997; Fisher 1997; Hadenius and Ugglä 1996). All four positions have been incorporated to some degree into donor discourse on civil society and its role in development (Rutherford 1997:8). However with specific regard to democracy, it is the associationalist perspective that most closely resonates with discourses on good governance within which democracy is promoted. The following section reviews the emergence of civil society in mainstream development discourse through the 1980s and 1990s.

1.3 The Emergence of Civil Society in Discourses on Development, Good Governance, and Democracy

The focus of mainstream development theory and discourse has appeared to shift between the state, the market, and civil society over the past four decades. The 1960s and 1970s were characterized by an emphasis on the role of the centralized state in securing social welfare and economic growth, whereas the development thrust in the 1980s emphasized the primacy of the market and the opening up of the economy as a means to achieve key development objectives (Peet & Watts 1996:20). Later in the 1980s and 1990s, mainstream donor discourses witnessed the “resurrection, rebirth, and renaissance” (Cohen & Arato 1992:29) of civil society, which has most recently come to fore with programs for good governance and democracy (Robinson 1998; Hyden 1997; Fisher 1997).

Its resurrection in these contexts is commonly attributed to several factors, including the disillusionment with top-down approaches to development, the economic austerity of the

1980s and the civic movements that emerged in response, political upheaval in Eastern Europe (including the fall of the Berlin Wall and iron curtain), and the global trend towards democratization, as well as increasing decentralization and withdrawal of the state from the provision of key social services (Hyden 1997; Van Rooy 1998; Peet & Watts 1996).

The rise of neo-liberalism and the “New Policy Agenda,”¹¹ combined with the failure of development strategies aimed at helping the poor (Fisher 1997:443), led to a disillusionment with state-centered, top-down development by the 1980s, and a growing focus on sustainability, participation, as well as local actors and organizations (Fisher 1997; Fowler 1991; Van Rooy 1998; Hyden 1997; Mohan and Stokke 2000).

Attention was further focused on civil society in the wake of austerity programs implemented throughout the world in the 1980s, and their socio-economic consequences which lead to an increase in popular mobilization and civic action. Burdened by growing foreign debt and decreasing commodity prices, and under pressure from donors and international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, southern countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, implemented structural adjustment policies. The repercussions of these policies included increases in poverty and unemployment, as well as reduction of government spending in health, education, housing and social security (Rutherford 1997). Not only

¹¹ The New Policy Agenda refers to a mix of policies based on neoliberal economics and liberal democratic theory (Fisher 1997; Edwards & Hulme 1996; Robinson 1995). In this context civil society organizations, particularly NGOs, are considered to be efficient mechanisms for the transfer of skills and technologies; the provision of welfare services and democratization - a crucial aspect of the neo-liberal economy. The dominant role of the state within the ‘New Policy Agenda’ is to “provide a supporting environment for private provision and reduce and rationalize public expenditures on social services” (Rutherford 1997:2).

did individuals, governments, and donors turn to civil society organizations to fill in the gaps resulting from government withdrawal, but movements emerged in opposition to the withdrawal of services, demanding participation, accountability and democratization.¹²

Research and theorizing on these new social movements grew, highlighting the transformative role of civil society movements in expanding democracy and creating new public spaces in which demands could be articulated (Alvarez & Escobar 1992; Melucci 1992; Slater 1994; Jelin 1996).

Furthermore, the crumbling of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the iron curtain were viewed by many as signs of the primacy of democracy and capitalism. This view was reinforced with the so-called third wave of transitions to democracy around the globe through the 1980s and 1990s, where a vibrant civil society was considered to be both a pre-condition¹³ and an outcome of shifts to democracy.

For development theorists and practitioners on both the right (neo-liberal) and left (radical / post-development), civil society emerged as a panacea—in the former context as part of a strategy for increasing institutional efficiency (Mohan and Stokke 2000: 249),

¹² Of note is the contradiction between IFIs' definitions of good governance in the 1980s—economic growth, financial efficiency and government cutback—and grassroots movements demands for democratization including increased participation in decision-making, accountability and transparency. Later in the decade and more so in the 1990s these two perspectives merged in donor / lender agendas for good governance and democratization (World Bank 1995; Rutherford 1997).

¹³ Blaney & Pasha (1993), explain that in order to exist, civil society entails at least a minimal representative democracy including a system of rights, freedom of association and private property. Others however, would contradict this, pointing to effective civic mobilization under authoritarian regimes and their subsequent decline in post-transition periods (Oxhorn 1995).

and in the latter context as a way to “challenge hegemonic interests within the state and market..” (Mohan and Stokke 2000: 249).

As aforementioned, mainstream development discourse currently situates civil society and democratization primarily within frameworks of (good) governance (Robinson 1998).¹⁴ In such discourses, civil society is considered to contribute to democratization in several key ways. It is considered to be a site where so-called democratic culture and social capital are fomented, and social cohesion promoted; it is attributed with assisting in democratic institutional consolidation, providing a vehicle for citizen participation in policy and political processes, and acting as a countervailing power to the state (Van Rooy and Robinson 1998; MS—Danish Association for International Cooperation 2000).¹⁵

As noted, both this interpretation of the relationship between civil society and democracy, as well as theories of democratic consolidation in Latin America, parallel the associational school (Woods 1999: 43; Hyden 1997:8) which, according to Diamond

¹⁴ Governance, was first adopted by international development agencies in the 1960s. Referred to as institution-building, it focused on “effective government performance” (Bratton & Rothchild 1992:264). In the 1990s governance has come to represent on the one hand an organizing framework that implies a new form of public management and increased efficiency in public service delivery, and on the other hand governance is also used as a relational concept in reference to the interactions between social actors and the state, specifically to issues of political legitimacy, accountability, and citizen participation.

¹⁵ These are roles assigned to civil society based on a broad survey of key bilateral and multilateral donors (Van Rooy 1998; Robinson 1998; MS 2000). Van Rooy and Robinson (1998) also point out that “there are a number of other motivations, however, for using the term civil society in donor-speak ...(including) (a) an excuse for supporting friends now that the cold war is over, (b) a way to disguise free-marketsteering, and (c) a natural, if not defensible, desire to be doing the same thing as the Jones’ down the street” (1998 Ch. 3, p. 14 in pre-published manuscript).

(1994) sees civil societies' contribution to democratization in: containing the power of the state through public scrutiny; stimulating political participation by citizens; developing such democratic norms as tolerance and compromise; creating ways of articulating, aggregating, and representing interests outside of political parties, especially at the local level; mitigating conflict through cross-cutting, or overlapping, interest; recruiting and training political leaders; questioning and reforming existing democratic institutions and procedures, and the promotion of citizenship (Diamond 1994:6 in Hyden 1997:8).

From both the donor and consolidationist perspectives, civil society is therefore not only a space for organization, but also assigned a normative role, a goal that should be sought after, as it produces social capital and expands political democracy. These roles attributed to civil society and the implicit assumptions about democracy and democratization upon which they are based, have been more thoroughly explored in debates about democratic consolidation, particularly with regard to Latin America (Van Rooy 1998; Linz & Stepan 1997; Diamond 1994; Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1989; O'Donnell 1997; Schmitter 1997). Accordingly, the next section will review consolidationist perspectives on democracy and civil society as well as the criticisms leveled against them, in order to illuminate / clarify similar discourses in development on the same subject. Specifically, the narrow focus on institutions (and institutional solutions), which is the primary thrust of both consolidation and donor (development) perspectives (Cleaver 1999), is problematized, in large part for its homogenized, depoliticized treatment of civil societies and the processes therein.

1.4 Civil Society and the Consolidation of Democracy in Latin America

Many of the debates about democratization in Latin America have tended to focus on the institutional context for the consolidation of liberal democracy¹⁶ (Alvarez 1998; Yashar 1998; Linz 1996). As aforementioned, a similar perspective underlies donor discourses on civil society and the promotion of democracy in the region. Accordingly, the following section will review in more detail the roles attributed to civil society in democratization from development and consolidationist positions as well as some of the problems with this conceptualization of civil society vis-à-vis democratization.

Linz and Stepan (1996, 1997) consider a democratic regime to be consolidated when “democracy as a complex system of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives has become the only game in town...”(1997:15). From this perspective, only democracies or states with pre-existing democratic institutions can become consolidated democracies (Lowenthal 1997; Linz and Stepan 1997:15). The minimal democratic conditions required for democratic consolidation include the existence of a state, free and contested elections,¹⁷ and rulers who govern democratically (Lowenthal 1997; Linz and Stepan 1997:15).

¹⁶ Liberal democracy, and its various forms (e.g. constitutional democracy, representative democracy, parliamentary democracy etc.), is understood in this context as the combination of political liberalism (i.e. a separation of powers, rule of law, and individual rights) and popular sovereignty. Mouffe (1996), and Smith and Blanc (1997), consider liberal democracy to be more than a form of government, but rather a symbolic ordering of social relations (Mouffe 1996:245; Smith and Blanc 1997:281).

¹⁷ Linz and Stepan (1997) specify that elections must meet the seven institutional requirements for election in a polyarchy as elaborated by R. A. Dahl (1971). These include 1) elected officials; 2) free and fair elections; 3) inclusive suffrage; 4) the right to run for office; 5) freedom of expression; 6) alternative information and 7) associational autonomy (O'Donnell 1997:41).

In states that meet the minimum criteria, the degree to which democracy has become the so-called only game in town is assessed according to specific behavioural, attitudinal and constitutional criteria. They state behavioural consolidation is achieved when “no significant national, social, economic, political or institutional actors spend significant resources attempting to achieve their objectives by creating a nondemocratic regime..” (Linz and Stepan 1997:16). Similarly, a democratic regime is consolidated “attitudinally,” when, even in a time of crisis, a majority of citizens believe that democratic procedures and institutions are “the most appropriate way to govern collective life” (Linz and Stepan 1997:16). Constitutional consolidation is achieved when governmental and non-governmental actors are all subject to “the resolution of conflict within the bounds of the specific laws, procedures, and institutions that are sanctioned by the new democratic process...” (Linz and Stepan 1997:16).

There are five additional interrelated conditions that must exist in order for Linz and Stepan to recognize a democratic political regime as consolidated. These are i) conditions conducive for the development of civil society; ii) an existing, autonomous political society;¹⁸ iii) all political actors including the government must be subject to the rule of law; iv) a usable state bureaucracy; and v) an institutionalized “economic society” (i.e. a politically regulated free-market) (1997:17, 22).

As aforementioned, from this perspective, civil society strengthens democracy in several key ways: in creating public spaces where citizen’s demands can be articulated

¹⁸ Linz and Stepan consider civil and political society to be complementary but distinct. Whereas civil society includes all forms of self-organizing autonomous groups, political society is composed only of political actors competing for formal control over state apparatus (1997:17).

(see Alvarez & Escobar 1992; Bratton 1994; Melucci 1992; Slater 1994; Jelin 1996); in stabilizing citizen's rights—as citizenship is institutionalized within the civil sphere (Seligman 1992); as a “reservoir of political, economic, cultural and moral resources to check the power of the state” (Diamond 1991:7), and to stimulate a “culture of participation” among a plurality of people and associations (Blaney & Pasha 1993; Schmitter 1997).¹⁹

In the latter capacity, premised on the understanding that civil society organizations (CSOs) are themselves democratic, civil society is considered to be a site where citizens learn to become democrats. That is, a site where norms and values of participation, cooperation, trust, and integration are fostered (Hyden 1997; Hadenius and Ugglä 1996; Reilly 1994). Through participation in democratic activities, citizens learn to deal with conflict, and “achieve the capacity to transcend their own narrow interests, and come to see their role as that of promoting a broader common interest” (Haddenius and Ugglä 1996:1623).

These norms and values generated through association have become known in political and development discourse as social capital—the focus of Robert Putnam's influential work.²⁰ In “*Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*” (1993), Putnam attributes the prosperity of Northern Italy (vis-à-vis Southern Italy) to a

¹⁹ Ideas about the importance of a democratic or political culture in a stable democracy were previously elaborated by Almond and Verba (1963) in their writing on the importance of a civic culture to democracy.

²⁰ The literature linking social capital with civil society can actually be traced back to the 19th Century. Hyden (1997), writes “..the democratic currents of the Italian Risorgimento movement..conceptualized *valor sociale*, roughly translatable as social capital.. as a feature of the growth and practice of self-governing institutions..” (1997:5).

strong civic tradition that resulted in increased social capital. Putnam defines social capital as features of social organization, “..such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions..” (1993:167).

Social capital, in this context, is considered to be a public good that both arises from and facilitates “networks of civic engagement” or voluntary cooperation (Putnam 1993:164). These networks consist of “horizontal interactions,” between people of equivalent status and power. Putnam includes bird-watching clubs, choral societies, sports-clubs, as well as mass-based parties in his definition of civic engagement (Putnam 1993:173). He suggests that the trust and cooperation generated at this level of civil society will foster “..institutional success in the broader community” (Putnam 1993:175). That is, voluntary organizations encourage wider forms of social cooperation, reinforcing norms of reciprocity and accordingly make democracy work (Putnam 1993:174; Cohen 1999).²¹

Although Putnam’s conception of social capital has come under criticism for both its methodological and theoretical assumptions (see Cohen 1999; Tarrow 1996; Portes and Landolt 1996), social capital remains central to both liberal consolidationist and development / donor discussions on civil society, democracy, and development (Cohen 1999).²²

²¹ Putnam attributes the stronger state, society, and economy to four beneficial “side-effects” of civic engagement and the resulting social capital. These include the increased cost of defecting from an individual transaction; the expansion of norms of reciprocity; the facilitation of communication and trustworthiness of individuals; as well as a “culturally-defined template for collaboration” (Putnam 1993:175).

²² Putnam’s work has been criticized on several grounds: for the circularity of his argument, i.e. voluntary associations are seen as both evidence of and the sole source of social capital (see Portes & Landolt 1996); for his narrow conception of civil society and absence of democratic

If democratic culture and social capital are the ends of civil society, as a vehicle for citizen participation, civil society functions as a means. As a public sphere for debate and contestation, civil society, from both consolidationist and development perspectives, not only transmits the will of the people or demos to the state and its various institutions but acts as a countervailing power to check the state and ensure accountability. In Tocquevillian terms, "...a public discourse forged out of the politics of affirmation and contestation seeks to hold the state accountable and responsible..." (Chandhoke 1995:176). Donor mandates to strengthen civil society are explicitly aimed at increasing capacity for citizen participation in decision-making of the state (Mohan & Stokke 2000; Stiles 1998; Hadenius and Ugglä 1996; Fisher 1997). Hadenius and Ugglä refer to this as the pluralist function of civil society—"...by organized collective action, groups can easier hold their own and protect their interests vis-à-vis ... the state" (1996:1622). They argue that a "well-organized, plural civil society" not only opens up channels for popular participation, but creates a "bulwark against despotic tendencies in political life.." (1996:1622). They further state that to do so, civil society organizations must be autonomous and seeking to influence (even indirectly) state policy (Hadenius and Ugglä 1996:1624).

Criticism has been directed at these interpretations of civil society and its roles in institutions in his analysis of social trust (Cohen 1999); for the lack of clarity in defining the terms, i.e. between social capital, generalized reciprocity, and social trust. Cohen (1999) also points out Putnam's failure to explain how intragroup or interpersonal trust evolves into broader social trust beyond the immediate group (p.219). Cohen argues that "the metaphor of social 'capital' allows the theorist to finesse the generalization issue and to blur these distinctions by suggesting a false analogy between direct interpersonal social relations and economic exchanges on the market. Capital accumulated in one context of course can be invested in another place: it can be saved, inherited, and exchanged regardless of its particular form because there is a universal equivalent for it—money—and an institutional framework for exchange—the market economy"(1999:221).

democratization. It is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper to provide an indepth analysis of the many criticisms directed at civil society both in the context of development and democratization and as a concept in political theory. However the proceeding section will provide an overview of key concerns, particularly those that reinforce the need to consider micro-political relations within civil society—the focus of this paper.

1.5 Problematizing Consolidationist / Development Perspectives on Civil Society and the Deepening of Democracy in Latin America

Consolidation theories have been criticized for their ethnocentric, determinist perception that all non-consolidated democracies are at some stage of the trajectory towards consolidation (O'Donnell 1997:45). O'Donnell points out that a focus on the existence (or absence) of highly formalized and complex organizations on the consolidation checklist precludes alternative typologies and understandings of the existing and often enduring rules and institutions of so-called non-consolidated democracies. "Calling some polyarchies consolidated or highly institutionalized may be no more than saying that they are institutionalized in ways that one expects and of which one approves"(1997:45). He also finds the consolidationists' assumption that once the formal rules of the game are established the expected behaviour of the citizens will ensue, not able to take into account the various forms of particularism²³ that also exist in equilibrium within the institutional framework of certain polyarchies.

²³ Particularism is used to collectively refer to the variety of "non-universalistic" relationships that persist in many polyarchies, including clientelism, patronage, nepotism, etc.. (O'Donnell 1997:46-7).

Others have criticized the consolidationists' for excluding relations of power in their structural focus on institutions. "The emphasis on rules and procedures leaves aside the configuration of power relations and overlooks the modes in which actors interpret rules, negotiate around them, and apply them as a function of power resources which are distributed unequally" (Vilas 1997:11). Accordingly theorists have increasingly drawn attention to the challenges that inequality, exclusion, and difference pose to narrow conceptions of democratic consolidation (Vilas 1997; Dagnino 1998; Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998; Schild 1998; Oxhorn 1999). They see the focus of consolidation theorists on institutional engineering, as tending to overlook the impact of the historically structured, socio-cultural aspects of social inequality. Consequently, thin democracies exist, in which all individuals are legal citizens, yet a majority are excluded from meaningful participation²⁴ in social, political, and economic life (Phillips 1991; Alvarez, Dagnino, Escobar 1998).

Other concerns with specific regard to development / consolidationist interpretations of civil society and its roles in democratization include it's roots—as a western tradition arising out of particular European historic conditions that therefore cannot easily be transplanted into non-western contexts (Seligman 1992; Bickford 1995), and that its promotion in development along with western democracy, represents another

²⁴ The concept of participation remains hollow without clarification as to what it entails in specific contexts. Cleaver (1999) warns that participation (both political participation and participation as a development approach), has come to be seen as intrinsically good—an unproblematic means to empowerment (p.598). In the current context, political participation is taken as the participation of citizens in processes and institutions in which "relevant decisions are taken about life, welfare, and about what people consider important" (Vilas 1997:19). It does not assume that participation and subordination are diametrically opposed, but shaped by broader social, historical, and economic circumstances.

form of neo-colonialism (see Escobar 1995; Esteva 1987; Crush 1995; Slater 1997).²⁵ Feminists highlight the patriarchal historical roots of civil society which has tended to exclude women. As Phillips (1999) points out “..civil society often operates to keep women out....(and) tends to reflect whatever is the current distribution of sexual power, in fact the unregulated nature of civil associations make them more prone to discriminatory behaviour than the publicly scrutinized institutions of the state...” (1999:58).²⁶ The distinction between public and private which has served to define the boundaries of the civil sphere for much of its existence, and the relegation of women to the private realm is often the focus of feminist critique. This is one of the reasons, argues Chandhoke (1995), that it is not useful to think of the public / private as polarities but as points along a continuum, with movement between the two taking place within the civil sphere, where so-called private issues such as domestic violence can be brought into the public arena (Chandhoke 1995:173-175).

Others challenge the assumed links between civil society and deeper democracy, arguing that the relationship is not always clear (see Oxhorn 1995; 1998; Van Rooy and

²⁵ Others point out, however, that the notion that associational life did not exist beyond the west is fallacious, and moreover it is particularly patronizing to assume that exogenous ideas / traditions cannot be useful or successfully adapted to other contexts. As Taylor (1990) points out, with regard to democracy—“Western democracy wasn’t written in our genes. At the same time, the chauvinistic idea that representative institutions cannot take root outside of their home culture is refuted by the existence of such societies as India and Japan” (Taylor, 1990:101 in Van Rooy 1998).

²⁶ Phillips argues, however, that the concept of civil society is still useful or compatible with feminist perspectives for main reasons. Firstly, feminist perspectives tends to be radically pluralist, and “pluralism finds a more welcome home in the associations of civil society than in either family or state..,” and secondly due to the “looseness or indeterminacy of certain civil society organizations that makes them more hospitable to feminist politics and more accessible that “male-dominated states..” (1999:56).

Robinson 1998). This is partly due to evidence of strong civil societies in weak democracies or authoritarian governments, such as Chile in the 1970s and 1980s (Oxhorn 1995), and the decline of civil society in post-democratic transition periods, for example in Uruguay (Canel 1992). The links between civil society and democracy also become blurred with evidence that the sphere of civil society and individual organizations are not necessarily democratic themselves, and therefore unlikely to serve as schooling grounds where citizens' learn to participate and behave democratically. Common criticisms include: institutional problems such as lack of financial autonomy; limited financial, technical and managerial capacity, lack of accountability and undemocratic internal processes, and a lack of transparency in objectives and practices (Myllyla 1998; Bebbington & Thiele 1993). That is, civil society organizations (CSOs) are vulnerable to challenges similar to those faced by all other institutions, often repeating the patterns and power structures of the societies within which they are based (Fisher 1997:456).

Also problematic to the goals of development and democratization is the transhistorical, essentialized conception of civil society, which has emerged as the terrain of the good and the enlightened (Slater 1997). Current discussions around civil society are consistently divorced from ethnographic particulars, disaggregated according to large geographic regions at best (Bratton 1994; Rutherford 1997). Yet civil society organizations and movements are engaged in unique and complex relationships with the state, society, and the economy. These historical, political, and cultural specificities are lost when civil society is treated as universal or transhistorical (Blaney & Pasha 1994:4; Brown 1997:165; Kothari 1996:169).

This is significant, for in all instances of civic organization, social actors have differential access to material, cultural, and political resources, and in the Latin American context, resource access often correlates to ethnicity, gender, and class (Alvarez, Dagnino, Escobar 1998:9). Persistent relations of subordination and exclusion of certain civil society actors from meaningful political participation can create restricted public and political spheres in which the inequalities that pervade society are reproduced. As Chandhoke points out, “.. the problem with the liberal discourse which privileges civil society is that it is...profoundly indifferent to the ability or inability of the inhabitants of civil society to participate in the sphere of discussion and debate on equal terms..” (Chandhoke 1995:12).²⁷

Alliances and coalitions within civil society or even sectors of civil society are by no means a given; in fact, in Latin America civil society tends to be highly fragmented. Oxhorn (1999) attributes the fragmentation and atomization of the public sphere in the region to the dependence of organizations on external funding and other resources, to problems of social welfare and the decentralization of social welfare services which forces organizations to restrict their focus to “narrowly circumscribed activities;” and to increased individual orientation towards market activities leading to political apathy (1999:9).²⁸

²⁷ Civil society organizations’ relationships with the state are also heterogeneous. In most cases they are multi-leveled, dynamic, and very hard to characterize. Just as civil society is not a unified actor with an internally consistent agenda, the state must also be disaggregated, as its role hinges on “diffuse junctures with social organizations” with often blurred boundaries (Migdal 1994:9-10).

²⁸ Oxhorn (1999) considers these problems to be outcomes of the neopluralist politics that he considers pervasive in Latin America. Neopluralism, according to Oxhorn, “replaces the state-centered pattern of incorporating subordinate classes associated with state corporatism and processes of controlled inclusion with a market-centered pattern of lower class incorporation” the

Furthermore, it is argued that homogeneous conceptions of the civil sphere can depoliticize organizational life and social transformation (Slater 1997; Walker 1995). This charge has been leveled at the development apparatus as a whole by Ferguson in his influential book *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (1990). In it he argues that development institutions generate their own form of discourse that creates structures of knowledge around particular objects—in this case Lesotho, that are often removed from historical, political realities. He shows how interventions are then organized on the basis of this structure of knowledge resulting in “the depoliticizing (of) everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight...” (1990: xiv).

Some of these concerns have been addressed at the theoretical level in alternative models of democracy and participation, which consider civil society (and the public sphere) to be a site of conflict and contestation (Mouffe 1995; Honig 1996; Flyvbjerg 1998). Although such models also place emphasis on the role of civil society and citizen participation in deepening democracy (Smith and Blanc 1997:287), they “reject the possibility of a non-exclusive public sphere(s)” (Mouffe 1996), arguing that difference and the accompanying unequal relations of power are ineradicable parts of democratic politics. In these interpretations, relations of power and exclusion are not swept aside but rather brought to the fore of public debate, made visible so that they can enter the terrain of contestation (Mouffe & Laclau 1985; Honig 1996).

pluralist aspect comes from the “multiplicity of forms of participation that neopluralism entails..” (1998: 205).

Although, within radical (pluralist) conceptions of democracy, civil societies are formulated as conflictive spheres where hierarchical social relations are replicated (Oxhorn 1999; Vilas 1997; Mouffe 1996; Honig 1996; Fraser 1997), there continues to be an absence of on the ground analyses of the ways in which these micro-political relations within civil societies affect citizen participation in decision-making processes in specific locales (Feree and Roth 1998). According to Fisher (1997), "...most contemporary studies (of civil society) do not include systematic analyses of power relationships within the groups and associations of civil society and the forms and channels of participation that affect power relationships..." (1997:456). Clearly a more context-specific understandings of the micro-political processes within particular spheres of organizational life is required. Although these types of questions and analyses has been put forth by different theorists and practitioners (Fuentes & Frank 1989; Jakobsen 1999; Alvarez, Escobar & Dagnino 1998), there continues to be an absence of case studies of this kind (Fisher 1997). As Fisher (1997) notes, there is a need to refocus our attention to the processes, and not just the institutions of civil society (p.456). Civil society organizations and other actors and movements within civil society, if considered at all, have tended to be looked at separately, or alternately as a cohesive whole. This neglects not only the heterogeneity of movements and organizations but the interactions, boundaries, and alliances that are part of the *processes* within civil societies in specific contexts. As Cleaver (1999) points out, "...a more dynamic vision is needed of community and institutions that incorporates social networks and recognizes dispersed and contingent power relations, and the exclusionary as well as inclusionary nature of participation..." (1999: 609). Accordingly, this thesis posits that there is a need to focus

on the micro-political relations with civil societies and between actors and organizations in order for civil society to be more usefully conceptualized in donor discourses on democratization and development.

1.6 Reflections on Chapter One

This Chapter has aimed to provide a theoretical / conceptual framework within which to situate the proceeding case study and analysis. It has provided an overview of the conceptual history of civil society, and examined its contemporary uses as well as its rise to the fore of both post-development and mainstream development / donor discourses. It then argued that these discourses draw upon a similar understanding of the roles of civil society in democratization as political theories on democratic consolidation which focus on the Latin American context. Both consider civil society to be the site where social capital and a culture of democracy are generated, and where citizens can participate in (and limit) state decision-making. The criticisms leveled at these interpretations of civil society and democratization were then reviewed, and it was posited that attention to the micro-political relations between organizations within the civil sphere in particular contexts might usefully nuance current homogenized, depoliticized, and institutionally-focused conceptions of civil society that pervade both perspectives.

Chapter Two reviews the research methodology used in generating information for the case study, presented in Chapter Three. It also explores some of the broader issues surrounding qualitative research including representation, legitimacy and the positionality of the researcher within the process.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Of course, a storyteller could produce almost any effect from a tale, depending on how he told it...

(Robert Darnton, 1984: 53)

For the purpose of this thesis, a qualitative research strategy centered around semi-structured interviews was used in gathering information in Ecuador.²⁹ The research strategy and process are outlined in this section. First however, the broader issues surrounding qualitative research including representation, subjectivity, legitimacy and data validity will be reviewed in order to situate the selected methodology. The methodology used, as well as my reflections upon the methodology and research limitations will also be outlined.

2.1 Representation and Adequacy in Qualitative Research

....I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speak subject, and you are now at the center of my talk...

(hooks 1991: 152).

²⁹ Qualitative research does not consist of a single methodology but is pluralistic, and includes a range of approaches such as ethnography, semiotics, life history, historical research as well as phenomenology (Krefting 1991).

Qualitative research continues to be confronted by issues of representation and subjectivity that the insights of feminist and critical theories, combined with a postmodern problematization of Enlightenment essentialism, have brought to the fore.³⁰ In the social sciences it is now widely accepted that the qualitative researcher does not represent an objective, authoritative, or politically neutral observer standing “outside and above the text” (Lincoln & Denzin 1994:576). Rather, the researcher’s subjectivity is reflected in her ideological perspectives, personal identities and affiliations, as well as her material and social location. The qualitative researcher no longer has access to a privileged frame of reference from which to “know the Other or give voice to the Other..” (Spivak 1988 in Fine 1994:75). In fact as Fine (1994) points out, there is no

³⁰ Critical theory refers to a wide range of ideas that includes writers as diverse as the Frankfurt School to Foucault, Habermas and Bhaktin. In the present context, its definition is based on Kincheloe and McLaren’s list of basic assumptions accepted by a critical theorist or researcher: “..that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable....that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression” (1994:140). Nor is feminist theory conceived of as a single category in this context, there is no feminist standpoint. As Olesen (1994) points out, there are many feminisms of which some are conflicting. Useful to the current context, however, is the shared outlook that “it is important to center and make problematic women’s diverse situations and the institutions and frames that influence those situations” (1994:158). Postmodern, in this context, refers to the idea that there is no single, ‘correct’ representation of reality, but that meaning is subjective. In response to the often cited criticism that a postmodern perspective inevitably leads to the impossibility of meaningful research (i.e. one can only speak for oneself), Kincheloe and McLaren usefully distinguish between oppositional postmodernism and ludic postmodernism (as elaborated by Ebert 1991). They argue that the latter is less useful for researchers as it is limited by the absolute “undecidability of meaning and difference” which ultimately leads to “nihilism and inaction” (Kincheloe and McLaren 1994: 144). In contrast, oppositional or critical postmodernism politicizes the concept of difference by situating it within social and historical contexts, allowing for a more transformative critique and material intervention (Kincheloe and McLaren 1994: 144). Similarly, a materialist postmodern (feminist) approach, which combines attention to difference with a focus on (women’s) lived experiences also allows for a transformative (rather than uncritical) problematization of the modern’ (see Parpart 1995).

Other, rather there are plural voices of “those Othered” (Fine 1994:75).³¹ These realizations have led to the emergence of participatory as well as increasingly critical qualitative research, which have informed my research strategy and selected methodology.

2.2 Participatory-ness of the Research Strategy

Participatory research, including Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), and Feminist Action Research (FAR), are currently the preferred tools in the qualitative research tool-kit. More than a method of social investigation, participatory research involves education and action components, and ultimately seeks to radically transform fundamental societal structures and relationships (Maguire 1987:29).

One of the underlying assumptions of the participatory research model, which was shaped in large part by Brazilian educator Paolo Freire’s writing on the importance of developing a critical consciousness for social change (Freire 1970; Manzo 1995), is that knowledge is the basis of power and control. The participatory research process is therefore based on collective inquiry, and research is demystified by involving all

³¹ This is particularly relevant in research with and about women. The conceptualization of women or Third World Women as a universal or essential category has been problematized for homogenizing and reducing differences among women to a single framework (Mohanty 1991, 1995; Spivak 1988). This case study does not represent research about women in Ecuador, but in fact points to the conflicting identities held by different women that shape their strategies to effect social transformation.

participants in deciding the research topic, the research method, and the uses of the information generated.

The research undertaken in the present context did not include an explicit education or action component, and therefore cannot be defined as Participatory Action Research in the strict sense. However if the participatory-ness of a given research project is reconceptualized as existing along a continuum, elements of the research strategy selected incorporate many of the assumptions and methods of the participatory model, including notions of shared power, and research participants as knowledgeable partners (Maguire 1987:35). Moreover, although the research questions were the starting point for the interviews, participants directed the flow of conversation and determined the meaning of conditional concepts such as effectiveness or success within the context of the conversation.

2.3 Critical Approaches to the Research Process

Although not strictly participatory, the present research strategy was informed by emerging critical approaches to qualitative research. A more critical research strategy is one in which "...the researchers try to become aware of the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform their research..."(Kincheloe & McLaren 1994:140). Critical research does not consist of an empirical representation of the world but rather acknowledges that the way in which data is analyzed and interpreted is highly dependent upon the researcher's ideological assumptions. The researcher is no longer

invisible, but is positioned as a gendered, raced, and classed subject (Fine 1994:76), in my case as a white, middle-class woman from urban Canada.³²

The positioning of the researcher is particularly relevant in the context of cross-cultural research. In *Orientalism* (1979), E. Said highlights the neo-colonial aspects of western writing about non-westerners, apparent, for example, in the construction of the Orient and its populations as the other about whom the West maintains (discursive) authority. Although Said has since been criticized not only for homogenizing the political and cultural differences of the peoples he claims to represent, but also for not suggesting an alternative means to represent points of view across cultural boundaries (Marcus & Fischer 1986), issues of representation persist.

Acknowledgment of the subjective elements of qualitative research and challenges of representation has provoked a rethinking of the concept of data validity and reliability which are more relevant to a quantitative research model. Underpinning the notion of data validity is the ideal that there is a single truth / reality that can be uncovered through careful inquiry. This stands in contradiction to the critical researcher's assumption that there exists no single authoritative voice in qualitative research. Yet without some benchmark for validity how can meaningful or good research be distinguished?

Qualitative researchers and theorists from varied disciplines have recast positivist conceptions of validity, substituting it with alternate means of assessment based on trustworthiness and credibility (see Agar 1986; Guba 1981; Lincoln and Guba 1985).

³² The challenge however, is to acknowledge one's subjectivity without "...putting the personal self so deeply back into the text that it completely dominates, so that the work becomes narcissistic" or self-indulgent (Brunner in Lincoln and Denzin 1994: 578).

Trustworthiness or credibility in qualitative research is not defined a priori by the researcher, but “obtained from the discovery of human experiences as they are perceived by the participants”(Krefting 1990:215). Credibility can be attained and assessed in a variety of ways including triangulation, reflexivity, the use of low inference descriptors, participant feedback, and through the interviewing process itself. These techniques are particularly important in the context of cross-cultural research, where issues of subjectivity and representation become even trickier. Each of these techniques and the ways that they were applied in the present research will be outlined in the description of the research process below.

2.4 The Research Process

With these challenges and issues in mind, and the permission of the Carleton University Ethics Committee, I undertook qualitative research in Quito, Ecuador from September through November 1999. I had previously lived and worked in Ecuador for over two and a half years in the mid-1990s, an experience which greatly facilitated the present research process. Although I had spoken with several women active in political organizations prior to my departure, the majority of participants were contacted upon arrival in Ecuador. There are hundreds of women’s organizations in different regions of Ecuador, but I confined the scope of my research to organizations that were based in Quito and that sought participation in policy or political processes an explicit part of their mandate (see Chapter Three).

Of the twenty-two organizations initially contacted, interviews were carried out with thirty-three participants from fifteen different organizations. Information from twenty-one participants in ten of the fifteen organizations is included in the case study in Chapter Three. The information was primarily drawn from ten of the fifteen organizations due to these organizations' comparability, i.e. their similarity of mandates and strategies for action, and because they provided the most relevant information for the purpose of this specific study, i.e. they provided information on the micro-political relations with other organizations in the same area. In fact, most of the findings presented in Chapter Three are drawn specifically from interviews with eighteen participants from seven of the organizations. This data was the most adequate as I had interviews with more than one participant in each organization and had been able to return to review the information generated with them.

I used semi-structured interviews as a research strategy in order to facilitate free-flowing discussion of the research topic in such a way as to include story-telling, personal feelings and opinions.³³ Prior to each interview I introduced myself and the objectives of my research. The majority of interviews lasted for a minimum of an hour and often more—several lasting over three hours. Although the research questions

³³ Semi-structured rather than traditionally structured interviews have also been selected in order to overcome some of "...those aspects of interviewing which are embedded in a particular research protocol..which assumes a predominantly masculine (positivist) model of society.."(Oakley 1981:31). Oakley takes issue with a traditional, hierarchical approach to interviewing in which the interviewee plays a passive role in adapting to the definition of the situation as constructed by the de-personalized interviewer. She suggests that the paradigm of traditional (structured) interviewing "creates problems for feminist interviewers whose primary orientation is towards the validation of women's subjective experiences as women and as people.."(1981:30). A feminist critical social researcher is a collaborator and knowledge is inextricably bound up in relations of power (Maguire 1987; Foucault 1980).

framed the interview, it was primarily the participants who directed the flow of conversation, which was transcribed and, when appropriate, tape-recorded. Several of the participants preferred not to be taped, and many specifically requested not to be identified by name, primarily due to the sensitive and political nature of some of the questions discussed, particularly with regard to their relationship with other organizations and the state Department for Women-CONAMU. For this reason, specific participants are not named in this paper.³⁴

Strategies that were used to promote qualitative research credibility or trustworthiness of the information generated from the interview process included the use of low-inference descriptors, triangulation, participant feedback, and reflexivity (Johnson 1997). The use of participant feedback and low-inference descriptors were particularly important given the cross-cultural context and the fact that the interviews were carried out in Spanish, a second language for both myself and several of the participants.

“Low-inference descriptors” are defined as “the use of description phrased very close to the participants accounts and researchers field notes”(Johnson 1998:283). The low-inference descriptors used in this context include verbatim narrative and direct quotes, that aim to enhance the credibility of data by reducing the need for interpretation. Tape recording some of the interviews and transcribing the information directly

³⁴ Participants were also asked whether they preferred that the organization’s name remain confidential as well. Despite their preference not to be named individually, none of the participants in organizations referred to in this paper requested that the organization remain anonymous. Therefore in the presentation and analysis of the case study (Chapters Three and Four), organizations, but not specific participants, are referred to.

facilitated this strategy. In cases where it was not appropriate to tape record, I would take care to ensure that my notes reflected the narrative as closely as possible.³⁵

Participant feedback was also crucial in providing verification and insight into the interpretations and conclusions drawn based on the stories/information gathered. I obtained participant feedback in several ways. At the end of each interview I would review the notes that I had taken with the participant in order to verify that I had correctly understood their main points. Whenever possible, I would arrange a second interview with the participant in order to clarify information transcribed from the previous conversation and enable them to comment or add further thoughts. In some cases, if I was unable to arrange a second interview, I would clarify questions over the phone or via email. In a few cases, this means of clarification continued even after my return to Canada.

Triangulation, based on the idea of convergence of multiple perspectives for confirmation (Krefting 1991), was also used when appropriate to assure the credibility of information gathered. Blaikie (1991) warns that triangulation can be at odds with critical research as it can privilege certain perspectives, without taking into account the existence of legitimately different interpretations among participants. In the present research context, triangulation was used only to affirm the views of individual participants, for example the converging views of very differently positioned participants regarding the relationship between CONAMU (the State department for women) and non-state organizations, was useful to my analysis.

³⁵ In the presentation of the research findings in Chapter 3, some quotes from the participants are in Spanish with my translation in English, and others are in English only depending on whether the quotes came from transcribed tapes or from my notes, which I took in English.

2.5 Reflections on the Research Process

Reflexivity, the self-reflection by a researcher about the influence of her own position, including personal history, social location, identities and ideologies, on the research process (Johnson 1997:283), was an ongoing part of my research in Ecuador and during the writing of the thesis in Ottawa. In Ecuador, I kept a journal in which I recorded my personal reflections on the research process, in particular the limitations and challenges which I faced. These included the discrepancy between (methodological) theory and practise, cross-cultural differences—in particular language and translation, and my own position as researcher.

Prior to my departure I had read broadly and attended workshops on the research process and a variety of methodologies including critical and participatory research techniques. I went to Ecuador wielding an array of research tools and techniques. Although this research provided a useful background, in Ecuador the research process took on a life of its own. I initially tried to introduce participatory activities during the interviews, however most participants were more comfortable explaining verbally, rather than drawing or mapping; for this reason most of the information presented in the case study (Chapter Three) was generated through semi-structured interviews. Ideally, I would have carried out repeat interviews with all participants from each organization, and although this occurred in some cases, it was not possible with all participants. Also, I would have liked to have been able to receive feedback from the participants prior to the final presentation of information, however this was not possible in all cases either.

One of the greatest challenges was that of translation. As previously mentioned I decided not to have a translator assist during the interviews, a decision which had advantages and disadvantages. With a relatively high level of fluency in Spanish I felt comfortable interacting directly with the participants. However Marcus and Fischer (1986) point out that “in a conversation between two people, there is always at least a third, that is, the mediation of the embedded or unconscious cultural structures in language, terminologies, nonverbal codes of behaviour, and assumptions...”(1986:31). In translating, the researcher or narrator must mediate between “distinct sets of categories and cultural conceptions..” (Marcus and Fischer 1986:31). Despite my efforts to clarify the information received, either on the spot or in a second interview, there is no doubt that certain phrases, meanings, and assumptions remained ambiguous. This is one of the limitations of my research and cross-cultural research in general.

As aforementioned, reflection upon one’s ideological positioning vis-à-vis the research and the information presented is also an important aspect of critical research. In this regard, it is hoped that the “ideological imperatives” and “epistemological presuppositions” (Kincheloe & McLaren 1994:140), that have informed my approach to the topic and point of entry to the fieldwork are evident in the theoretical perspectives selected to frame the research, outlined in Chapter One. My position specifically as a student funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Ottawa also influenced the research process. Although I was not a representative of IDRC, my affiliation with the development research organization, well-known in the region, at times facilitated setting up interviews but possibly constrained some conversations.

Overall, the primary research process was both frustrating and rewarding, but above all it was an invaluable learning experience linking theoretical perspectives to contextualized strategies of women working towards significant social and political transformation. The research process was also invaluable in generating information that would not have been available through secondary sources. This is particularly true of the voices of participants in indigenous women's organizations who, because of a lack of resources for publications or organizational literature, would not have been easily heard without firsthand interviews. Perhaps most importantly, the primary research process initiated an exchange of ideas, between myself and the other women who participated, and as a result the case study, presented in the proceeding Chapter Three, is able to provide firsthand glimpses into very complex, and highly context-specific sets of relations.

Chapter 3: A Case Study of Micro-Political Relations Among Women's Organizations in Ecuador

Chapter One reviewed theoretical perspectives on civil society and its potential contributions to the deepening of democracy in Latin America. It demonstrated that in mainstream discourses on development and democratic consolidation, a cohesive, homogenous conception of civil society prevails. It argued that there is a need for context-specific analyses of the complex micro-political relations that exist within civil societies and their implications for development and democratization in the region.

Accordingly, the purpose of Chapter Three is to provide a concrete example of the micro-political relations that can exist even within one sector of civil society, in this case within the women's movement in Quito, Ecuador. Research reveals that despite the existence of factors promoting joint action among the organizations studied, this sector of the women's movement is characterized by fragmentation particularly in relation to ethnicity. That is, despite common agendas, shared concerns and discourses, division exists among *mestizo* women's organizations, between *mestizo* and indigenous women's organizations, and within indigenous women's organizations themselves. The implications of these inter-organizational relations for conceptualizing civil society in the context of democracy and development are assessed in Chapter Four.

The first part of Chapter Three provides background information necessary to contextualize the Ecuadorian case study. It first looks briefly at some of the historical, socio-political and economic factors that underlie the problems of democracy in Ecuador's most recent democratic period following the transition from military rule in 1979. Despite being the chronological leader in its transition to democracy in the region,

Ecuadorian democracy remains weak, with a majority of its citizens excluded from meaningful participation in social, political, and economic life (Conaghan and Malloy 1994; Conaghan 1996; Larrea and North 1997; De la Torre 1997). Research has shown that in response to these exclusionary relations, various actors and organizations within Ecuadorian civil society have succeeded in influencing policy processes at specific moments through collective action (Yashar 1999; Sawyer 1997; Selverston 1997; Slater 1997). There has been little research, however, on the relations among actors within civil society in Ecuador and their implications for democratization (Selverston 1997).

The second part of Chapter Three accordingly focuses on the women's movement within Ecuador, specifically on contemporary organizations that aim to transform exclusionary political relations by placing women's issues and concerns on national policy agendas. It provides a historical perspective of women organizing in the region before turning to Ecuador's current organizational landscape. The information generated during the primary research process is then presented.

Three specific sets of inter-organizational relations are examined—between *mestizo* (or not explicitly indigenous) women's organizations, between *mestizo* organizations and indigenous women's organizations, and among indigenous women's organizations themselves. Sources of division in each of the three cases are analyzed. They include the particularistic relations that some organizations had formed with certain politicians or political departments, cited differences between *mestizo* and indigenous women's organizations, as well as different conceptions of the relationship between gender and ethnicity, and the relation of indigenous women's organizations to the larger indigenous movement.

As noted in the Introduction of the paper, although the case study explores micro-politics among women's organizations, the focus of the research is not on *women* per se, but on micro-political relations within civil society in a specific context. Women's organizations were primarily selected not because they are *women's* organizations but because they cut across boundaries of gender and ethnicity, two key aspects of difference in Ecuador's exclusionary democracy.³⁶

3.1 Ecuador's Democratic Deficit

Chapter One highlighted the multiple roles that civil society has been assigned in the task of strengthening democracy, particularly in the so-called third wave democracies predominant in Latin America. Key aspects included providing a space or vehicle for citizen participation in political and policy processes, creating social capital as a byproduct of associational life, and in doing so promoting a culture of democracy. These outcomes are significant for Ecuador, given the current thinness of democratic rule and the weakness of citizen participation. This section (3.1) will examine in detail the thinness of current democratic rule in Ecuador, looking at the underlying socio-political and economic factors before turning to the role of civil society in this context.

Despite a negotiated transition from military to civilian rule in 1979, democracy

³⁶ Women's organizations were also selected for logistical reasons, as I had previously established contacts with some of the organizations. It is not coincidental, however, that most recent analyses of inter-organizational networks tend to focus on women's movements (Jakobsen 1998; Phillips 1991; Alvarez 1997; Fereé & Roth 1998), for it is predominantly within gender and feminist theories that attention has been focused on the interactions between gender, race, class and the challenges that these multiple intersecting differences pose to theories about civil society, citizen participation and democratization (Fraser 1995).

in Ecuador remains extremely fragile and thin from both minimalist procedural and participatory perspectives. Hershberg (1999) points to the strength and influence of the Ecuadorian armed forces as a major obstacle to democratic rule. He classifies Ecuador as a “tutelary democracy,” one in which “the satisfaction of one or both criteria for polyarchy is profoundly in doubt due to the influence of the armed forces over the political system and the dubious autonomy of civilian politicians with regard to the conduct of domestic and foreign policy” (1999: 9). The control exerted by the armed forces was evident in 1997 when they assisted in the dismissal of populist President Abdala Bucaram (El Loco) and more recently in the January 21st 2000 military coup.³⁷ However the excessive political power of the military is but one of the problems undermining Ecuador’s democracy.

Conaghan and Malloy (1994) attribute the thinness and fragility of contemporary democracy, not only in Ecuador but the Andean region as a whole, to the absence of governmental “responsiveness and accountability to the public” (Conaghan and Malloy 1994: 221). They point to the “marginalization of the legislature; the arrogance and autonomy of the executive branch; the growing disjunction between electoral choice and public policy; the weakness of political parties; the devaluation of “politics” and the entrenchment of economics as the framing discipline of public policy; the forced contraction, through neoliberal policies, of the public sphere (and by definition the contraction of what may be defined as rights). . . .” (Conaghan and Malloy 1994: 22)

³⁷ In the first military coup in Latin America since Haiti’s in 1991, the armed forces, in conjunction with indigenous organizations, removed President Jamil Mahuad and installed then Vice-President Noboa.

Conaghan (1996) categorizes these deficiencies as “faulty” political linkages—the failure of politicians and political institutions to integrate citizen’s demands into governing processes (1996: 34). She argues that these faulty linkages are a not only the result of political problems—weak institutions, a concentration of political power, clientelist patterns of exercising political power,³⁸ breaches of democratic process, and weak political parties—but also the persistence of severe social exclusion, poverty, and inequality (Conaghan 1996: 34).

Poverty and inequality continue to increase in Ecuador, one of the poorest countries in the region. Currently, an estimated 69% of the population live below the national poverty line—an increase of 12% since 1987 (Saltos y Vasquez 1999: 260-265). Economic inequity is also increasing; 63.4% of Ecuador’s wealth is concentrated among 20% of the population, whereas the poorest 20% of the population share only 2.16% of the total wealth (Saltos y Vasquez 1999: 260-265).³⁹ State spending on social services as a percentage of GNP has decreased from 38% in 1980 to 20.3% in 1999; in the same time period, percentage in GNP spent servicing the debt, currently over US\$16 billion,

³⁸ O’Donnell (1997) sees clientelism as a form of particularism, and encompassing a wide range of relationships “ranging from hierarchical particularistic exchanges, patronage, nepotism, and favours to actions that..that would be considered corrupt..” (1997:46). He argues that clientalism or particularism is in fact an informal but highly influential institution in Latin America politics. Although not the focus of this paper, this is evidenced in case study with regard to the Ecuadorean context.

³⁹ Vilas (1997) emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between new and old inequality, particularly in the Latin American context. He asks, “..to what extent are we facing something really new, or are we just witness to an updating of well-known ingredients of the Latin American political *longue durée*..”(1997:26). He appropriately points out that often, novelty lies only in the particular combination of factors, rather than in the factors themselves. However, economic, political, and institutional transformations that took place at the end of the 1980s and early in the 1990s did introduce a variety of changes in Latin America, including political actors, economic restructuring, the consolidation of institutions democracy, state reforms with emphases on deregulation and privatization, and the emergence of new actors alongside traditional ones.

has increased from 8% to 41% (Saltos y Vasquez 1999: 260-265).

Poverty and inequality disproportionately affect Ecuador's indigenous populations, who have historically been considered to be "sub-human" in the national imaginary, despite representing nearly half of the country's total population (Becker 1999:2). As Selverston (1997) points out, the exclusion of indigenous peoples is reflected in cultural, economic, as well as political practises (1997:172). She finds the roots of exclusion in the "...colonialist mentality of Spanish domination of indigenous peoples that laid the framework for the development of a European-style nation state that required economic and political integration and projects of forced cultural assimilation.." (1997:172). She argues that this pattern of cultural and economic domination is reflected in present day politics in Ecuador, and cites a recent quote from a provincial governor who stated that "the reason Ecuador is so poor is that we have too many Indians" (Selverston 1993 in Selverston 1997:172).

Such pervasive poverty and inequality limit the meaningful exercise of citizenship rights (Vilas 1997). In Ecuador, the legal rights of citizens, as outlined in the Constitution, are undermined by the persistent devaluation and exclusion of the poor, women, indigenous populations and other marginalized populations, all of whom face barriers to meaningful participation in the political institutions and decision-making processes (Becker 1999; Selverston 1997). In practice, for most Ecuadorians citizenship rights do not extend beyond the right to vote. Accordingly Becker (1999) asks "what does democracy mean for a country that does not attempt to extend equal civil, political,

and social rights to all its people?" (Becker 1999: 2).⁴⁰

The following section reviews several different perspectives on the factors underlying Ecuador's exclusionary democracy, including the influence of historically structured inequality, the nature of Ecuador's most recent transition to democracy, and neo-liberal economic policies that have dominated in the post-transition period. These factors shed light not only on the problems facing democratic rule in Ecuador, but also on the parameters that shape / limit associational life and its potential contribution to deepening democracy both institutionally and in everyday life.

3.1.1 *Factors Underlying Ecuador's Democratic Deficit*

It is clear that historical circumstances underlie Ecuador's contemporary social, economic, and democratic difficulties. Larrea and North (1997) state that "The country's

⁴⁰ Ecuador's Constitution was re-written in August, 1999. It is extremely progressive and comprehensive, and relevant to the present context, outlines very clearly the rights of all Ecuadorian citizens within its democratic system. Article 1 states "*El Ecuador es un estado social de derecho, soberano, unitario, independiente, democrático, pluricultural y multiétnico. Su gobierno es republicano, presidencial, electivo, representativo, responsable, alternativo, participativo y de administración descentralizada*" (Constitucion política de la Republica del Ecuador 1999:1). Article 23 outlines comprehensive civil rights extended equally to all citizens; Article 26 – 29 outline broad political rights; Articles 30 – 82 outline social economic and cultural rights of all citizens; Articles 98 – 102 specify the rights and mechanisms for citizens' democratic participation; and Articles 103 – 113 specify 'other' forms of democratic participation ("*De otras formas de participación democrática*") (Constitucion política de la Republica del Ecuador 1999:1-27). However, as one participant interviewed pointed out, the Constitution does not translate into practise: "*..Si bien el respeto y reconocimiento a la diversidad étnica, social, cultural y de género constituye un concepto propio del discurso político moderno, adoptado por muchos en nuestro país, en la practica, este contrasta con los niveles de intolerancia expresados en regionalismos, segregacionismos, racismo, machismo, violencia domestica y social, entre los más evidentes....*" (Interview September 1999).

problems derive from historically structured and profound inequalities in the relations of social, economic, and political power ..." (1997: 914). Its colonial past and enduring internal and external neo-colonial policies have led to the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of a small elite (Radcliffe 1996; Sawyer 1997; Whitten 1976, 1981; Stutzman 1981). This concentration of power persists in Ecuador's most recent period of democratic rule despite the fact that the 1972 military coup had been initiated as an attempt to reverse this concentration of power and perceived political incompetence of the ruling elite (Isaac 1993).⁴¹

Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992) note that in the Latin American context, the chances for democratic consolidation were higher in countries with increased levels of industrialization, and strong civil societies in which large landowners were of secondary importance (1992: 215). They emphasize that the most important aspect in consolidating the recent wave of democratic transitions in the region is the presence of strong competing political parties (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992: 215).

Ecuador possessed none of the three criteria prior to its negotiated transition in 1979 (Conaghan and Malloy 1994; Rueschemeyer, Stephens & Stephens 1992).⁴²

⁴¹ The military considered itself to be better suited to govern than the privileged ruling class. This is evident in the declaration issued by the Ecuadorian military junta following the coup stated that "...the constant failures of (civilian) governments, the absence of people from the centers of decision-making, the administrative inefficiency and immorality, the incapacity ..of political parties and fundamentally, the economic structure have contributed to the existence of an unjust and backward society....faced with this situation, the armed forces..have assumed power, without leaders or caudillos, but as an institution, to implant a new national political doctrine, which will make possible the execution of the substantial transformations of the socioeconomic and legal order..." (in Conaghan and Malloy 1994: 54).

⁴² Conaghan and Malloy (1994), point to the insulation of the military's decision-making apparatus from the elite class, as the motivating factor for business elites to organize themselves

Sustained industrialization in Ecuador began in 1957, relatively late even by Latin American standards (Isaacs 1993: 14). Civil society was extremely weak and fragmented (Conaghan and Malloy 1994: 554), and eighty-three percent of the land continues to be held by the wealthiest twenty percent of the population (Isaacs 1996: 50).

Furthermore, in the post-transition period, political parties have been neither competitive or strong (Conaghan and Malloy 1994). The weakness of political parties, although rooted in historical, socio-political and economic factors, was exacerbated by military rule and the nature of the 1979 transition to civilian government. Under military rule political parties had been marginalized and consequently were unable to strengthen or gain much support in the post-transition period—at which time they fragmented and proliferated due to internal conflicts (Isaacs 1993:124; Conaghan and Malloy 1994; Larrea and North 1997).

Weak political parties, characterized by an absence of legitimacy and representativeness, continue to present an major obstacle to meaningful citizen participation in politics and decision-making in Ecuador.⁴³ Although there are currently twelve legally recognized parties spanning the ideological spectrum, politics in the post-transition period have been dominated by right-wing parties supported by coalitions of elite business interests with neoliberal agendas. Such neo-liberal economic policies and

against the state, calling for a transition to liberal democracy as a means to regain control over political power and economic policy-making (1994: 69).

⁴³ Up until recently, “...no organized party has reached out to Ecuadorian Indians. Political parties of both the Right and Left instead tend to regard the indigenous community as an obstacle to modernization..” (Isaacs 1996:47). However the new Pachakutik Party, headed by Freddy Ehlers, is an indigenous political movement turned political party, which first participated in federal elections in 1996. In 1998 it formed an alliance with the Socialist Party (Partido Socialista) and together they won 13.5% of the vote (Saltos and Vasquez 1999: 320). Pachakutik representatives now hold a total of six seats in Congress.

externally imposed structural adjustment programs are also responsible for increasing poverty, inequality, and an overall deficit of democracy (Larrea and North 1997). These neoliberal economic policies represent more of the same for Ecuador. For most of the twentieth century the Ecuadorian economy has been oriented towards export-led growth based respectively on the cacao boom (from the late 1800s to the 1920s), the banana boom (1948-1965), and the state-controlled petroleum boom (1972-1982) (Larrea and North 1997). The economic impact of all phases was a concentration of earnings among only a few elite land-owning families, who controlled not only the economy but also the political system (Larrea and North 1997). Larrea and North (1997) argue that economic and political choices in the 1970s continued to promote a concentration rather than a redistribution of wealth and resources, ultimately resulting in increased poverty, unemployment, and inequality despite rapid economic growth during the period.

This model of economic development continued to dominate through the 1980s and 1990s with the support of elites and pressure from international financial institutions, resulting in "...an extreme concentration of decision-making powers in the hands of the President and a small economic team; a near complete marginalization of Congress from economic policy decisions; a marked resistance within the economic team to any compromise with dissenting social groups or party elites; and a willingness on the part of the executive to use repressive measures to pursue the program" (Conaghan and Malloy 1994:168).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ The persistence of exclusionary policy-making was evident this past March (2000), when President Noboa has signed a controversial bill into law that will make the US dollar Ecuador's official currency, claiming that it is the only way to stabilize the shattered economy and halt rising inflation, which has topped ninety percent, the highest in the region. Critics argue, however, that it will increase poverty and inequality, and a poll released last month by the private

Given these multiple forms of exclusion faced by large segments of Ecuador's population, what role can organizations and actors within the public / civil sphere play to make the Ecuador's superficial democracy more representative and responsive? As previously noted, problems of accountability and citizen participation have, in specific instances, been successfully challenged by organizations and actors within the civil sphere in Ecuador. Sawyer (1997), Becker (1999) and Yashar (1999), for example, have documented the gains made by indigenous organization and protest with respect to land claims and titling. But to what extent is associational life able to systematically and sustainably expand citizen participation in decision-making processes or promote a culture of democracy through the generation of social capital as specified in discourses of development and democratic consolidation?

These questions are explored in an on-the-ground analysis of the micro-political relations within a sector of the civil sphere in Quito, Ecuador—contemporary women's organizations seeking engagement in policy policy processes at the national level. The following section first reviews associational life in Ecuador, in order to contextualize the research findings. It first situates women's organizations within the broader landscape of civil society both in Ecuador and the region as a whole. Different types of women's organizations are then highlighted, with the focus turning to organizations seeking to participate in policy processes at the national level. The remainder of the Chapter presents details from the case study based on primary research in Quito, 1999. It becomes

public opinion firm Cedatos showed that seventy percent of Ecuadoreans believed only the wealthy will benefit from the move and that fifty-three percent were doubtful that it will resolve Ecuador's economic crisis (CNN.com March 9, 2000).

apparent that due to the highly fragmented nature of this sector, ideas about the role of civil society in strengthening democracy must be reconsidered.

3.2 Civil Society in Ecuador

Talk of civil society in Latin America brings to mind grassroots movements such as the Ecclesiastical Base Communities (CEBS) in Brazil, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, and indigenous movements in the Andes who have, in the 1990s, garnered international attention and support in their struggle for rights.⁴⁵ Up until the 1970s, labour unions, student and peasant federations were the key actors in Ecuador's associational landscape. The 1970s and 1980s, however, saw the emergence of new social actors, including indigenous, women's, ecological and other so-called identity based movements (Selverston 1997; Segarra 1997; Slater 1997; Saltos y Vasquez 1999).⁴⁶ Of these new movements, the indigenous organizations that emerged have

⁴⁵ According to Kamrava and O'Mora (1998), the emergence of civil society in Latin America in the 19th century was linked to processes of socio-economic development, initiated by the expansion of the export sector (1880-1930) (1998: 899). They note that these processes and the resulting social changes gave rise to a variety of actors demanding "expression and political inclusion" (Kamrava and O'Mora 1998:899). They posit that the ensuing growth of middle sectors, including merchants, shopkeepers, and small businessmen, provided the foundations upon which contemporary civil society began to develop in the region in the early 1900s. However, due in part to previously existing political structures and institutions e.g. caudillismo, civil society organizations were, for the most part, unable to promote a democratic agenda until well into the 1960's (Kamrava and O'Mora 1998:901). As noted in Chapter 1, Kamrava and O'Mora also emphasize the paradoxical relationship between authoritarian rule and the development of civil society in the region (1998:901). Evidence demonstrates that in Argentina, Brazil and Chile, civil society organizations became more active under authoritarian regimes whereas activity declined in early post-transition periods (Kamrava and O'Mora 1998; Oxhorn 1995).

⁴⁶ According to some theorists, the growth of indigenous, ethnic, ecological, women's, gay, and human rights movements have demanded a different conceptual framework of understanding than

garnered the most attention nationally and internationally, and arguably have been the most successful in catalyzing change. Given their significant influence in Ecuadorean civil society, and their relevance to the case study focus which includes the relationship between indigenous women's organizations to the broader indigenous movement, the emergence of the movement is briefly reviewed.

Indigenous organization and resistance in the region are not new phenomena but part of an ongoing reaction to colonial and post-colonial processes of development. However contemporary forms of indigenous organization that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s were seen as a response to the overall inability of traditional political mechanisms to address systemic inequalities.

Indigenous organization in Ecuador is structured at the local, regional and national levels.⁴⁷ The primary national umbrella organization is the *Confederación de*

traditional peasant and labour organization. In the past, the study of social movements has predominantly been confined to the parameters of class conflict within a Marxist framework. Analyses of so-called old social movements are expressed in terms of dependency and modernization, focused on class mobilization (i.e. peasants, workers), embedded in a view of society as an "...entity composed of more or less immutable structures and class relations that only ...large-scale upheavals could significantly alter..." (Alvarez & Escobar 1992:3). As Jelin (1998) points out whereas 19th and 20th century labour and peasant movements aimed at "total societal transformation" (p.412), social demands expressed in collective movements emerging since the 1970s have changed their profile. Touraine (1992) summarized the distinction between old and new movements, stating that "...old social movements were associated with the idea of revolution, (whereas) new ones are associated with ideas of democracy and participation..." (p.143). Theoretical debates on contemporary social movements through the 1980s and early 1990s tended to fall within two categories, the New Social Movement Approach and the Political Process Approach (Cohen 1985). Recent literature on movements and social transformation (particularly in the Latin American context) evidences a cross-pollination of the two approaches (Alvarez, Dagnino, Escobar 1998; Slater 1997).

⁴⁷ The Shuar Federation, formed in 1964 by the Shuar population of the Oriente or Amazonian region of Ecuador, provided an operational structural and administrative model followed by indigenous organizations emerging in the 1970s and 1980s. The Federation had been established to counteract colonial advances on Shuar territory, in the central-southern Oriente (Salazar 1981:595). The organization began with the formation of small administrative units or *centros*, throughout the territory. To coordinate all the *centros'* activities, *asociaciones* were developed,

Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador—CONAIE), founded in 1986, representing eleven different indigenous nationalities.⁴⁸ CONAIE's mandate is to negotiate indigenous demands with the State, in particular the acceptance of a new constitution that recognizes indigenous rights through the formation of a decentralized plurinational state.⁴⁹

Despite the assertion by the Latin American Left that these indigenous and the other diverse, emerging organizations and movements could coalesce within the “populist paradigm” (Warren 1998:167), popular organization and institutional as well as extra-institutional political participation has historically and continues to be fragmented in Ecuador and the region as a whole. This fragmentation is attributed in part to the domination of electoral politics by clientelistic networks of regional elites, differences in regional socio-economic structures, ethnic relations, and cultural patterns, as well as to the denial of citizenship rights to a majority of the population (Larrea & North 1997:922; Lind 1992).

The following section looks more closely at fragmentation *within* a specific sector of civil society, in this case women's organizations oriented towards policy changes at the national level, using on-the-ground analysis to explore in more detail complex

which in turn were coordinated by the *Federación* (Salazar 1981). The primary goals of the Shuar Federation included social and economic improvement, as well as the exertion of community control over government colonization projects in the region (Salazar 1981:595). Their relative success inspired other indigenous groups throughout the region to adopt similar models of democratic organization.

⁴⁸ There are a variety of indigenous groups and alternative organizations which oppose CONAIE, and consider its inter-institutional negotiations with the Ecuadorian state to represent a ‘co-optation’ of their cause, and point to corruption within CONAIE's leadership.

⁴⁹ See Becker (1999), and Sawyer (1997) for a detailed analysis of indigenous movements in Ecuador.

relationship between the civil sphere and a deepening of democracy not only institutionally but in everyday life. It begins by examining in more detail the meanings of *mestizaje*, and indigenous—concepts that are central to the divisions within this sector which cut across the boundaries of ethnicity and gender.

3.3 Women Organizing in Ecuador

3.3.1 *Defining the Terms*

Throughout the case study, the women's organizations are distinguished along lines of ethnicity that require clarification. The concept of ethnicity itself is contentious. Rattansi (1995) suggests that there is little agreement on what is meant by ethnicity beyond the fact that it derives from the Greek work *ethnos*, meaning a people, a collectivity sharing certain attributes which is "caught in the impossibility of fixity and essentialization....and harnessed to a wide variety of political and cultural projects" (1995:253). Most relevant to the current context, is the emerging view of ethnicity as part of a cultural politics of representation. As Rattansi argues:

"The formation of ethnic identities may be regarded as part of a process of racialization when categories of 'race' are explicitly invoked or when popular or specialized biological and quasi-biological discourses are draw upon to legitimate projects of subject-formation, inclusion and exclusion, discrimination, inferiorization, exploitation, verbal abuse, and physical harassment and violence" (Rattansi 1995:258).

Ethnicity is a fundamental aspect of the socio-symbolic construction of Ecuadorean society. Throughout the research process the categories of *mestizo* and

indigenous were continually referred to, primarily by organizations self-identifying as indigenous. Accordingly these categories are used in the presentation of the case study—not only to stick as closely as possible to participants' firsthand accounts, but also because it was along these divisions that conflict and fragmentation were most evident. However these are slippery, loaded terms and require some exploration as to the meanings, both explicit and implicit, that they invoke.

In line with Radcliffe's analysis (1999), for the purpose of the paper the categories of indigenous and *mestizo* are viewed as relational, rather than essentialist, categories of representation, within parameters set by history, hierarchy, and persistent racism.⁵⁰ As noted, during the interviews, participants in (self-identified) indigenous women's organizations tended to distinguish themselves from *mestizo* women's organizations. Racial positioning is highly ambiguous in Ecuador, even more so for women than men (Radcliffe 1999; Selverston 1997). As Weismantel and Eisenman (1998) point out

...a theory of Andean race....in which race designates a social history and a sense of being that is neither 'hard-wired' into the body, nor read from it...instead, race accumulates within the body, in its extremities and its orifices, its organs and its impulses, as a result of a life lived within a particular human community at a specific moment in time (1998:134 in Radcliffe 1999:213).

The fact that race or ethnicity is socially made rather than based on rigid

⁵⁰ Another key category relating to women organizing in the region is *feminista* or feminist. It is beyond the scope of this paper to do justice to the interesting and important debate surrounding the usages and meanings of this category particularly in the Latin American context. Alvarez (1998) has explored the shifts in feminist identities in the region from the 1970s through the 1990s, pointing out that what was previously an extreme and isolated movement has become multifaceted and heterogeneous, spanning "... a vast array of cultural, social, and political arenas.." (1998:295). During the research process in Ecuador, *feminista* was used occasionally by participants in indigenous organizations almost synonymously with *mestizo*, i.e. to imply difference—in lifestyles, agendas, and access to material and political resources.

phenotypic characteristics is demonstrated in the constantly changing (rising) number of people who identify themselves as *mestizo* (Radcliffe 1999:215).

Mestizaje (broadly an indigenous-European mix), emerged as a racial category in Ecuador in the nineteenth century, in an era of social Darwinism and racial hierarchies. In this context, *mestizaje* was considered to articulate “a positive connotation around racial mixing...” (Radcliffe 1999:215). The *mestizo* identity, endorsed in Ecuadorian official discourse, represented an urban, modernizing identity, an avenue for social advancement (Radcliffe 1999:215). The promotion of *mestizaje* and the so-called whitening of the nation has been an ongoing State project (Stutzman 1981), not just a racial category but an ideological position. This was apparent in official State speeches. For example General President Rodriguez Lara in September 1972, stated that “..there is no more indian problem, for we all become white when we accept the goals of national culture” (Whitten 1976:180).

In the twentieth century, *mestizo* refers more to a cultural rather than racial category, largely determined by style of speech, level of education, clothing, hairstyles and workplace (Radcliffe 1999:217). The fluidness of race / ethnicity was striking in recent survey in which people were asked to “self-identify.” As one women responded “*I don't know how to identify myself. I don't think I'm Indian, nor that white—I would be normal—mestizo*” (Radcliffe 1999:220).

The notion of indigenous is equally ambiguous in Ecuador, and often used in a way that disguises significant internal heterogeneity (see Slater 1997). J. Jackson (1989) has outlined the theoretical inadequacies of standard anthropological notions of indigenous and culture, particularly when using the concepts to describe transformations

such groups are undergoing as they negotiate their rights using “ethnic strategies” (1989:127). In contemporary history indigenous does not just refer to a heritage, world view or way of life, but perhaps more significantly has symbolized socio-politically, economically, and geographically marginalized populations. However, the 1980s and 1990s have witnessed a rise of neo-indigenist ideology in Ecuador and worldwide, which has altered self and others perceptions of what it means to be indigenous – drawing on notions of a proud Inca heritage and role as keepers of the environment (Selverston 1997; Radcliffe 1996; Jackson 1989). In Ecuador, indigenouness has been successfully used as a strategy to claim socio-political rights (see Sawyer 1997; Yashar 1999).

For the purpose of the case study, and with these ambiguities in mind, I used participants’ literal interpretations of identity and racial categorization. That is, the organizations that self-identified as explicitly indigenous are considered so in the case study. For most participants it seemed that indigenous was at once a symbolic, strategic, and lived identity. Those that were explicitly non-indigenous, or referred to by indigenous organizations as *mestizo* or non-indigenous are also referred to as such in the proceeding section. These racial designations were also used by self-identified indigenous women in reference to the material and political resources they perceived as forfeiting as a result of their identity. From this perspective, with regard to accessing national decision-making processes, indigenous women were at a disadvantage because of their marginalized status.

The two proceeding sections review the so-called women’s movement(s) both in Latin America as a whole, and then specifically in Ecuador in order to contextualize the findings on inter-organizational micro-politics among specific women’s organizations

that are subsequently presented. It locates women's organizations within the broader contexts of women's movements in the region, and civil society in Ecuador.

3.3.2 *Women Organizing in Latin America*

Although Latin American women's protest and organization has had a transformative effect from the time of the conquest through the twentieth century, the women's organizations that surfaced during democratic transitions in the late 1970s and 1980s have been the focus of most contemporary research on women's movements in the region (Lind 1997; see Jaquette 1994; Jelin 1990; Alvarez 1992; Schild 1998; Radcliffe and Westwood, 1993).

More recently, however, attention has turned to the proliferation of women's organizations and activism emerging through the 1990s in response to structural and social inequalities within the new democracies in the region, particularly the community and neighbourhood self-help organizations (Miller 1995; Lind 1997). Neoliberal development policies and the dismantling of the welfare state have forced these responses, originally intended as temporary strategies, to become permanent institutions for social service provision (Alvarez 1998; Lind 1997). Also increasing in number are women's organizations oriented explicitly towards policy change and participation in decision-making processes—the focus of the present case study. Lind notes that these have received significantly less attention within social research (1997.).

Whether focussed on community or policy-level organization, much of the literature on contemporary women's movements in Latin America has distinguished

between women organizing around “practical gender interests” and those organizing around “strategic gender interests” (Moser 1989; Lind 1992:137). C. Moser, drawing from Molyneux (1985), argued that strategic gender needs are “those needs which are formulated from the analysis of women’s subordination to men,” whereas practical gender needs “are those needs which are formulated from the concrete conditions women experience... usually a response to an immediate perceived necessity which is identified by women within a specific context” (Moser 1989:1803). The implication was that poor women’s movements were based on practical (private) needs such as access to food, housing, health services, while the feminist movements used political strategies with the broader (public) aim of redefining gender, and gender roles. More recently, however, this dichotomy has been criticized for overlooking the links between practical and strategic gender interests, and the strategic actions and agendas of women addressing practical needs (Jaquette 1994:226).

Although it is clear that all organizing, whether strategic or practical, *is* political, there was a notable absence of interaction between the organizations oriented explicitly towards policy change, at the centre of the case study, and the *organizaciones de auto-ayuda* (self-help community organizations) working at the local level to provide basic needs. More significantly, however, there was an absence of interaction even among organizations with a similar policy focus, casting further doubt on the heuristic value of any categorization that assumes inter-organizational cohesiveness or cooperation. Accordingly, this case study focuses on the complex micro-political relations among seemingly similar organizations, which force a reconsideration of the potential for associational life to promote a democracy or broaden citizen participation. Consequently

the next section focuses specifically on women's organizations in Ecuador with agendas explicitly oriented towards national-level policy changes, first situating them within the broader landscape of women's associational life Ecuador.

3.3.3. *Women's Organizations in Ecuador*

Similar to other countries in the region, women in Ecuador continue to be marginalized from equal participation in social, political, and economic life as a result of their gender (Becker 1999), in spite of the ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, approved by the U.N. in 1979 and signed by Ecuador in 1981 (Instituto de la Mujer 1992). Discrimination against women is apparent not only in everyday life, where they continue to be poorer and less educated, but also at the symbolic level⁵¹ in the Ecuadorian national imaginary.⁵²

⁵¹ Radcliffe (1996, 1999) has examined the way in which symbolic constructions of gender have been key for the formation of both ethnic and national identities in Ecuador. She explores the way in which women are represented in national discourses, not only as a homogeneous category, but also the way in which discourses about the nation both constitute and are constituted by gender relations (Radcliffe 1996:8). In her research she draws upon McClintock's (1993) analyses of the gender dimensions of time and continuity as presented within nationalist discourses. "...Women are represented as the atavistic and authentic "body" of national tradition (inert, backward looking and natural), embodying nationalism's conservative principle of continuity. Men, by contrast, represent the progressive agent of nationalism's modernity (forward-thrusting, potent and historic), embodying nationalism's progressive or revolutionary principle of discontinuity" (McClintock 1993:66 in Radcliffe 1996:6). She concludes, however, that despite the persistence of these symbolic significations of Ecuadorian women, women's organizations, from feminist to indigenous women's networks, are challenging and contesting these representations (McClintock 1993:66 in Radcliffe 1996:6).

⁵² The national imaginary refers to the construction of national spaces and identities. Nationalism in this context is not the discovering of an ontological self-consciousness, but rather it invents a nation where one did not previously exist (Anderson 1991:6). It is not a universal or real category, but rather as a broad vision for organizing society, made up of a series of competing discourses in constant formation. These competing discourses, combined with political practices, define events, objects and relationships by establishing "...a popular identification with the imagined political community in question.." (Mallon 1995:5).

In response to discrimination and marginalization in recent history, Ecuadorian women's political organizations began to emerge during the military dictatorship in the 1970s, and proliferated through the 1980s and 1990s in conjunction with increasing social and economic crises and distrust in the formal political system (Lind 1992:135). In the post-transition period, women have become visible participants in political life, setting up "women's fronts" in trade unions, peasant federations, neighbourhood organizations and political parties, feminist and indigenous organizations (Lind 1992:139).

Based on a study carried out by the Universidad Catolica between 1990-94, there are more than 145 registered women's associations in Ecuador, and approximately 300 informal non-registered women's groups (Muller 1994:75).⁵³ Muller (1994) outlined a typology of the different women's organizations in Ecuador, distinguishing between informal organizations (including community and neighbourhood groups); non-governmental organizations (including women's research and development institutes); professional women's groups (including unions); government organizations for the promotion of women, and finally religious groups oriented towards the promotion of women and gender issues (Muller 1994).

According to this typology, informal groups are those established primarily by women who are poor, living in rural areas or marginalized urban neighbourhoods. These organizations, that have proliferated rapidly since the early 1980s, tend to be aimed at alleviating everyday problems faced by women's, including lack of food and poverty,

⁵³ The current number must be significantly higher, as the Centro de Promocion de la Mujer de la Conferencia Episcopal en Ecuador maintains contact with over 752 informal women's groups.

through networks of support and community kitchens. Although without access to institutional channels for participation in decision-making processes, links with other organizations have increased their capacity to participate politically and voice demands.⁵⁴

Non-governmental organizations (including women's centers and research institutes) dedicated to women's issues also proliferated in the 1980s, and are primarily based in Ecuador's major urban centres – Quito and Guayaquil. According to Muller (1994), they tend to be oriented towards capacity building, policy research, participation in policy-making processes, and raising funds - also working as intermediaries between informal groups, government, and international institutions. Professional women's groups and women's unions were in large part created at the end of the 1970s when women began to increasingly incorporate themselves into universities and professional jobs.

The first government initiative for women was the National Women's Office (ONM - *Oficina nacional de la mujer*) which was established in 1980. Over the past two decades this office has undergone changes in name and function and its relations with organizations within civil society were, and continue to be, fraught with difficulty and disagreement (Muller 1994). These issues will be examined in more detail in the proceeding section.

Religious groups for promotion of women and international organizations with programs on / for women are also key actors in this sphere of civil society, working with and within all of the categories listed in the above typology. Although Muller's typology

⁵⁴ Interview with CEDIME participants, September 1999.

is useful in providing a general map of women organizing within civil society in Ecuador, it does not include an analysis of indigenous women's organizations which have tended to be viewed as part of the indigenous movement in Ecuador rather than as part of a women's movement (Interview, Quito, October 1999). This is significant, as fragmentation among the organizations in the present case study occurred primarily along the boundaries of ethnicity. Moreover, the typology's clearly delineated categories mask divisions that weave across categories blurring apparent commonalities.

That there are differences, diversity, and conflict among these groups of women's organizations or within the so-called women's movement in Ecuador is not a surprising revelation. Writing by women in both the North and South through the 1980s and 1990s has problematized the idea of a homogeneous women's movement at either the international, national and even local levels. It is well-established that women's organizations do not represent an intrinsically unitary movement, based on essential characteristics of women (Mohanty 1991, 1995), and that generalizations about Latin American women tend to obscure the divisions based on place, class, race, ethnicity, and age. This scholarship, however, has not trickled down to mainstream development or research for development in this area (IDRC 1999).

The resulting divisions among women's organizations represent what Feree and Roth (1998) term "exclusive solidarity," stemming from tensions between gender and ethnic affiliations and identities. exclusive solidarity occurs when "...the dominant group within a movement or organizational sector tends to make its experiences of oppression normative and to marginalize participants who are different. ...Appeals for gender solidarity within such contexts become equivalent to an expectation that all participants

should accept the perspective of the dominant group” (Feree and Roth 1998:629). They distinguish exclusive solidarity from inclusive solidarity which does not place one organization or social group in the position of defining the issues or identities that matter. They usefully highlight the limitations of theories about organizations and social movements that treat gender, race or class as “unproblematic and non-overlapping social categories” (1998:626). Drawing from Connell (1987) and Spelman (1988), they emphasize that “...gender, race, and class.. are not just categories that can simply be added like beads to a string to define social position or identity, but are processes that interact with each other to create complex and specific socially situated selves” (Feree and Roth 1998:627). Accordingly, as noted in the introduction of the paper, they argue that the presence or absence of organizational or movement interaction, and the separation of identities that it conveys, is a “crucial fact” that needs to be explained (Feree and Roth 1998:627).

Yet Feree and Roth (1998) also point out, however, that with the existence of certain conditions, such as common concerns, agendas, and discourses, such differences can be bridged to form broader alliances. Similarly, Miller (1995) has argued that despite these differences most women’s movements in the region have historically sought a politics of inclusion, demanding full citizenship, and increased socio-economic independence (1995:188). The organizations included in the present case study are no exception. All of the organizations sought inclusion in policy processes armed with overlapping agendas and using common discourses of citizenship to put these agendas forth.

Yet in spite of overlapping concerns and similar strategies for action, the

organizations studied had been unable to form cohesive coalitions through which to meaningfully broaden women's participation in political and policy processes and generate a culture of democracy. Furthermore, through the course of the interviews it became apparent that this sector was atomized most significantly along the boundaries of ethnicity, reinforcing social patterns and structures that challenge deeper social democracy. Given the presence of bridging conditions, what factors underlie these divisions?

The next sections will explore this question examining information generated during primary research in Quito, Ecuador in 1999. Section 3.4. reviews the bridging factors that would appear to enable and promote joint action among the participating women's organizations. These include a common focus on domestic violence, the use of discourses of citizenship, shared distrust of the state department for women (CONAMU), and the existence of broad national coalitions. The proceeding section (3.5.) then examines why, despite these factors, this sector of the women's movement is characterized by division and fragmentation most significantly along boundaries of ethnicity, but also among *mestizo* organizations and among indigenous women's organizations themselves.

3.4. Shared Discourses and Cross-Cutting Issues

One striking bridging factor was the appropriations of notions of citizenship (*ciudadanía*) by all of the organizations interviewed, without exception, as a means to promote participation in decision-making and access to social and legal rights, what

Schild (1997) refers to as a “common language of rights” (p.111). According to the participants interviewed and theorists (see Dagnino 1998; Schild 1998), the use of citizenship as a political strategy has become prevalent not only in Ecuador but in the region, and arguably around the globe. Although citizenship meant different things for the various organizations, most of the women’s organizations were using citizenship as a strategy to legitimate their claims to specific rights.⁵⁵

Different understandings of citizenship are not only used by different women’s organizations but also in official State discourses. Schild (1998; 1999) notes that in Latin America, neo-liberal conceptions of citizenship prevail in what she refers to as “the integrative project of the nation” (1998:98). A good citizen in this context is one whose engagement with the free market is unencumbered by state intervention. However the neo-liberal version of citizenship is challenged by bottom-up conceptions of new citizenship asserted as political strategies within social movements and civil society organizations (Dagnino 1998). This bottom-up conception challenges the neo-liberal perception of social rights as social needs. Its point of departure for citizenship is the right to have rights. It is not limited to the formal and legal acquisition of a set of rights,

⁵⁵ Citizenship is a highly contested concept. In anglophone political theory, T.H. Marshall’s (liberal) definition of citizenship is often taken as a starting point to the discussions - “..Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed...” (1950:28). Individual liberty is central to this model, however the inequalities that arise from free-market capitalism are considered to be fundamentally at odds with democracy’s foundational principle of equality, and accordingly are to be mediated through state guarantee of social rights. Citizenship in this context is both a status and a set of rights, rather than a political practice. Many authors have highlighted the eurocentrism in the broad application of the notion of citizenship, which has its roots in western political theory, as well as the gender and racial hierarchies within which it is embedded (Radcliffe 1999:215). For a comprehensive critique and analysis of citizenship, and an exploration of community-based rather than individualist understandings of the concept, see Taylor (1998), Voet (1998), and Kymlicka (1996).

but entails a more egalitarian form of social relations within civil society and beyond (Dagnino 1998:50). It is this understanding of citizenship that is promoted by the women's organizations in Ecuador interviewed, exemplified in the transcribed quotes below (my translation):

...se intenta la creación, desarrollo y defensa de prácticas alternativas de redistribución y construcción de ciudadanía..."(CEIME).
(..to attempt the creation, development and defense of alternative practises for redistribution and construction of citizenship..).

...somos trabajando en el fortalecimiento de la participación y concertación ciudadana de las mujeres...(CONMIE)
(...we are working in strengthening citizen participation and coordination of women..)

...la participación ciudadana debe asegurar procesos democráticos que reconozcan la diversidad de intereses y necesidades de la ciudadanía en relación con el género...(CEDIME)
(..citizen participation should secure democratic processes which recognize the diversity of citizens interests' and needs' in relation to gender...).

...promover una verdadera participación ciudadana en los procesos de desarrollo, y fortalecer el sistema democrático a través de esa participación crítica...(CEPAM)
(...promote true citizen participation in processes of development, and strengthen the democratic systems through this critical participation...).

...promover un proceso de concertación ciudadana, para el impulso de soluciones locales frente a cada uno de los problemas sociales, económicos y ambientales...(CIAM)
(...promote a process of citizen cooperation / coordination, to initiate local solutions for specific social, economic, and environmental problems..).

A majority of the participating organizations had programs specifically focused

on the promotion of citizenship as a means to increase participation and access social, political and economic rights. This discourse was particularly evident in organizations' common emphasis on domestic violence against women, and the promotion of legal and policy changes in this regard. Despite the Constitution's claim that "...*El Estado adoptará las medidas necesarias para prevenir, eliminar y sancionar, en especial, la violencia contra los niños, adolescentes, las mujeres y las personas de la tercera edad...*" ("...the State will adopt necessary measures to prevent, eliminate, and sanction, especially, violence against children, adolescents, women, and the elderly...", my translation), research has estimated that approximately 70% of women are victims of domestic violence in Ecuador, and that 37% of women suffer frequent physical abused (defined in this case as one or more times per month) (CEIME 1997). Moreover, judicial impunity prevails, with only an estimated 1.03% of investigated cases resulting in guilty sentences for the perpetrators (CEIME 1997:91-178). As one participant interviewed stated: "*Esta patética realidad pone en cuestionamiento a la familia...que amerita que las mujeres, la familia, la sociedad y el Estado se planteen como prioridad la erradicación de la violencia en contra de las mujeres...*" ("This pathetic reality puts the family into question...demanding that women, family, society and the state prioritize the eradication of violence against women...", my translation), (Interview, Quito, September 1999).

All of the participating organizations had specific programs and/or policy strategies focusing on these issues, including seminars for women and other related groups, for example the National Police Force (Centro Ecuatoriano de Investigaciones para las Mujeres); educational packages for women in Quichua and Spanish (CONMIE,

CONAIE—Dept. for Women); information on women's constitutional rights against violence (CEDIME pamphlet); as well as strong lobbying for the implementation of Law 103 (ratified in 1995), regarding violence against women (e.g. CEIME, CEDIME). Almost without exception, all organizations interviewed sought policy change and public education for women and men.

Another significant factor that might have bridged differences and promoted joint action among the organizations interviewed was a shared distrust and distancing from the state department for women—CONAMU. Women's issues first appeared on the state's agenda in the 1970s when, under pressure from the Inter-American Women's Commission of the Organization of American States (OAS), they created the *Departamento Nacional de la Mujer* (National Women's Department), within what was then the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (Lind 1992:140). This Department was the predecessor for the larger *Oficina Nacional de la Mujer* (National Office of Women—OFNAMU) established in 1980 (CEIS 1986 in Lind 1992:141). In 1986, this office became the *Direccion Nacional de la Mujer* (National Directorate for Women—DINAMU). DINAMU was charged with linking the promotion of women and women's rights with national policies and political agenda. DINAMU was also set up as the link between women's non-governmental organizations and associations and the national government. However this relationship was, and continues to be, fraught with difficulty and disagreement (Muller 1994; Interviews, Quito, September, October 1999).

In 1997 DINAMU was replaced by the *Consejo Nacional de las Mujeres* (National Council for Women—CONAMU), and housed within the Ministry of Social Welfare. Its stated mandate is to “mobilize resources and forces to overcome the

limitations and obstacles which impede the full and equal participation of women in economic, political, social and cultural life - including participation in decision-making and positions of power..." (my translation of CONAMU Document 1998:3).⁵⁶ One of CONAMU's primary stated roles is the coordination of all national government policies, programs and projects to the benefit of women and gender equity, with civil society initiatives. The Directorate of CONAMU is composed of one representative from the office of the President, three representatives from other state ministries or departments, and three representatives from women's organizations. Two of these latter three representatives were from the two national umbrella organizations for women (see below), and one was from an autonomous feminist organization.

Since its establishment in the 1970s, the state women's department has suffered from lack of staff, authority, funding, and cooperation – internally and externally (Lind 1992; Muller 1994; Interviews, Quito, September 1999). All the participants of non-government organizations interviewed had negative reactions towards the State Department (CONAMU) ranging from dissatisfaction to outright distrust. A variety of factors were cited as to the reasons for this problematic relationship between the state and civil society organizations in this sector.

Highlighted in many interviews was the dependence of CONAMU on the government (and Ministry) and its continual changes in personnel and political agendas which have impeded not only the development of a continuous action plan based on a stable budget, but also the formation of relations of trust and legitimacy between

⁵⁶ See Lind 1992 (or CONAMU documents) for a description of specific programs undertaken by CONAMU.

CONAMU and civil society organizations. There was also a lack of accessible institutional links between CONAMU and civil society organizations, and for the most part the organizations which did have links to the state had not done so through CONAMU, but relied on other strategies to influence political / policy processes. There was a significant discrepancy in access to State institutions and officials among organizations, which has been noted as contributing to the fragmentation of the women's political movement in Ecuador. Organizations targeting a particular policy or constitutional reform tended to develop particularistic, bilateral relations with specific government ministries rather than working through CONAMU. The participants interviewed had consistently negative views of CONAMU and the role that it played in promoting women's participation and welfare. As aforementioned, this was attributed to CONAMU's dependence on government, and its continually changing personnel and political agendas, which hindered the development of a meaningful action plan, a stable budget, and credibility.

Another consistently cited cause of division between these sectors was CONAMU's recent attempt to force all national and international funds towards women's programs (governmental or non-governmental) to be filtered through them. This was considered to be unacceptable by the women's organizations interviewed, due to CONAMU's political biases and ineffective program strategies. One of the participants in a non-profit women's organization stated that not only was CONAMU not popular among non-governmental organizations but even other government departments and ministries preferred to work directly with non-governmental organizations on women's issues, rather than through CONAMU. Moreover, participants agreed that there

was a lack of confidence in state institutions in general. Corruption, economic, political, and social crises combined to create an extreme absence of legitimacy in governance processes.⁵⁷ Given this shared distrust of CONAMU and the institutional process through which organizations were technically supposed to access the state, coalescing around alternative processes through which to participate might have emerged. Again, this was not the case, in fact interestingly, the absence of a democratic process by which to access (or participate) in decision-making was not a focus of the majority of organizations interviewed. On the contrary, the undemocratic, old-style politics through which some organizations accessed policy processes was a key source of division, as will be explored in the next section.

The existence of broad national coalitions was a third factor conducive to cohesive action among women's organizations working toward political and policy changes. Feree and Roth (1998) state specifically that these types of coalitions can be particularly influential in creating "bridge-building" among movements (1998: 645). Yet despite claims made by participants from both national umbrella organizations interviewed about broad representation, even they seemed unable to succeed in building bridges between organizations within this sector.

⁵⁷ During my research, I carried out a random, informal cross-sector survey of approximately 70 people, of whom 94.3% cited government corruption as the number one problem currently facing Ecuador. This is confirmed in a study by J. S. Parga (1999) on Ecuadorian political culture. In response to the question "what is the most serious offense," (*actos mas grave*) with regard to politics, 54% surveyed responded "corruption" (Parga 1999:277). In response to the question "what institution is the most corrupt," (*institución mas corrupta*), 50.3% of those surveyed responded "Congress" (*el Congreso*), 28.2% said the government (*el Gobierno*) and 21.4% said both (*ambos*) (Parga 1999:278). Although it is beyond the scope of the present paper, it is interesting to note that in spite of extreme lack of confidence, participation in policy and political decision-making was still the primary focus for all of the organizations interviewed.

Specifically, interviews were carried out with participants in two national umbrella organizations with head offices based in Quito. Both emphasized a diverse and numerous membership. The first organization, *Coordinadora Política de Mujeres Ecuatorianas* (CPME), was composed of NGOs, women's political organizations, community and neighbourhood organizations, professional organizations, as well as women's unions. As one of its participants stated "...we recognize the diversity among women in Ecuador" ("*...reconocemos la diversidad de mujeres en Ecuador*") (Interview, Quito, October, 1999).

Founded in 1995, CPME aimed to promote women's citizenship rights and access to power in order to achieve gender equity. "*Nuestra movilización se orienta fundamentalmente al cuestionamiento de todas las formas de discriminación y sistemas de poder que aun nos subordinan, y al formulación de propuestas en torno al funcionamiento de órdenes sociales justos y sustantivamente democráticos...*" ("our mobilization is fundamentally oriented towards questioning all forms of discrimination and systems of power that subordinate us, and to the formulation of proposals regarding the functioning of just and democratic social orders...", my translation), (Interview, Quito, October, 1999). Its specific mandate was constitutional and public policy reform in the areas of: political participation; integration of gender equity in public policies; opening institutional channels for the incorporation of women's movement into policy processes; reforms in areas of violence and human rights, poverty and employment, and anti-corruption initiatives. It had successfully had several of the proposals outlined in its *Agenda Política* (Political Agenda) incorporated into the new national Constitution, in

areas of penal reform and new laws of decentralization and participation,⁵⁸ and had influenced reforms in sixteen Constitutional Articles. Although CPME was working primarily at the national level, with offices and representatives in fifteen provinces, it maintained international ties—for example it was a member of the Coalition of Andean Women.

The second principal umbrella organizations *Foro Nacional Permanente de la Mujer Ecuatoriana* (el FORO), established in 1994, cited an equally broad membership of over three hundred and twenty diverse organizations nationally. Its mandate was also to strengthen and cohere women's collective action towards social, political and economic change; to promote the insertion of women as citizens in public and decision-making spheres; to promote and defend women's rights and work towards the eradication of gender inequity. The aim to create gender solidarity is an explicit part of their agenda, as the head of the organization stated "...we need to demystify relations between women to consolidate gender solidarity..." ("*...a desmitificar las relaciones entre mujeres y consolidar la solidaridad de género...*") (Interview, Quito, October, 1999).

As noted, both organizations claimed broad memberships that cut across ethnic,

⁵⁸ The Law of Decentralization and Social Participation (*Ley de descentralización y participación social*), which is part of the Law of Modernization (*Ley de modernización*), decreed that 15% of the state budget would be transferred to the municipal level (Gonzalez de Vega 1999). It also required : a) the strengthening of local capacity to consolidate autonomous management through the transfer of public services to the local level; b) the defining of relations between, and responsibilities of, the executive government and municipal governments in order to avoid the doubling of funds; c) to encourage and increase social participation in public management and decentralization processes; d) to strengthen local governance institutions (Léon 1999:170). Thus far, the process has been hindered by the rate at which municipalities in Ecuador have multiplied since the early 1980s, and the clientalistic relations that pervade them. Moreover, the state has been unable to meet projected budget allocations, therefore transfer of funds and responsibilities has not materialized (Jaramillo 1999).

regional and economic boundaries. The FORO explicitly stated that this heterogeneity was reflected in the nature of its seventeen provincial chapters “*..La diversidad..se ha visto reflejada en procesos diferentes y aún heterogéneos de consolidación de los Capítulos...caracterizando al (organización) como un espacio respetuoso a las particularidades de las organizaciones...*” (“...diversity can be seen to be reflected in different and heterogeneous processes for consolidating local Chapters...characterizing the organization as a space which respects the differences among organizations..,” my translation), (Interview, Quito, October, 1999). The stated objectives of the FORO organization were the consolidation of mechanisms through which women could articulate their concerns and strengthen collective action that was oriented to social, cultural, political and economic change in their interest. They supported the insertion of women into positions of political power and public office to promote full citizenship for women, and they explicitly aimed to create a single women’s movement in Ecuador.

Both national umbrella organizations acknowledged the diversity of women in Ecuador, but felt that they were able to provide a forum where the different organizations could come together to share common concerns. “*Consideramos que el movimiento de mujeres debe y puede constituirse en un eje dinámico y democrático para la transformación política del Ecuador...*” (“... the women’s movement should and can constitute a dynamic and democratic axis / mechanism for political transformation in Ecuador...,” my translation), (Interview, Quito, October, 1999). Yet heterogeneity within the women’s movement and conflict among organizations were consistently cited by the participants (in both the umbrella and other organizations) as some of the largest obstacles facing women’s organizations in effecting cohesive social transformation,

despite common issues and concerns. As aforementioned, claims to representativeness by both umbrella organizations was refuted by participants in other organizations, and most emphatically by the indigenous women's organizations interviewed.⁵⁹

This section has reviewed the possible bridging conditions that could potentially have promoted joint action among participating women's organizations, including common discourse of citizenship, a focus on issues surrounding violence against women, a mutual distrust of the State Department for Women, and the existence of broad national coalitions, this sector of civil society remains fragmented. The research demonstrates that despite these bridging conditions, inter-organizational differences prevailed resulting in deep divisions within this sector. Although these divisions were most deeply entrenched along boundaries of ethnicity, they also manifest among *mestizo* women's organizations and among indigenous women's organizations. The following section will therefore focus on the key factors underlying these divisions, based on interviews with participants in individual organizations.

⁵⁹ The very existence of two national umbrella organizations did not in itself appear to contribute to further split among the women's movement, at least according to participants interviewed. Although they rarely worked together, neither felt, or were perceived, to be in direct competition with on another. This can possibly be attributed to the different memberships. FORO appeared to be a more populist organization, with grassroots chapters throughout the country, with more leftist roots including links with labour movements etc.. In contrast, CPME, although a national umbrella, did not have local Chapters and had a significantly smaller, urban-based membership. Neither had explicit links with political parties.

3.5 Sources of Division Among Women's Organizations

This section looks at sources of inter-organizational division among women's organizations working for political participation and policy change at the national level, presenting information based on interviews. It looks at three specific sets of inter-organizational relations: i. among *mestizo* (or not explicitly indigenous) women's organizations; ii. between *mestizo* organizations and indigenous women's organizations, and iii. among indigenous women's organizations.

In the first case, key sources of division were the particularistic relations that some organizations had formed with certain politicians or political departments. In the second case, indigenous organizations tended to see themselves as different from *mestizo* women's organizations, with distinct objectives and identities. In the third instance, between indigenous women's organizations, division stemmed from different conceptions of the relationship between gender and ethnicity, and the relation of indigenous women's organizations to the larger indigenous movement. Each of these three sets of inter-organizational relations are reviewed below, with particular attention to the latter two (between *mestizo* and indigenous women's organizations, and between indigenous women's organizations themselves), as these divisions appeared to be most deeply entrenched and pervasive. Their implications for ideas about civil society and democratization in development are addressed in Chapter Four.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Another common source of division among civil society organizations in general is competition for scarce funds. Although this may have been another contributing factor in the current context, it is not highlighted mainly because it was not raised as a key source of division by the participants themselves. This can possibly be attributed to the fact that their funding came from diverse sources (including raising funds from members, to local and national governments

mestizo women's organizations interviewed included the *Red de Mujeres en Comunicación* (Network of Women in Communication), *Centro de Estudios y Investigaciones de la Mujer Ecuatoriana* (Centre for Research for Ecuadorian Women—CEIME), *Centro Ecuatoriano para la Promoción y Acción de la Mujer* (Centre for the Promotion and Action for Women—CEPAM), *Centro de Investigación de los Movimientos Sociales Del Ecuador- Programa Participación Política y Mujer* (Centre for Research on Social Movements in Ecuador-Program for Women's Political Participation—CEDIME), *Agencia Latino-Americana de Información – Red de Mujeres* (Latin American Information Agency- Women's Network—ALAI), and the *Centro de Información y Apoyo de la Mujer* (Centre for Information and Support for Women—CIAM).

As previously noted, almost all of these organizations had overlapping agendas with regards to political action and reform. They promoted the realization of full citizenship for women, including political participation, protection from violence and inequity. The strategies they used to advanced these agendas ranged from constitutional reform to input on policy-making, working with women in communities to research and interaction with international organizations. The majority of the organizations belonged to one or both of the National Umbrella Organizations interviewed (CPME and the FORO). There were few consistent views expressed regarding their relation to the

and some international donors). As will be elaborated further on in the text, however, there was across-the-board rejection of the state department for women's attempt to control all sources of funding, as it was felt that this would have created increased competitiveness and an unequal playing field.

umbrella organizations,⁶¹ some considered them to be important in attempting to “unify the different women’s organizations in Ecuador...and support policy changes together...” (*“..para unificar las diferentes organizaciones....y juntos apoyar las cambias políticas...”*) (Interview, Quito, September - October, 1999, my translation). However all of them, without exception, confirmed the heterogeneity and fragmentation of the women’s movement in Quito and Ecuador, which umbrella organizations had been unable to overcome. (It is important to note, however, that none of them were working in isolation, they were enmeshed in other networks, with different types of organizations, movements, and institutions).⁶²

A repeatedly cited fragmenting force among *mestizo* organizations were the particularistic relations that certain organizations had succeeded in forming with individual politicians, departments, and / or ministries, despite distrust and distancing from CONAMU. “...We cannot compete or collaborate with other organizations who are politically connected for a say in policy and decision-making..” (Interview Quito, September, 1999).

Rather than dealing with the State through CONAMU, organizations tended (or

⁶¹ CEIME was an exemption, as it initially housed the FORO and works quite closely with the FORO office (Interview).

⁶² A notable example was CEIME, which maintains links with three commissions in Congress, four Departments within the justice system, multiple connections and contacts with the Ministry of Education and the National Police Force; with municipalities in Quito, Tena and Imbabura, with four universities and a dozen other NGOs both national and international (Interviews and documents). These links were diverse in nature, ranging from joint research or targeted political action to education and capacity-building. Moreover, although not the focus of the research, it became apparent during the course of the interviews, that these organizations had few links community or neighbourhood self-help organizations (*organizaciones de auto-ayuda*) aimed at meeting basic needs. Any links that did exist between women’s political and community organizations included some funding, and capacity-building.

attempted) to develop bilateral relations with specific government ministries and officials. For example, one of the organizations was headed by an ex-minister of public works who maintained close personal relations with politicians in several ministries. Accordingly they were able to use these contacts to achieve significant judicial and educational reforms. Specifically, a program aimed at incorporating gender issues into secondary school curricula was adopted in 1997 by the Ministry of Education, as well as the implementation of laws on violence against women and the capacity-building and education of the national police force vis-a-vis the new laws. Other organizations with similar agendas but no direct links to government cited the lack of institutional channels for participation as one of the largest challenges in advancing their mandates for policy-change. Interestingly, despite cited problems of access to policy-makers, none of the organizations included a focus on process in their agendas and strategies for action. In fact, many were seeking to establish similar old-style personal relations with politicians in order to have their voices heard. The implications of the absence of agreed upon processes for democratic participation are further explored in Chapter Four.

Although participants in these organizations concurred that the movement was fragmented and there were few instances of joint action among them, more significant divisions manifest between these and indigenous women's organizations, at the interface of gender and ethnicity. The next part of this section will therefore review key sources of division between indigenous and non-indigenous women's organizations, as well as among indigenous women's organizations themselves.

There are indigenous women's organizations both within and apart from the local, regional, and national Ecuadorian indigenous movements. The triple burden of exclusion,

race, class and gender faced by indigenous women, particularly in the Latin American context, has been well documented (see Bronstein 1983). Although there has been a great deal of research and writing on contemporary Ecuadorian indigenous movements, there has been little attention given to the position of indigenous women at the interface of ethnicity and gender, within broader indigenous or women's movements (Radcliffe 2000; Sevarra 1997).

There is a tendency to subordinate gender to issues of ethnicity within indigenous women's organizations not only in Ecuador but Latin America in general (Chinchilla 1993:43). Ecuadorian indigenous organizations recognize and emphasize the importance of indigenous women's participation as crucial to their success, and have women's groups within their larger organizations. However these indigenous women's groups are not focussed on issues surrounding gender, but rather women are incorporated into most indigenous organizations in Ecuador in their reproductive capacity as mothers and their connection to *Pacha Mama* (Mother Earth or land) (Radcliffe 2000).

Ethnicity, not gender, is the primary identity or affiliation.⁶³ There is a sense that a separate focus on gender issues would be divisive and damaging to political strategies based on ethnicity (Interviews with CONMIE and CONAIE's -Department for Women, Quito, October 1999). On this point, many indigenous organizations argue that equality

⁶³ It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a sustained critique of notions of identity, however it is not viewed uncritically in this context. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) point out that identity is both a practise and a category of analysis, used by people in everyday settings to make sense of themselves and their relations with others, and used by "political entrepreneurs" to organize collective action along certain lines (2000:5). Useful to the current context, Tilly (1996) characterizes identity as "blurred but indispensable...an actor's experience of a category, tie, role, network, group or organization, coupled with a public representation of that experience.." (p.7). Most relevant in this context is not the legitimacy of the particularistic claims made by ethnic groups in Ecuador, but rather the consequences of specific affiliations and self-understandings.

for indigenous populations as a whole will lead to equality for women, as equality is a fundamental aspect of indigenous culture; however, this has been shown to be a problematic assumption, contradicted by indigenous women and anthropologists (Radcliffe 2000). Indigenous women face a number of issues related specifically to gender (Minnaar 1998). Despite overlapping discourses of citizenship, and concern for violence against women, political participation, and equal rights, there is very little collaboration between indigenous women and other organizations belonging to what could be conceived as the women's movement in Ecuador (Interviews, Quito, September – October, 1999). One of the reasons emphasized by both indigenous women's organizations / departments interviewed was the sense that *mestizo* women's organizations are at odds with indigenous women's livelihoods and community roles. “..They (*mestizo* women's organizations) do not share our experience or understand what it means to be an indigenous women in Ecuador....” (Interview, Quito, October, 1999 my translation).

Indigenous woman's organizations considered themselves to have distinct objectives from *mestizo* organizations, although participants from the two national umbrella organizations (the *Foro Nacional Permanente de la Mujer Ecuatoriana* and the *Coordinadora Política de Mujeres Ecuatorianas*- CPME), had claimed to represent indigenous women's interests as well. Participants from the *Departamento de Mujeres*, of the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas en el Ecuador* (CONAIE)—claimed that this was “tokenism,” that they were “used” to create an impression of solidarity for the umbrella organizations' agendas, but that in reality they had very different priorities—“..*nuestras prioridades y agendas son muy diferentes...*” (Interview, Quito,

October, 1999, my translation).⁶⁴

The other national indigenous women's organization interviewed—*Consejo Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas de Ecuador* (CONMIE)—had a similar view of *mestizo* women's organizations and particularly the national coalitions. CONMIE's agenda, similar to other organizations included in the research, focused on promoting political participation, citizenship rights (interpreted by the CONMIE participants as the right to self-determination and autonomy), concern for violence against women and need for policy reform in this regard, as well as equitable gender relations (CONMIE Document 1996, Interview). However CONMIE has little formal contact with other types of women's organizations. All five participants interviewed from CONMIE emphasized that *mestizo* women's organizations had different priorities and perspectives. All CONMIE participants also emphasized that the two main national umbrella organizations (CPME and the FORO) did not address indigenous women's needs, but were co-opted by *mestizo* organizations. “...*ha habido eventos organizados por mujeres y organizaciones mestizas que lamentablemente han excluido el tema específico de mujer indígena..*” (Interview, Quito, October, 1999).⁶⁵ For this reason, they had chosen not to be a part of the coalitions, until they could be accepted on equal terms of mutual respect for their differences, rather than co-opted for political purposes. “...*Conocemos que a nivel de las*

⁶⁴ For the mostpart, participants in the so-called *mestizo* women's organizations rejected the idea that they were intentionally excluding or marginalizing indigenous women from their movement. In some interviews, however, indigenous organizations (including indigenous women's) were considered to belong to a distinct indigenous movement. Whether *mestizo* organizations explicitly or implicitly excluded the participation of non-Mestizo women is beyond the scope of the paper, but addressed in footnote 66.

⁶⁵ “*There have been events organized by women and mestizo organizations which lamentably have excluded the specific theme of Indigenous Women*” (my translation).

mujeres en el Ecuador existe el Foro Nacional Permanente de la Mujer Ecuatoriana y la Coordinadora Política de Mujeres Ecuatorianas, a las cuales tambien hemos sido invitadas, pero no hemos formado parte, esperando madurar nuestros proceso de organización y posteriormente participar con la igualdad y respeto mutuo...” (Interview, Quito, October, 1999).⁶⁶ In these relations, ethnic differences were seen to preclude shared understanding and joint action, despite similar agendas and even discourses—as outlined in the previous section. These divisions went beyond differences of opinion or special interests, but were at a more fundamental level—i.e. “they do not understand us”(Interview, Quito, October, 1999).

Perhaps more surprising were the divisions and differences that manifest *between* the national indigenous women’s organizations interviewed. This was attributed in part to the diversity of their membership, which included eleven distinct indigenous cultures as well as African-Ecuadorians. However, according to participants in both organizations, dissent was primarily due to differing perceptions of how indigenous women’s issues should be approached and presented. For example, participants in the *Departamento de Mujeres*, part of the National Indigenous Federation *la Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas en el Ecuador* (CONAIE) stated that although they addressed issues specific to indigenous women, it was important to link them to a “united indigenous voice” in order to effect change. In this context, ethnic identities transcended gender identities as a political strategy to effect change. Accordingly the bulk of the *Departamento de Mujeres*

⁶⁶ “We know that for women in Ecuador there exists the FORO and CPME, to which we have been invited to join, but have not formed a part of, as we are waiting until our own organizations and organizational process develop such that we can participate on terms of equality and mutual respect” (My translation).

de CONAIE activities were aimed at facilitating women's participation within indigenous organizations. "*...es importante que las mujeres indígenas participen en el movimiento Indígena, y que mantenemos un frente unido como indígenas en el Ecuador...*" ("....it is important that indigenous women participate in the indigenous movement, and that we maintain a united front as indigenous peoples in Ecuador...", my translation) (Interview, Quito, October, 1999).

However the participants in CONMIE disagreed with the *Departamento de Mujeres de CONAIE*. They emphasized that they had conflictive relations with the national indigenous organization and the Women's Department within it, for they felt that indigenous women's issues could not be addressed effectively as part of a broader agenda of indigenous issues. In fact the President of CONMIE stated that in the seven indigenous Federations in which there existed Women's Departments (*Area de Mujeres*), all were male dominated, with women playing subordinated, marginalized roles. "Indigenous organizations promote and perpetuate the myth of gender equality within traditional indigenous communities..." (Interview, Quito, September, 1999). For this reason CONMIE saw the need to create a separate indigenous women's organization. They did not want their ethnic identities to transcend or subordinate issues related to their gender identity.⁶⁷ In establishing CONMIE they had faced "...huge opposition from

⁶⁷ Interestingly, the head of the *Foro Nacional Permanente de la Mujer Ecuatoriana*, who was also the head of the women's branch of one of the five national umbrella unions, pointed to the parallel between the women's branch of the union and the larger union organization, and the conflicting loyalties to ethnic and/or gender identities of indigenous women's and indigenous organizations. She explained that she had faced a great deal of antagonism within the union when she had first promoted an alliance between the Union's women's office and the women's umbrella organizations i.e. the Foro. She explained that as part of the union's women's branch, she was not permitted to attend other women's organization's meetings, as she would be brainwashed for they weren't leftist. When she did attend and become active in the FORO, she

indigenous women and men, as they saw it as a disloyalty to other indigenous movements and organizations..." The President of CONMIE further stated that the Women's Departments within the seven indigenous Federations (including CONAIE) were "...threatened and persuaded not to support CONMIE..." (Interview, Quito, September, 1999).⁶⁸

The conflict among indigenous women and divided loyalties vis-a-vis broader indigenous movements reflect, perhaps most dramatically, the complex micro-political relations at play within this small sector of Ecuador's civil sphere. Given these deep divisions and conflicts, to what extent can these organizations be said to be deepening democracy including promoting a democratic culture and broadening citizen participation? These questions are explored in Chapter Four.

3.6 Reflections on Chapter Three

Chapter Three initially outlined some of the challenges facing Ecuador's exclusionary democracy, and situated women's movements in the broader context of civil society organization in the region. It then presented research findings on the micro-political relations among ten women's political organizations based in Quito, Ecuador.

The participating organizations appeared to have the bridging conditions

was punished within the union, demoted from her position of leadership.

⁶⁸ The idea that women within other indigenous organizations had been threatened to not support CONMIE was dismissed by participants from the Women's Department of CONAIE. The five CONMIE participants interviewed, including the President, also stated that they had had some support from three of the seven indigenous Federations.

necessary to overcome differences and form alliances for joint action, including the appropriation of discourses of citizenship, and a focus on issues surrounding the prevalence of, and impunity towards, violence against women. However the research findings indicated that despite overlapping interests, the existence of (self-identified) representative umbrella organizations, and mutual distrust of the State Department for Women, inter-organizational relations were characterized by division and conflict.

These divisions were particularly evident along the boundaries of ethnicity, for example between CONMIE and non-indigenous women's organizations, and between CONMIE and the CONAIE Department for Women. These inter-organizational divisions reflect the differences that manifest in broader social sphere, and point to the tensions between gender and ethnicity as strategic / political affiliations. This was even more dramatically apparent in the tension between indigenous (women's) organizations and the struggle between indigenous versus gender identities. Also of significance was the lack of commitment on the part of any of the organizations to work towards an agreed upon set of procedures through which to negotiate or deliberate over these manifest differences.

It is clear that even within one sector of civil society—women's organizations seeking engagement in policy processes at the national level in Ecuador—actors and organizations cannot be conceived of as cohesive or unified. What are the implications of such pluralism for the roles attributed to civil society in deepening democracy? What are the implications of the lack of agreed upon mechanisms through which to negotiate differences within this sector? These questions are the focus of Chapter Four, which ties together Chapters One and Three, exploring the implications of these inter-

organizational relations for ideas about civil society in development and democratic consolidation in Latin America.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Final Reflections

It is to give up on a dream of a place called home, a place free of power, conflict, and struggle, a place—an identity, a form of life, a group vision—unmarked or unriven by difference and untouched by the power brought to bear upon it by the identities that strive to ground themselves in its place.

(Honig 1996:258)

What implications do the complex micro-political relations among women's organizations seeking participation and policy change in Ecuador have for claims made about the role of civil society in deepening democracy in development / consolidationist discourses? Can civil society organizations be looked to as vehicles for increasing citizen participation and promoting a culture of democracy? Or does the reproduction of inequalities within the civil sphere further hinder meaningful participation?

This Chapter aims to link ideas about civil society and democratization in development and consolidationist discourses, reviewed in Chapter One, with the context-specific findings about micro-political relations among civil society organizations presented in Chapter Three. The first part of Chapter Four will explore the ways in which the case study problematizes fundamental assumptions about civil societies' role in deepening democracy within discourses of development. It will be argued in the second section that although these assumptions about civil society are problematic, organizations can still be perceived as democratizing forces despite the differences and exclusions that pervade the civil sphere. Finally, the need for a more theoretically informed, context-specific analyses of civil society organizations and actors will be stressed, particularly if the concept, so central to contemporary mainstream development discourse, is to be

given equal primacy in practise.

4.1. Problematizing Conceptions of Civil Society and Democratization in Discourses of Development

According to minimal procedural definitions, Ecuador is a democracy. There is agreement, however, that even without using the slippery yardstick of democratic consolidation, Ecuadorean democracy remains thin and fragile. From an institutional perspective, the power of the military in internal affairs, the weakness of political parties, breaches of democratic process (the recent military coup a notable example), all undermine even minimal procedural definitions of democracy. These weaknesses are further revealed in persistent social, economic, and political exclusion and inequity which make a mockery of equal citizenship status and rights. As noted in Chapter Three, Conaghan (1996) emphasizes that these problems of democracy have resulted in “faulty” political linkages—the failure of politicians and political institutions to integrate citizen’s demands into governing processes (1996: 34).

From a development perspective, civil society has a key role to play in strengthening democracy in this context. As pointed out in Chapter One, from a mainstream development / consolidationist perspective, Ecuadorean women’s organizations, as part of civil society, are considered to: promote social cohesion by contributing to the creation of social capital and a democratic culture; stimulate political participation by providing a vehicle for citizens to partake in policy and political processes—thus institutionalizing citizenship within the civil sphere; mitigate conflict through cross-cutting, or overlapping, interests; and reform existing democratic

institutions and procedures (Van Rooy 1998; Robinson 1998; MS—Danish Association for International Cooperation 2000; CIDA 1997; IDRC 1999; Diamond 1994:6 in Hyden 1997:8; Blaney & Pasha 1993).

Very few of these objectives were fulfilled in the example provided in the case study, reflecting in part the various criticisms leveled at this model, reviewed in Chapter One. Not only was social cohesion *not* promoted among these actors and organizations, but on the contrary, pre-existing social rifts and the accompanying relations of power were reproduced. As Schild states with regard to women organizing in the Chilean context, “..these cleavages are manifested through what seems like a common language of rights..” (Schild 1997:111). In spite of broad appropriation of discourses of citizenship, in reproducing hierarchies of inequality, organizations further hindered the institutionalization of citizenship rights. As noted in Chapter One, mainstream development discourse tends to neglect these relations of inequality which manifest in disparities in access to material and political resources among organizations (Alvarez 1997; Fisher 1997). Although there were striking material differences between *mestizo* and indigenous organizations,⁶⁹ with indigenous organizations operating on much smaller budgets and in relatively modest quarters, these differences garnered far less attention during the interviews than did disparities in access to political resources. In theory, women’s organizations’ official link to state policy processes should be via CONAMU. As explained in the case study, however, this was limited by poor relations between civil society organizations and CONAMU across the organizational spectrum. The existence

⁶⁹ Although the setting of organizations was not an official part of the interviews or analyses, the *mestizo* organizations visited had larger, better equipped offices (i.e. with computers, faxes, several phones and administrative staff), in comparison to the indigenous women’s organizations.

of bilateral relations between certain organizations and politicians or ministries in the absence of effective institutional channels for participation, combined with organizations' distrust and strained relations with the State Department for Women—CONAMU, served to further entrench particularistic, undemocratic political practises. With only certain organizations able to capitalize on the personal links which they maintained with individual politicians and departments, a limited number of voices had access to decision-making processes and the responsibility of presenting 'women's issues and priorities' to government actors and institutions.

Although the state is not, as Schild (1997) reminds us, "a monolith with intentions—such as, for example, to co-opt,"(1997:97), its institutions and practises shaped the parameters of peoples' actions (Schild 1997:98). For example, CEIME's connections with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, and the National Police lead to comparatively enormous influence on these political agendas. Similarly CEDIME was able to generate political support for specific educational initiatives due to key political / personal contacts within the Ministry. The FORO and CPME wielded significant political influence, less as a result of personal contacts than the weight that they carried as national coalitions. Of the two, CPME had made the most headway in influencing policy agendas, and succeeded in changing and inserting several clauses within the constitution. In contrast, CONMIE had no official or unofficial dialogue with government institutions or politicians; participants even stated that their own opportunity to participate in decision-making processes was via the national coalitions, something

that they explicitly sought to avoid.⁷⁰

In this case, similar to Schild's example in Chile, the integration of some women and women's organizations is occurring at the expense of the marginalization of others (Schild 1997:106). As Ewig (1997) found in the Nicaraguan context, "uneven resources among feminist groups and hierarchical internal NGO relations, discourages democratic practices within the feminist movement" (1997:100). Consequently participation continues to be a restricted activity. Although there is increasing recognition that civil society organizations themselves maybe neither democratic, transparent or accountable, and a subsequent re-thinking of their democratizing potential in this light, there is still little attention to the significant (democratic, undemocratic or non-existent) processes and procedures through which organizations can negotiate or deliberate over difference. Interestingly, there was no lobbying by any participant / organization towards more democratic, accessible mechanisms either for participation or disagreement.

The absence of commitment, among all of the organizations interviewed, to creating an accepted, institutionalized process, not only to enable participation but through which to negotiate difference, meant that any influence on policy processes wielded by organizations within this sector failed to neutralize the power differences among civil society actors / citizens through equal participation in the debate

⁷⁰ As the case study noted, interviews revealed that indigenous women's organizations felt excluded and marginalized by what they termed *mestizo* women's organizations. However interviews with participants in the latter organizations revealed that they felt that they were representing Ecuadorean women, that is, not explicitly excluding indigenous women from the movement. It was beyond the scope of the research to establish conclusive basis for either claim. It was my impression, however, that although *mestizo* women's organizations were not explicitly excluding or marginalizing indigenous women, certain factors such as their membership (almost exclusively *mestizo*), and the tendency to represent Ecuadorean women as a cohesive category, did contribute to implicit exclusionary practises.

(Habermas 1996; Flyvbjerg 1998; Cohen 1996).⁷¹ This is particularly significant for development / donor organizations seeking to strengthen democracy by supporting civil society actors and organizations. Even if the capacity of specific organizations to participate in policy dialogue is enhanced, without a broader set of procedures for deliberation, non-democratic, old-style political practises are arguably reinforced.

Finally, despite the existence of broad national coalitions there was little evidence of social capital or horizontal relations of trust among organizations, and these were explicitly absent between indigenous – *mestizo* organizations. This absence of “generalized trust” (Uslaner 1999:125) existed not only between CONMIE and CPME and the FORO, but also between CONMIE and the Department for Women of CONAIE. As noted in Chapter Three, participants in the latter considered the establishment of a Women’s indigenous organizations outside of the parameters of the indigenous movement to be a betrayal. The verbal and physical threats cited by CONMIE participants are testament to the profoundness of this sense of betrayal and mistrust.

4.2 Multiple Publics, Difference, and Democratization

Clearly the present case study findings, as well as others studied in different

⁷¹ This is the thrust of Habermas’ discourse theory of democracy. Cohen (1996), in a review of Habermas’ deliberative democracy, outlines the key requirements of an “ideal deliberative procedure” through which agreement is sought. “In such a procedure participants regard one another as equals; they aim to defend and criticize institutions and programs in terms of considerations that others have reason to accept, given the fact of reasonable pluralism and the assumption that those others are reasonable; and they are prepared to cooperate in accordance with the results of such discussion, treating those results as authoritative..” (1996:100). This is clearly not the case among Ecuadorean women’s organizations participating in the case study.

contexts (Ewig 1997; Fisher 1997), problematize the development / consolidationist understanding of the role of civil organizations in democratization. However there are alternative conceptions of civil society that consider atomization within the civil sphere not as a detriment but rather as a positive force for democratization. These perspectives are presented and assessed in this section.

In political theory, Nancy Fraser is one of the foremost advocates of the need to re-think the public / civil sphere and its role in democratization. Fraser (1995), compellingly argues that the idea that public or civil life can be confined to a “single overarching sphere,” (which underlies development discourse), is unsatisfactory(1995: 289). She points out that in stratified societies, relations of power, hierarchy, and inequality cannot be bracketed in the civil / public sphere. That is, even with formal or legal bestowal of equal rights, such as those professed in the Ecuadorean Constitution, informal impediments to participation persist. Whether these be in the form of “unequally valued cultural styles” (Fraser 1995:290), discrepancies in access to material, cultural, and political resources (Alvarez 1997), the marginalization of racialized groups, or “protocols of style and decorum” (Fraser 1995:289), these impediments function to exclude certain people and populations from participating equally in the civil / public sphere. Fraser posits that in light of these inequalities and differences, civil society is not a singular sphere but composed of a plurality of competing publics (Fraser 1995:289). Not only does she redefine the civil / public sphere as composed of multiple publics or “subaltern counter-publics,” but also argues that a plurality of competing publics constitutes a strong democratizing force, particularly in stratified societies.

Specifically, the existence of such parallel discursive arenas is seen to promote a plurality of voices, demands, and priorities, rather than marginalizing those on the periphery of the civil sphere and society in general. From this perspective, the different conceptions of gender and gender identities put forth by the *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas de Ecuador* (CONMIE), for example, represent a democratization of the civil sphere. By circulating counter-discourses in opposition to dominant (*mestizo*) public voices, CONMIE attempted to prevent a single understanding of women and women's issues from prevailing, to ensure "...that no limited social actor could attribute to herself the representation of the totality" (Mouffe 1996: 247). Accordingly, Fraser maintains that rather than "jeopardizing the democratic ideal," these types of conflictive micro-politics bring hierarchical relations to the fore "...making them visible so that they can entertain the terrain of contestation" (Mouffe 1996: 247; Fraser 1995).

Many Latin Americanist scholars have found this perspective particularly useful given the high degree of stratification that continues to define the socio-political and economic landscape in much of the region. Alvarez (1997), in her research on organizational "webs" in Brazil, notes that proliferating "alternative publics" and their increasing articulation with "official" publics has widened policy debates within institutions of political society and the state (1997:108). Similarly Paoli and Telles (1998), in a discussion of collective action and a changing democratic dynamic in Brazil, state:

Alternative policies concerning housing and quality of life, racism and gender inequalities, violence and human rights, the environment and sustainable development are elaborated and debated in diverse public arenas...this multiple

and decentralized articulation has worked to elaborate alternative social policies in new spaces of intervention.

(Paoli and Telles 1998:70-71).

4.3 Final Reflections

Broadly, this paper has attempted to examine “theoretical paradigms in a manner that connects them to contextualized political strategies” (hooks 1991:8). It has explored a conceptual history of civil society, focusing on its contemporary usages in mainstream development discourses, specifically the roles it has been assigned towards strengthening democracy. It argued that this understanding, which parallels consolidationist perspectives on democratization in Latin America, is problematic for its homogeneous, depoliticized, and undifferentiated portrayal of the civil sphere. The complexity of relations within civil societies in specific contexts was demonstrated by the case study, which focused on one small sector of associational life in Ecuador—women’s organizations engaged in, or seeking to be engaged in, policy processes at the national level. At first glance, the combination of shared concerns among these organizations for domestic violence and issues of impunity, and their common appropriation of discourses of citizenship to legitimate claims to rights, as well as the existence of seemingly broad national coalitions, and shared distrust and bypassing of the State Department for Women– CONAMU– would indicate the potential for inclusive solidarity and alliance formation (Feree and Roth 1998). Yet this small sector of the so-called women’s movement in Ecuador was characterized by fragmentation, both along and between boundaries of ethnicity.

It is apparent in the Ecuadorean context that fragmentation within the civil sphere has both positive and negative implications for the potential for civil society, and specifically women's organizations, to deepen democracy and increase participation. On the one hand, alternate perspectives on democracy and the public sphere suggest that these types of divisive micro-politics can act as a pluralizing force in what has historically been an exclusive sphere. Conflicting relations among the organizations studied ensured that marginalized interests—indigenous women's voices—did not get subsumed by dominant publics which, in this case, include *mestizo* women's organizations with inroads into institutional decision-making processes, and national women's coalitions, as well as the national indigenous organization *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE). Although certain voices in this sector of the women's movement in Quito were heard more loudly at the policy-level than others, to hear dissenting voices at all reflects the existence of a public / civil sphere.

On the other hand, however, this atomization prevented broad alliances, norms of trust and cooperation, and an overall culture of democracy. Furthermore, the absence of cohesive action also meant that the overall impact on policy issues surrounding common concerns for violence against women was weakened. This stands in contrast to seemingly more cohesive indigenous movement in Ecuador which has had greater success affecting national policy processes (Selverston 1998). This types of inter-organizational conflict is a particular concern for Thompson (1984), who feels that it is precisely this fragmentation that prevents oppositional attitudes from generating coherent alternative views which would provide a basis for effective, joint political action.

Interestingly, however, in the Ecuadorean case it is not the absence of shared concerns that prevents joint action in most cases, but a deeper division along boundaries of ethnicity which mirror broader societal patterns and structures. As revealed in Chapter Three, neither of the indigenous women's organizations, the Women's Department of CONAIE *Departamento de Mujeres*, of the *la Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas en el Ecuador* (CONAIE) or the *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas de Ecuador* (CONMIE), wanted to be absorbed into a false we that reflected the more powerful voices of other women's organizations. CONMIE, moreover, did not want to be absorbed into the we of indigenusness either, resulting in their isolation from both broader women's and indigenous movements. As one participant from CONMIE stated "...we are different from both the indigenous movement and the *mestizo* women's movement, they cannot claim to represent us to the government or anyone..." (Interview, Quito, October 1999). Although none of the *mestizo* women's organizations interviewed explicitly excluded indigenous women, as previously noted factors such as their membership (exclusively *mestiza*), and representation of Ecuadorean women as a cohesive category implicitly contributed to the exclusion of indigenous women from their movement.⁷² Perhaps the most significant consequence of fragmentation within this

⁷² As previously stated it is beyond the scope of this paper to conclusively establish the existence of exclusionary or racist practises by *mestizo* women's organizations vis-a-vis indigenous women. Interviews revealed that exclusionary practises were certainly perceived by indigenous women's organizations, and divisions along lines of ethnicity were clearly entrenched. Whether this split was based on perceived or actual racism, or whether it was inevitable due to insurmountable differences, is a question that deserves further research. Explicitly exclusionary practises were not apparent among the so-called *mestizo* organizations, however as mentioned in the text, implicit practises, their membership, and construction of issues facing Ecuadorean women certainly contributed to the unconscious exclusion of non-*mestizo* women. Given the tensions between gender and ethnic identities, however, it could be argued that the split was inevitable, reflecting differences that could not be bridged, despite common strategies and concerns. Despite these differences, the fact that there were so few instances of cooperation, particularly given the

sector, however, was a lack of commitment to establishing processes or mechanisms through which to deliberate or negotiate difference.

What does all this mean for discourses of development on democratization and civic organization? Whether this type of atomization represents a positive democratizing force is, of course, contingent on definitions of success—whether it is the penetration of policy processes, as argued by Mazmanian and Rochon (1993), or increased pluralism of voices, as Fraser et. al. suggest. Regardless of whether it is conflictive or coalitional, the theoretical overview and case study have demonstrated that in discourses of development, civil society might be more usefully re-conceptualized as a *relational* concept, involving people and processes that are interconnected and embedded in particular socio-political, economic, and historical contexts.

As Alvarez (1997, 1998) and Chalmers (1997) have argued, organizations are not “self-contained, discrete or isolated actors, somehow pure and disconnected from one another or from the larger constellation of social and political actors” (Alvarez 1997:89). Focussing on the Latin American context, both Alvarez (1997) and Chalmers (1997) state the importance of recognizing the broader social structures within which organizations are embedded. Despite divisiveness within the sector, participating organizations maintained diffuse networks with other actors and organizations—as the example of CEIME clearly shows.

Not only is civil society relational, it is inherently political, bound up in the relations of power and inequality pervading society at large. It is critical that the political

presence of bridging condition points to the existence of (implicit or explicit) racist practises.

nature of associational life be taken into account in development initiatives to strengthen civil society and democracy, where it matters deeply who receives international financing and support or who does not. This is not merely a call for a sharp awareness of the tensions and limitations of social action, (Melucci 1992) but it is the recognition that the civil sphere is no longer a safe place called home free of power, conflict and struggles (Honig 1996: 258). “..To accept the impossibility of the conventional home’s promised safety from conflict, dilemmas, and difference, is not to reject home but to recover it for the sake of an alternative..practise of politics.” (Honig 1996:270). The practise of politics as it relates to civil society is of particular importance in the context of development. If the so-called strengthening of civil society organizations does not take place in conjunction with a focus on the processes and political rules of the game through which deliberation and citizen participation take place, non-democratic structures are further entrenched. Without such agreed upon processes in place, spheres of association are unable to systematically or sustainably have a transformative influence on social and political life.

Regard for the micro-political relations and political processes in particular contexts becomes particularly more important as attention is increasingly focused on civil society as a global phenomenon (see Lipschutz 1992; Macdonald 1994),⁷³ and the gap

⁷³ The idea of a global civil society has emerged as part of the broader challenge to the realist view of the nation state as the principle actor on the international stage (Macdonald 1994:271). Certainly the international environmental movement, the Ottawa process and the ban on landmines, as well as recent protests at the WTO conference in Seattle evidence the existence of organization for international causes across national boundaries. Examples such as the Pan-indigenous Movement in South America, or the use of an internationally-oriented website and internet communication by the Zapatistas in the Chiapas uprising to challenge the territoriality of the Mexican nation-state, also blur boundaries of inside and outside, and require a re-thinking of the current geopolitical order (Slater 1997). Even some of the participating organizations, both indigenous and *mestizo*, had established various connections not just at the local or national but

between debates about democracy in the development industry and political theory, including ideas about how public discourse, debate and action does / ideally could take place, grows. To conclude, it is clear that the complex relations among organizations working towards social and political transformation require more theoretically informed, context-specific analyses. This becomes particularly important as funds earmarked for the strengthening of civil society organizations increase (Robinson 1998), and ideals of citizen participation and democratization become the favoured children of mainstream development programming.

also the international level. However R. B. J. Walker (1995), argues that the conceptual problem of global civil society is that it reproduces statist discourse, with its ontological disjunction between what goes on inside and outside the modern state (1995:311). Movements and organizations do not easily conform "to the prevailing discourses of sovereignty or a simple counter-sovereignty" (Walker 1995:311.), and as Macdonald (1994) points out, "global civil society interactions reproduce the conflicts and contradictions of the domestic civil societies they emerge from, and also create new ones reflecting the dynamics of power at the international level" (Macdonald 1994:283).

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