

DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES? VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION AND DEMOCRATIC CULTURE IN A SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIP¹

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Formal democracy has, for the first time in the country's history, been established in South Africa. Whether that democracy will survive remains unclear. Equally unclear is whether citizens will enjoy access not only to the form of democracy but also to its content.

Periodic elections are, of course, a necessary condition for democracy, but not a sufficient one. A further requirement is that citizens acquire the ability to hold their elected representatives to account, an outcome which is not guaranteed by formal democratic procedures. For a variety of reasons, formal democracy can co-exist with power relations between 'voters' and 'representatives' which are, in reality, thinly disguised relations between leaders and the led.

In these cases, those who hold elective office use the power and resources which this bestows to their own advantage. For example, they ensure that public resources which are in theory available to all are available only to those who are loyal to the power-holders: the power to dispense public goods becomes the capacity to reward the obedient and punish the dissident, a relationship known as patron-clientelism. The result is that voters are subjects, not citizens, clients of a powerful patron rather than autonomous individuals who may decide freely who is to govern on their behalf.

Evidence that this phenomenon can co-exist with formal democracy is provided by, for example, post-war Italy. Here, despite having all the formal prerequisites of democracy, power in many parts of the country was, for many years, used by patrons to ensure that a compliant citizenry remained beholden to them for access to entitlements which were theoretically available to all (White, 1994). The result was that elections largely became a ritualised exercise in which the patrons or their favoured candidates were routinely returned to power and in which the rights which democracy bestows remained beyond the reach of those who were relegated to clients.

There is plentiful evidence that this is a distinct possibility in South Africa. Firstly, the evidence suggests that the winner of the first democratic election, the African National Congress, could enjoy an almost guaranteed electoral majority

for many years (Friedman, 1994). This creates opportunities for elected representatives to gather to themselves, over time, the power and the resources required to become patrons of many citizens, rather than their servants. Secondly, democracy and the assumptions among citizens that accompany it are clearly new to this country. Given the salience of race in the society, the majority of citizens may conclude that the fact that the new leadership is (largely) black is enough of a reversal of past injustices to ensure very little determination to hold it to account. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, research shows that patron-clientelism does exist in this society, that it is the dominant feature of relations between leaders and residents in at least some informal shack settlements (White, 1994). While these factors offer cause for pessimism, some analysts insist that the fight against apartheid created a vigorous culture of democracy at the grassroots of the society which will act as a powerful counterweight to a new elite which seeks to turn citizens into subjects (Swilling, 1992).

To both sides of the argument, a key question is the extent to which a 'democratic culture' has - or can - take root here. And the two views cited here show that there is no consensus on this question.

This study does not attempt to give a definitive answer. Instead, it seeks, in a modest way, to supply some empirical data which is at present lacking in the debate about whether a democratic culture exists here that is strong enough to block politicians who are tempted to become patrons rather than representatives. Following theoretical and empirical work on Italy - by the author of this study as well as other scholars - it accepts, for reasons which will become clear, the hypothesis that a vibrant and democratic associational life, expressed in active and widespread participation in voluntary associations, equips citizens to reject patron-clientelism. By means of a thorough empirical study of three neighbourhoods, it examines the extent and nature of participation in voluntary associations and then seeks to offer some tentative implications for the society's capacity to escape patron-clientelism.

While the study does not offer a route map to consolidating a democratic culture and society, it may offer important pointers to those concerned to understand one element of our democratic prospects and to those concerned to use that understanding actively to strengthen our democratic prospects.

Politics and Voluntary Association

The American political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba adopted from social anthropology the concept of 'political culture' to illuminate their understanding of political behaviour as the product of the history of both the

political system and its individual members - a phenomenon which is, therefore, rooted in both public events and private experience. Dowse and Hughes emphasise that:

in studying the origins of a political society through the ideas embodied in the political culture approach, it is necessary to treat both the historical development of the society as a whole and the life experiences of the individuals who eventually embody the culture of the society (1972:228).

In their study of political culture, Almond and Verba administered an identical questionnaire to respondents in five countries. From the responses they generated a typology of five different types of political culture. The type relevant to this study is a 'civic culture' which

includes the notion of participation in structures widely regarded as legitimate but in which, for most people at least, life offers a range of opportunities for commitment to parochial and a-political institutions, a commitment which helps to develop both a sense of potential personal competence and a sense of trusting other people ... the sense of political competence is the feeling that political 'inputs' and 'outputs' can be affected by the citizen (1967:231).

The opposite of political competence is alienation from the political process.

In a more recent study, Robert Putnam argues that the quality of political participation and the nature of politics are quite different in different parts of Italy. In his view, while politics in the south and north east is 'organised hierarchically and focused more narrowly on personal advantage', in other regions 'political behaviour ... presumes that politics is about collective deliberation on public issues' (Putnam 1993:96). Thus, whilst the former would produce an 'alienated' political culture in Almond and Verba's terms, the latter is closer to their notion of a 'civic culture'.

Putnam's work is of interest to the present study because it attempts to define the elements of the 'civic' culture which, in his view, underpins the democratic behaviour which prevents patron-clientelism from taking root in parts of the society. An examination of the extent to which these elements exists in South Africa might throw light on the possibilities for and obstacles to the growth or maintenance of a democratic culture here.

Putnam adduces some correlates of this civic minded style of politics: high turnout for national elections and referenda; low use of the personal preference vote² and a high incidence of newspaper readership (Putnam, 1993:96). He argues further that the existence of a dense network of voluntary associations is more than an indicator of civic mindedness: it contributes to its growth and

strength since it offers people experiences which cultivate patterns of behaviour and political attitudes consistent with a democratic culture. These include creating and abiding by sets of rules of conduct, electing and deposing officials, debating and deciding on the best ways of achieving common goals. It builds social trust, or, in Putnam's words, constitutes social capital: voluntary associations are 'empowering' since they impart the skills and experience needed to participate in public life as citizens, with rights and obligations. Equally importantly, they do so in a way which strengthens democratic behaviour patterns because this participation is bound by rules which oblige members to respect each others' rights. This applies whether they are football clubs, bird watching societies, choirs, burial societies (very common in Italian towns and villages until the advent of the welfare state) or trade unions.

This investigation took as its starting point this understanding that voluntary associations - in all their variety - play a significant role in the development of a civic-minded, democratic, culture characterised by debate and action on matters such as political morality and good government and in which patron-clientelism is likely to find infertile soil. A number of underlying assumptions need to be spelled out here:

The first is that civic mindedness is a crucial characteristic of a political culture in which citizens seek the common good by grouping together rather than pursuing their individual interests through personal ties of kinship and clientelism. The latter tendencies instead tend to produce political corruption in an elite which also exclusively pursues its own interests. There is, for example, no accountability for political decisions in a political system in which an elite maintains its position through clientelism. In a civic-minded culture, on the other hand, citizens not only expect their leaders to be accountable, but expect to take responsibility not only for their own behaviour but for the conduct of their leaders by calling them to account when appropriate.

Secondly, voluntary associations, because they are run according to rules invented or at least supported by the membership, promote an expectation that members will conduct themselves according to the rules and that they can be called to order and disciplined if they do not. Clearly, such an expectation is a component of a civic-minded political culture. Among the questions which our research raises are, firstly, whether voluntary associations do develop such expectations and behaviour and, secondly, if these are transferred from the arena of the voluntary association into the local and national politics.

Thirdly, the stability of a democratic political system depends on the existence of ties which cross-cut divisions based on kinship, ethnicity and religion (see, for example, Truman, 1951 and Dahrendorf, 1959). Voluntary associations could contribute to this insofar as they are issue- or neighbourhood-based. If membership is based on rural place of origin, for example, it is possible that such associations would reinforce rather than cross-cut ethnic loyalties.

Our research can address these important questions in only a very preliminary way: it was a necessarily small-scale study located in only three of a myriad of possible geographical neighbourhoods. In addition, normal democratic political life for the people we were studying has only very recently begun. Thus, the second of our questions - whether expectations and behaviours generated at the level of the voluntary association are transferred to the political level - cannot be answered with empirical evidence at this stage.

Voluntary Associations in South Africa

Putnam's correlation between voluntary association and a culture of civic mindedness provides a useful starting point to examine the prospects for and obstacles to the growth of a democratic culture in South Africa. By testing the degree of participation in voluntary associations among the historically disenfranchised who live in urban township neighbourhoods, the study was initiated to offer important pointers to the current and likely future state of democratic culture and participation here.

We anticipated that participation in associations and attitudes towards democratic participation would both vary sharply, depending on education levels, length of residence in urban areas, socio-economic status, the degree of identification with traditional institutions and similar factors. As this report will show, this assumption has been only partly vindicated. However, our assumption that an investigation of participation in voluntary associations would unearth information vital to an understanding of grassroots political culture was confirmed.

Research Areas and Methods

The geographic area chosen for the research was the township complex of Soweto, the country's biggest agglomeration of black urban residents and now formally a part of the Greater Johannesburg metropolitan area. We chose three different types of township dwelling pattern in which to conduct the research. They were a long-established formal township of small houses built by the local authority, Mzimhlope; the neighbouring Meadowlands hostel, originally built

for occupation by single male migrant labourers; and a recently legalised 'squatter' settlement in the middle of Soweto, Powa Park.

In Mzimhlope, we paced out a block of streets which contained the number of houses which we considered we could comfortably manage to visit and revisit during the research period. These streets form a 'community' in the limited sense that there are some natural boundaries around the edges (a highway on one side, which divides the area from the hostel, and open ground on the other two sides of the triangle) and most people within the triangle know one another, at least by sight.

In the hostel we chose a block in the section which used to be occupied only by single migrant labourers. At the time of the research, however, they had already been joined by women and children and other newcomers. They have in common a particular form of internal organisation and a tendency to owe allegiance to the Inkatha Freedom Party. We also covered a block in the hostel which had been occupied, since 1977, by households which were evacuated from floods in another part of Soweto. They had also been joined by newcomers.

Finally, in Powa Park, since it is quite a compact settlement of about 300 shacks, we spoke to whoever was available and willing to talk to us.

Although the focus of the research was on ordinary members of the organisations, and, indeed, on non-members, in all three areas we also talked to those occupying leadership roles in local voluntary associations.

In all the areas, the researchers went systematically from house to house asking if the occupants were prepared to spend some time talking about themselves and their involvement in associations. The interviewers had a check-list of completely open-ended questions and respondents were encouraged to digress and elaborate as they wished. In the first encounter they were asked about the composition of the household, education and employment histories of all the members and about the organisations, if any, to which they belonged. During a second and subsequent discussions, they were encouraged to talk about how their organisations were run, how finances were managed and how they would deal with mismanagement if it arose. The qualities of office bearers were discussed and whether the same criteria applied to those in political office. As people became more aware of the forthcoming local government elections, these became the topic of conversations as well.

Researchers kept notes of these conversations and compiled them into a daily diary and into a dossier on each household.

Although this report will make some limited use of statistical material gathered from the interviews, it does not purport to offer definitive quantitative data on associational life in the areas which were researched. This would not have been

appropriate, since we were concerned to examine the 'quality' rather than 'quantity' of voluntary association participation. Instead, the findings are based on intensive field work, which included not only interviews, but observation of association meetings and, in some cases, both participation in and observation of social processes which shed light on the research question.

Types of Voluntary Organisations in the Research Areas

Civics

Civic associations were or had been active in all three areas. The 'civics' appeared in the 1980s when they were established as a key element of the strategy pursued by the United Democratic Front. The UDF owed allegiance to the principles of the ANC and acted as a substitute for the banned movement during the 1980s, to mobilise the population in a way most likely to withstand government security action. Civics, although allied to the UDF, insisted that they were 'non-aligned' politically since they were ostensibly a kind of residents' association, geographically based and therefore open to all residents of a particular area.

These claims, as well as the civic movement itself, are controversial. While the debate is heated and complex and has been aired extensively elsewhere, two criticisms are relevant for the purposes of this report. The first is that they purported to speak for and represent all residents within their boundaries but that this claim could never be tested since few civics recruit individual members. During the 1980s, this failure to recruit members and therefore to keep membership lists could be justified by very real fears of arrests and persecution. But, although there is no longer any danger to members, the style of the 1980s has persisted and these organisations, for the most part, still do not have lists of their members - but still purport to speak for all those within the geographic boundaries to which they lay claim. This has sometimes led to violence as groups emerge who are opposed to the civic but find their interests ignored by, for example, developers who have accepted the civic claim to representativeness at face value.

While this is not the place to canvass this argument fully, one relevant consequence of the civic style is that they lack formalised internal democratic rules in the sense that one does not acquire rights and obligations by joining the civic. One is deemed a member by virtue of where one resides. Some critics have suggested that this tendency has been strengthened by the formation in the early-1990s of the SA National Civic Organisation (SANCO), which has imposed a centralised structure on the civic movement.³ It is argued that, while

township residents may have exercised a degree of informal control over local civic leaders who were physically accessible, they have no such control over a national leadership whose identity may be unknown to them and in respect of whom they have no formal rights. In addition, whilst declaring every intention of signing up millions of members, the national leadership has singularly failed to persuade its supporters to join up and pay membership subscriptions (Seekings, 1997).

The second relevant consequence is that the claim to apolitical status is mythical since SANCO endorsed the ANC in the first national election and repeated that endorsement for the 1995 local elections. This, it is argued, simply formalises the reality that SANCO civics - the vast majority, although there are a handful formed by rival political organisations, are the grassroots arm of the ANC alliance and are generally regarded by township residents as such.

The mere fact that civics clearly are politically aligned does not preclude the possibility that they may contribute to 'civic-mindedness' in Putnam's sense. However, the fact that few maintain formal democratic arrangements raises questions about the extent to which they can be regarded as voluntary associations in Putnam's sense and in that used in this study. Nevertheless, civics do provide an avenue for a form of associational life for residents of the researched areas.

The leadership of civics is almost exclusively male. However, in some areas the street committees⁴ which were intended to constitute the 'building blocks' of the civics and which were particularly effective in Mzimhlope in organising responses to police and hostel-centred violence, are still active. Some of the leaders at this level are women.

Two other forms of association are widespread in the research areas and more generally in urban South Africa: the burial society and the *stokvel*, or rotating credit association. These involve the handling of money and therefore careful records are kept and controls are maintained over its disbursement and those who manage it.

Burial Societies

Burial societies are pervasive: at least one member of each household in the formal township area where we conducted the research belongs to at least one burial society so as to ensure financial and physical help at the time of a death. The rules of any particular burial society will define which persons in a family are covered by whatever benefits the society offers its members. In the hostel and informal settlement areas, other arrangements are made which ensure a 'decent burial' when deaths occur.

Township funerals are costly and require a great deal of physical work in food preparation and transformation of the home to receive the many visitors. Many things must be arranged and paid for: an elaborate coffin, limousines to transport the family and buses for the guests, a marquee with tables, chairs and plates for serving the post-burial meal and plenty of coffee, tea, alcohol and cakes for the period in which condolences are expressed in person by relatives, neighbours and friends. The bereaved family is expected to keep open house and feed everyone who comes to the funeral: no one may be turned away.

Some urban dwellers (particularly those living in hostels) retain strong rural ties but die in the city; their bodies must be returned to the (rural) resting place of their ancestors, accompanied by family and friends. Again the transport of the body and the mourners requires immediate and costly disbursements.

Two types of burial societies exist to help the bereaved family. One appears to be universal and is evident wherever there are groups of people living together, however briefly. It is geographically restricted and entails somebody, who may be elected or simply take on the task spontaneously, going from house to house in the neighbourhood, in the event of a death, collecting a few rand (a fixed amount) from each household. This person keeps strict records of which households have contributed and how much is handed over to the family. He or she is always assisted by two or three others who physically collect the cash. Any contributor can demand to peruse the records. Thus although this organisation is set up on an *ad hoc* basis to deal with a particular bereavement, it is accountable to the neighbourhood and the same people will often take on the roles on a continuing basis, performing the collecting and disbursing tasks whenever there is a death.

A second type of burial society has a more formal existence, often a long history (many started when people first moved to Mzimhlope, for example) and may be geographically dispersed. This happens because friends who are not residents of the same suburb or township may initiate the burial society, or someone who is a member may obtain permission for a friend or relative to join. Some burial societies we came across encompass members in areas across Gauteng; in others, almost all the members are neighbours. They differ from the more *ad hoc* societies in that they keep membership lists and collect weekly or monthly dues, imposing penalties for failure to contribute on time. There is also an elected executive committee and designated people with rights to sign cheques or make disbursements. All the records are kept in a book which must be available for scrutiny at any time; members become suspicious and distressed if the book is not kept up to date.

Besides dispersing money at the time of a bereavement, members of these societies generally commit themselves to helping with the organisation and catering for a funeral. Given these domestic obligations, it is perhaps not surprising that women were generally the prime movers in membership-based burial societies which we came across. Men, where they are members, do not attend meetings. Men benefit, of course, as the family members of the active women. We have heard that there are all-men burial societies, but we did not encounter any in the course of our research.

It is worth noting that burial societies constitute a somewhat different form of association to those that are formed to cater for people interested in a common pursuit (sporting, cultural and the like) or a common commitment to the society or community (blood donating). Burial societies, in contrast, are formed to cater for individual economic need - that to provide for a funeral - although obviously in a collective manner. In this sense, it seems appropriate to view the burial society as a form of 'collective sustenance or survival' (Narsoo, 1993).

Stokvels

These rotating credit associations in the research areas are similar to those found in many parts of the world amongst relatively poor people. The origin of the word that is used across South Africa is obscure, but is generally accepted as being the English 'stockfair': events which were held in the Eastern Cape by white farmers at which they sold cattle or stock. The stokvel always involves a group of people each of whom contributes an equal amount of money at a gathering of some kind which takes place on a regular basis. The members of the stokvel are entitled, on a rotating basis, to take the whole 'pot'. The contribution and distribution of money is always accompanied by a social event, and each member also brings a contribution in money or in kind towards the drinks, tea and coffee, cakes or meat and salads which are consumed.

In some stokvels to which our informants belong, the members may spend their 'pot' on whatever they wish, its advantage over personal saving being that there is no temptation to spend the money before the full amount has been accumulated. In others, the members agree that the purpose of the stokvel is to buy specified items, for example groceries, where the large lump sum means the beneficiary can purchase in large quantities, thus effecting savings. A recent similar development which is very popular at present is a 'kitchen party'. Here the members bring a small gift of a household item to the house of the hostess, together with some food or drink and an agreed sum of money which can be as much as R250 per month. The role of hostess rotates amongst members of the

group and she is enabled to purchase a large and expensive kitchen item such as a cooker or fridge without having to incur hire purchase charges.

Like burial societies, stokvels are motivated at least in part by individual economic need. They cater for this, however, in a way which entails an important degree of communality and an at least informal acknowledgement by members of their obligations to one another. But there is little if any relationship between members and office-bearers since the latter do not, in effect, exist - the responsible 'official' is the person whose turn it is to arrange the gathering - although there is a national association of stokvels which exhibits all the formal characteristics of a voluntary association. It should be stressed, however, that while individual stokvels lack some of the formal elements of voluntary associations, they engender a high degree of mutual commitment and obligation since members rarely if ever seek to evade their duty to contribute to the common enterprise.

Church-based Associations

Amongst those interviewed, especially in the formal township, many belong to churches both 'mainstream' (Dutch Reformed, Anglican, Apostolic) and syncretic or 'indigenous' (Independent Zionist). The most common voluntary association within the ambit of churches in the research areas was the Mothers' Union of the 'mainstream' churches. Across denominations, members of Mothers' Unions meet for prayers on Thursday afternoons. Their other activities are to visit the sick, the orphaned, prisoners, the handicapped and the destitute, taking offerings of money and clothing as a gesture of sympathy and support. The Mothers' Union also generally acts as a burial society for its members. In addition, women informants who belong to Mothers' Unions tended to be active in the local membership-based burial societies. Very often these societies had been started by Mothers' Union members who saw the provision of burial 'insurance' as an extension of their charitable and community work.

The parish priest does seem to exercise a significant degree of control over Mothers' Unions: for example, the minister of each denomination receives regular reports from his Mothers' Union and is consulted by them. As one informant said, 'The minister is like the father of the family. Nothing can happen without his being consulted'. In the event of irreconcilable differences, the minister is called in to mediate. Despite this reliance on the minister, Mothers' Unions are democratic institutions, they are based on voluntary membership and they do elect office bearers. And they do appear to engender a commitment to addressing broader social needs, an extension of their members' religious commitment. Despite their link to burial societies, therefore, their members are

not primarily united by economic need but by a willingness to contribute to the common weal.

Members of Mothers' Unions are commonly not active in the civics and are cautious about 'politics'. One very active informant told us that she views the civics with suspicion as a 'platform for politicians'. In her view the Mothers' Union is successful as a community organisation because there are shared (religious) beliefs amongst members and there is an arbitrator, in the form of the minister. Both of these are lacking in other bodies.

There are also church choirs, which our informants listed amongst their voluntary association memberships. However, they have none of the features of a society, being organised by the musician who conducts them without any organisational participation from the singers. They do not take part in choir competitions, and we came across no one who was a member of the many township choirs which we believe exist in Soweto.

Sports Clubs

Given the popularity of football in the townships, we were surprised at how few people in any of the households whose members were interviewed were active players or supporters of football clubs.

It appears that local football teams are usually established at the initiative of a group of 'sponsors'. These men put up the money for the equipment and organise the young players to take part in local league games. However, the three informants who were player-members all informed us that they were generally dissatisfied with the way these clubs were run. They all had a history of leaving clubs because they were never consulted about activities and rules and because the sponsors did not hold themselves accountable to the players for the disbursement of money obtained from attendance receipts. Players claimed that they were often not paid the agreed amounts from gate money or wins but that there was no mechanisms for complaints. Another criticism was that both sponsors and players did not obey the basic rules which required them to attend matches and meetings.

Like dissatisfied burial society members, football club members did not challenge the leadership, preferring to express their discontent by exercising their 'exit' choice. In contrast to the burial societies, however, there appear to be no informal mechanisms to ensure that club 'leaders' honour their perceived obligation to members.

Aerobic Clubs

As part of their friendship and social life, young women in Mzimhlope frequently initiated aerobic classes with one of their number (generally between three and six) as the instructor. However, these groups had no formal structure (such as rules, constitution and formal membership) and were extremely short-lived.

Voluntary Associations and Social Life

It appears that the social life of our respondents has become acutely impoverished in comparison with the past. This should be understood within the broader context of political and social events during this period.

The last six years were characterised by political strife on a large scale, accompanied by massive social upheaval and violent crime with the consequent insecurity which confined people's movements to places where the threat to their personal safety was low. The social fabric and social interaction were undermined to such an extent that only vital social activities such as burial societies remained. These societies perform an essential social service and each household must have a member so that they can draw on financial and social support in the event of a death.

Recently, however, a new form of social entertainment has emerged in Soweto: 'Street-Bashes'. A group of friends pools financial resources and chooses one of their number as the host who will provide the venue. Garden tables, chairs and umbrellas are set up in the street outside the host's house and the public are invited to attend and purchase liquor and soft drinks. Although these events and the groups of people who organise them are highly ephemeral and therefore do not constitute, in any way, a type of voluntary association, they are an indication of a return to normal social interaction and township street life. On the other hand they reflect an era of consumerism since the brand names of liquor and soft drinks manufacturers are prominently advertised at the venues and they sponsor the event by providing the equipment.

In sum, anecdotal evidence suggests that the travails of the past six years have ensured a diminution of social life and hence of opportunities (and perhaps also inclinations) to join and sustain the sort of voluntary associations noted in the Italian villages. While violence is the most obvious explanation, it is worth noting that township life has been highly politicised over the past decade as townships became the most fertile soil for the 'struggle' against apartheid. Although our informants did not mention this factor, there is some evidence that one consequence of this was a tendency in which rival organisations who became aware of autonomous attempts to form local associations attempted to

'appropriate' them by ensuring that they expressed allegiance to the political group or party. This may have acted as an inhibition on spontaneous associational activity.

Whatever the reason, however, the strongest forms of associational life are those centred around common economic needs or the need to resolve or address interest-based concerns. And, while these do display a concern to address issues in a social or communal manner, they differ markedly from the voluntary associations noted in Putnam's and the author's Italian research.

It is now necessary to supplement the broad outlines of typical forms of association in townships by examining in greater detail the dynamics of associational activity in the research areas.

The Texture of Associational Life in Mzimhlope: The Mzimhlope Civic

Like other civics, Mzimhlope's claims to be politically independent, and therefore open to residents of all persuasions. However, the civic is affiliated to the Soweto Civic Association, which is allied to SANCO, and, therefore, the ANC. In Mzimhlope there is an overlap between the leadership of the Civic and the ANC, since the local ANC chair is also a civic executive member. There is no formal membership - anyone who lives within Mzimhlope's geographical boundaries is deemed to be a member. There is an annual general meeting at which an executive is elected, but there is a tendency for the same executive to be re-elected year after year. The present chair is also the chair of a local burial society which acts, in effect, as an agent for a Soweto funeral parlour's insurance scheme.

The civic maintains an office where there is always a member of the executive - who is otherwise unemployed - on duty. He is supposed to deal with emergencies, but is much criticised as he merely records events which need to be addressed, and it is not until the chair is available that any attempt is made to address the problem. The executive is also criticised for not being even-handed: a man who is known to be a murderer has not been handed over to the police because he is a friend of the chair, it is alleged. Criticism of the civic is that the executive does not consult constituents on matters of interest to them. For example, when the civic nominated members of the Transitional Metropolitan Council (pending elections later that year), the executive did not hold a meeting or consult the inhabitants of the area about who should be nominated. Young people in the area are particularly critical of the civic leadership on this and other matters.

This was demonstrated at the first public meeting called by the Mzimhlope Civic Association after the elections of April 1994. The relationship between the hostel and the township was an important item on the agenda. Young people walked out in protest because they felt that their concerns about how to foster peace were receiving no attention from the leadership.

In sum, the evidence we gathered suggests that the civic association has an ambiguous effect on the quality of associational life in Mzimhlope. There is clearly a significant degree of public participation in civic activities and residents are clearly not simply passive recipients or endorsers of decisions reached by those who run the civic. However, there does appear to be significant dissatisfaction with the extent to which the civic's decisions and activities accurately reflect residents' concerns. There are also suggestions of a leadership style which concentrates substantial power in the hands of the civic's chair, to the extent of allegedly giving him influence over who will be subjected to criminal justice. In the absence of formal mechanisms to deal with this problem, the informal ones which do appear to exist seem to offer significant but limited avenues for membership participation and even more limited checks on the leadership.

A degree of distrust in the civic's ability to represent residents adequately on issues which might challenge the informal political establishment of which the civic leaders are a part has prompted some in Mzimhlope to adopt forms of representation which bypass the civic, a phenomenon we will address at a later point.

Mzimhlope Burial Societies

We spoke to the leaders and the ordinary members of a number of burial societies which, despite their different structures, share many common characteristics.

The Tusaneng Burial Society was started in 1965 by the present chairperson. Anyone was welcome to join who agreed formally with each clause in the constitution, which was read aloud to new members. These days not so much attention is paid to the constitution and many members have probably never seen or read it. There is a weekly contribution and a fine is imposed for non-payment. The contribution was adjusted some time ago to incorporate a *stokvel* element: the kitty rotates to each member in turn, who must open a savings account in which the money is deposited. This money must be used in the event of a funeral in the family, which means that, in the event of a death, members are not allowed to claim that they have no resources to devote to the funeral at all.

In the event of a funeral, each member also 'pops out' a small, designated sum which is handed over immediately to the bereaved family. An additional small fine is levied if payment is unreasonably delayed. It is the responsibility of the chair to send a message to the members to bring the money to her. She counts the money to ensure that each member has paid, then the members are entitled to count it again. On delivery to the family, it is again counted, the transaction is witnessed and the recipient signs for the money.

The Mzimhlope Women's Helping Hand is run on similar lines. If any members delay paying their contribution, one or two committee members visit the defaulters and persuade them to pay. Members previously in good standing are allowed a certain leeway if they are in financial difficulties. The procedures followed to control the money are that the secretary records the contributions in a book, the committee scrutinises it and the treasurer takes the money to the bank and pays it into the two accounts, one for funerals and one for savings. A member can ask to see the record book at any time.

Even though neighbourhood or street burial societies appear, at first glance, to be more ad hoc in nature, since people are asked for money only at the time of a death and no money is accumulated - it is, rather, distributed immediately - they nonetheless have a structure. For example, one which covers only two of the streets in our area of Mzimhlope requests R3 towards any funeral of a resident member. There is a known membership, so that people who are neighbours but not members, are not asked to contribute. There is a chair who keeps a record of contributions and three collectors who report to her any problems experienced in collecting the money. The chair is, in turn, responsible for visiting households which have not paid for any reason. She reports back to a general meeting which is called only when there is a problem or when elections must be held.

The chair of this society is also a link between her streets and the civic; the society is, in fact, the last remnant of a once very active Street Committee, which was initially the smallest organisational component of the civic.

All burial societies in Mzimhlope are almost exclusively the domain of women: we found only one man amongst those we interviewed who is an active member himself. The chair of a local burial society explained that, while there are a few men members of her society, they do not attend meetings 'because it feels a bit uncomfortable and they are always busy'. Others suggest that men are consciously discouraged or excluded: 'A man might lie about the amount of money handed over to the family' said one leader; another said

'Men are quite dominating, so the women have taken a decision that men can attend and make verbal inputs, but they cannot make important decisions. If men are given important roles there is a

risk of them embezzling the funds of the organisation. Women are more trustworthy than men, who come with tricks to embezzle you'.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, the founders and moving forces in the membership-based burial societies are all also members of their respective church Mothers' Union.

Another characteristic of these societies is that although there are annual elections for office bearers, carried out by secret ballot, the same people are re-elected, generally until they die or are too ill to perform their roles. The Mzimhlope Womens' Helping Hand had its first president for ten years and its second for twenty, although recently the present incumbent had tried to retire at each AGM, but had been re-elected.

Similarly, the founder of Tusaneng continues to be re-elected every year despite her efforts to bring in younger women and train them to take over the role. Even when there is discontent with the manner in which an officer is fulfilling her role, she tends not to be voted out of office: for example, another geographically spread society had a rule that the book of financial records was to be circulated at each monthly meeting for scrutiny. The treasurer, a woman named Dorothy, failed to make the book available, with one excuse or another, for six months. By the end of the year she had brought it up to date but a dispute ensued between old members, who wanted her to maintain her office and new ones, who wanted to vote her out. A compromise was struck whereby Dorothy continued to collect the money, but a second person, elected on an ad hoc basis at each meeting, would actually deposit it in the bank account. It transpires that it is always older members who are elected to do this - again evidence that the old tend to inspire more trust than the young.

The tendency to re-elect office-bearers, even when they wish to hand over the reins to others, suggests that they are regarded less as leaders or representatives, more as people who are taking on an administrative responsibility on behalf of the members. This view is not restricted to the townships. It is commonplace in associations in the affluent suburbs where people generally accede to office by volunteering their services. Willingness to do the work required, rather than an ability to represent the wishes of members, is usually regarded as the key qualification for office. However, we did not come across any cases in this research where office bearers were called to account and dismissed for malpractice. Instead, disgruntled members leave and join or start other burial societies. Despite this, the members regard these organisations as democratically run. It is extremely rare that there are any accusations of malfeasance: office bearers are held accountable not so much by the threat of being voted out but by

the strength of social control exercised through gossip. The status indicators attached to burials are also bound up in the prestige of different burial societies - in other words, the respect accorded to the event depends to some extent on that bestowed on the burial society to which the deceased or his or her relative belonged. Thus the good name and standing of a burial society will be important to its members. For this reason they are much more likely to try to control office bearers through informal mechanisms rather than the public display of disaffection (which would reflect badly on the society's reputation) entailed by voting people out of office. Rather than getting rid of office bearers, therefore, members are much more likely to leave a burial society as a result of distrust or a personality clash.

This highlights a key difference between a voluntary association and a state - precisely because membership of the former is voluntary, that of the latter compulsory, the stakes entailed in choosing a leadership are significantly lowered and the democratic criteria applicable in a state are not necessarily seen by members as appropriate. The implication is that the extent to which the formal right to vote office-bearers out of their position is used by members of a voluntary association is not a good measure of the extent to which voluntary associations cultivate 'civic mindedness'. The evidence gathered here suggests that membership of burial societies does not, in practice, give members direct experience of holding office bearers to account by rejecting them in a ballot. But it also shows that the societies do, in varying degrees, use strict mechanisms which are designed - and operate - to hold officials to account. When necessary they also invent new controls and new offices.

Associational Life - Meadowlands Hostel

Hostels were constructed by local authorities and individual employers to house their workers. Meadowlands used to house employees of an array of different employers who were anxious to keep non-residents (especially women) out. Access to the hostel was strictly controlled - a pass was required to enter and women were absolutely excluded. During 1977, the local authority housed a large number of families who had been rendered homeless by flooding in nearby Kliptown. The influx of newcomers completely altered the single sex character of the hostel and controlled access disappeared. Inhabitants from very different urban and rural backgrounds and speaking different languages were forced to live cheek-by-jowl in the stark environment of the hostel with insufficient facilities to cope with the vastly increased population. Relations between them often deteriorated into hostility and violent confrontation and were always marked by mutual suspicion. Between hostel residents and people living

in the surrounding townships, relations ranged from active friendships to indifference that turned to hostility and violence during the heyday of popular mobilisation by the UDF. By the time of this research in the mid-nineties, what many residents described as a full-scale 'war' was being slowly negotiated to a wary peace. The direct targets of township attack were members of Inkatha. This was, however, easily equated with 'all Zulu speakers' (of whom many were second and third generation township dwellers) and with 'hostel dwellers' (many of whom were originally from Kliptown and not Zulu speaking but branded as 'the enemy' because of where they lived).

The Induna System

Zulu speakers in the many hostels in Gauteng who accept the authority of chiefs in their area of origin in KwaZulu Natal are organised into an interconnected system of *indunas* which is controlled from that province.

This sort of arrangement is, of course, not one of voluntary association but rather an extension of traditional rural authority structure over 'subjects' living in the city. However, an important change from appointed to elected *indunas* occurred during the conflict between the inhabitants of the Gauteng hostels and the surrounding townships during the late-1980s and early-1990s. Thus, at the time of our research, the Meadowlands hostel an elected *induna* and an elected deputy-*induna* who represent all hostel residents who identify themselves with the traditional authority structures of rural KwaZulu-Natal. The old divisions between the sub-regions had therefore dissolved into a common 'Zulu' identity with an authority and representation structure which corresponds to this conception.

The Hostel Residents Association

In order ostensibly to represent the wider interests which these rural-oriented people share with other hostel residents, a Resident's Association was created which claimed to be inclusive of all people within the hostel. However, at the time of the research, it was clearly IFP-dominated judging by the tone of a meeting attended by our researchers. Indeed, people who were not IFP supporters said that they did not feel comfortable at Resident's Association meetings and did not attend them. Nevertheless, it was a venue at which it was possible to criticise the IFP since the association was nominally independent of that party.⁵

However, its neutrality was brought into question at Residents' Association meetings at which the ANC and its allies were criticised and accused of, 'stirring confusion and chaos in the hostel' as part of an orchestrated attempt to gain

support there. Informants who did not support Inkatha said that there was no point in their attending meetings as their concerns - such as poor sanitation and broken toilets - were never addressed. Those in charge of meetings were aware of the fact that meetings were not attended by all sectors of the hostel population, accusing those who stayed away of 'preferring to gather in shebeens to criticise the leadership'.

It was suggested that the solution to this problem was to hold new elections in an attempt to encourage those who avoided meetings to elect into office people whom they supported. Since those who stayed away were likely to be people who did not support the IFP this did appear to be an attempt to create an association properly representative of all residents.

In sum, there were significant similarities between the Hostel Residents' Association and the Mzimhlope Civic. In both, membership was assumed to derive from residence rather than a conscious decision to join. Both were politically aligned whilst purporting not to be. The hostel association did, however, appear to show a greater concern for formal rules, perhaps reflecting the more hierarchical organisation of hostel life. And there seemed less pressure on hostel leadership than on its civic equivalent to address issues of immediate concern to residents, which might also reflect the stronger sense of hierarchy within the hostel - although there are other possible explanations, to which we will return. But despite these features, the Residents' Association did show a significant interest in holding the IFP to account, imparting an important element of democratic culture into its ethos.

The Texture of Community Life: Powa Park

This small tract of hilly, ashy land was first occupied next to Orlando Power Station in the 1960s by Soweto residents who wanted to keep cattle and graze them on the unoccupied riverbank. Various attempts were made by the authorities to evict them countered by a fledgling civic organisation that was helped into being by the existing Orlando Civic. In the face of strong resistance, the Johannesburg City Council, owners of the power station and the adjacent land, agreed to negotiate with the squatters. A particularly skilful facilitator was engaged by the Council, who initiated the dialogue which has been the hallmark of all subsequent dealings with the settlement. The settlement is also characterised by a set of interlocking organisations through which both these dialogues and issues of everyday life are ordered.

Powa Park General Meeting

From time to time all residents are called to an open admission 'General Meeting'. This gathering receives reports from an Executive Committee which it mandates to act on behalf of residents. The Executive Committee is not elected by the General Meeting: its members are all *ex officio* delegates from the various voluntary associations existing in the settlement. These are: local branches of the ANC and the ANC Women's League, Powa Park Burial Society, the Creche Committee and the Working Committee, which is elected by the General Meeting.

The Division of Labour Between Different Organisations and Structures

The Working Committee appeared, at the time of research, to have taken on the role previously played by the civic - liaising with the City Council on the provision of facilities. It is active in seeking physical improvements and development of the site. It was not involved in overtly political responsibilities such as helping people to register for local government elections, providing voter education and transmitting branch resolutions to higher levels of the movement. These tasks were carried out by the ANC branch. The ANC Women's League, however, acted rather more as a local voluntary association working for improvements in what are perceived to be women's issues: keeping the site clean and litter free, negotiating (with the help of the Working Committee) for a local authority mobile clinic which visits once a week and the like. The Burial Committee ensured that money was collected if a resident died and that the family was offered help with the work entailed in the burial. The Creche Committee, again with the support of the Working Committee, negotiated with the City Council to provide worn-out buses to house the creche and then to obtain funds to buy materials to construct a permanent creche building using local labour. These committees were not associations in the formal sense - they are rather groups of volunteers who undertake to tackle specific tasks (much as a club or society might form, for example, a volunteer fundraising committee).

Members of the Creche Committee have learnt some particularly significant lessons: in applying for funding they have discovered that it is useful to keep accurate records of income and expenditure since funders are more likely to listen favourably to requests for more help from an entity which maintains good financial records.

Powa Park, therefore, enjoyed (and still does enjoy) a far 'denser' network of communal life than the other areas researched in this study. It is worth noting,

however, that they were not, with the exception of the ANC and ANC Womens' League branches, membership-based: rather, they were groups of people committed to performing socially necessary tasks. The Working Committee also appeared to play a crucial support role. This is not necessarily a form of organisation which encourages constitutional accountability to members - although the General Meeting may offer a form of accountability - or pluralist politics.

Despite these qualifications, the settlement displays a high degree of collective activity designed to improve conditions and to enrich life in Powa Park. The unity required by a collective fight against removal may have played some role in encouraging an ethos of this sort. But it is important to note that, in other informal settlements, insecure tenure has promoted either patron-clientelism (since continued residence depends on the patronage of a leadership figure) or cohesion has broken down when some residents are permitted to live in an area, while others are expected to leave. This has been a common occurrence since the right to stay has often been accompanied by a promise to upgrade the settlements, which were often too overcrowded to allow upgrading unless some residents left.

Some general comments

Mzimhlope

Our overall impression is that Mzimhlope people are, by and large, politically committed but not active on a day-to-day basis in addressing common problems. While there is overwhelming support for the ANC and, particularly, for President Mandela, it is passive - it entails voting in elections but not attending branch meetings, let alone taking on political office or tasks. What does engage people collectively are local issues, such as electricity and rates payments, crime, street lighting and cleaning and relations with the hostel residents. They will attend meetings of the civic in the hope of finding solutions to these problems.

For the rest, it seems as though this very stable community caters for death by involvement in burial societies, but is not otherwise very active in associations formed to engage in common pursuits.

Powa Park

Two aspects of Powa Park are particularly striking. The first is, in contrast to Mzimhlope, the level of political engagement. Every facet of life in Powa Park is shot through with politics. Every issue that is raised with people there evokes a political response and is discussed in terms of a political solution. Commitment

to the ANC is at a very high level and is an active engagement rather than passive support.

The second is the extraordinary stability of the neighbourhood, which evinces a real sense of community with its network of active organisations which have achieved remarkable improvements in the day-to-day living conditions of residents. In our view, Powa Park's ethos illustrates a particularly encouraging outcome of consultative development practice. It is surely not coincidental that the officers of the local authority have made special efforts in Powa Park to negotiate with all the representative bodies when implementing development programmes, nor have they insisted on the removal of some residents. Perhaps the result is a virtuous spiral in which the local authority, by ensuring that its projects enjoy widespread support, successfully introduces change without provoking conflict, brings material benefits and also stimulates the growth of single issue interest groups who learn negotiating and record keeping skills as well as how to represent their constituents democratically.

Meadowlands Hostel

A peculiar characteristic of the hostel needs to be borne in mind when considering the extent of civic-mindedness - the propensity to participate in associational life - amongst its inmates. It is not at all homogeneous, yet its residents are perceived by people in the township around it as all Zulu, all rural and all supporters of Inkatha (IFP). This means that hostel residents are subject to a degree of forced identification in that everyone who lives there is 'labelled' by those not living there. Internally, it suits the IFP to claim that it represents everyone, but the political and social differences are acutely felt by non-Zulu speakers, by those who originate in the townships rather than in rural KwaZulu Natal, and by those who support the ANC. These differences are, in some circumstances, accentuated by fear of the dominant organisation, so that they are generally not openly acknowledged. And they translate into an unwillingness to participate in associational activity.

Comparative Observations

A comparison between the hostel and Powa Park reveals that both are 'communities' with a serious lack of very basic facilities: decent toilets, refuse collection, spaces which ensure privacy and the like. However, whereas in Powa Park almost everyone seems to have become involved in addressing these problems, in the hostel this is not so. In Powa Park, for example, the ANC Women's League has organised people to collect refuse and keep the common

areas tidy. In the hostel all attempts to do this have failed and similar failure has met efforts to maintain communal toilets in a decent condition.

The only association which addressed an immediate material need in the hostel was one established to lobby for a clinic. The person behind this initiative was a particularly dynamic woman who had also started a stokvel with five other people, whose purpose was to purchase building materials to upgrade dwellings. These five women were also the ad hoc committee for her clinic initiative. When she was interviewed, she had succeeded in obtaining funding from the Transvaal Provincial Administration which had also seconded staff to train women as paramedics and to educate other women in the hostel on health matters.

Aside from these very restricted but successful individually-driven initiatives, the propensity to engage in activities designed to improve the quality of hostel life is low across the board. The hierarchical way in which most residents are organised, the divisions within the hostel and the extent to which associational life is politicised seem to ensure this. But, while fear of the consequences of independent activity do not seem to prompt attempts to bypass the Residents' Association, bypassing the dominant organisations has indeed been attempted in Mzimhlope, along the lines of the events recounted below.

Spontaneous Township Organisation

In Soweto, residents are expected to pursue their interests through the Soweto Civic Association. However, two disputes, both of them education-related, show that the Civic is not necessarily seen as the appropriate channel to address some grievances or concerns, those which stem from dissatisfaction with organisations or individuals within the ANC camp. And, more importantly for this study's chief focus, they do show a willingness by residents to act in their interests where the Civic is perceived to be unwilling or unable to do so.

Jabavu East Lower Primary School

In Jabavu East, at the time of the research there was a primary school where conflict arose over the powers of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) on the one hand and the teachers' union Sadtu, which is affiliated to the Congress of SA Trade Unions, a formal ANC ally, on the other.

The principal of the school was a member of Sadtu and supported by the majority of the teachers, also members of the union. But a number of teachers resigned from Sadtu and declared their allegiance to the pupils and their parents and the PTA. Accusing the principal and Sadtu teachers of various forms of malfeasance, they used the PTA to get rid of these staff members, gain the

attention of the press and the commitment of the MEC for Education to arbitration as a means of resolving the dispute.

In this instance, the parents activated the PTA as a form of interest association and preferred this vehicle to the Civic. It is significant that Jabavu is an area which voted overwhelmingly for the ANC and there was no evidence that parents had changed their political allegiances. This suggests that parents were willing to combine to challenge the decisions of local leaders of a political alliance which they support, an important development since it indicates a willingness to challenge a form of political authority which is more likely to command allegiance in the area than any other. However, there was always the possibility that, without a supportive response from the elected authorities in the area, they would conclude that action of this sort is not productive and avoid it in future, lapsing into a form of apathy.

Meadowlands

In Meadowlands, Dzata Higher Primary School was presented with a new principal in May 1994. Teachers who were members of Sadtu objected on the grounds that he had been appointed without due consultation with them and eventually evicted him by force with the help of other members of the union from outside the school. They appointed one of the school's union members as acting principal. The parents, however, did not find this arrangement satisfactory, alleging that demands were constantly being made on them for money, without explanation or tangible results. They claimed that if they refused to pay these additional 'contributions to the school funds', the principal threatened to withhold their children's examination results.

Enraged by this and other examples of dismissive and improper behaviour, a parent decided to organise a concerted response by calling a meeting which elected a Concerned Parents Interim Committee. As in the previous case, despite being ANC supporters, parents did not call upon any of its structures or allied organisations to mediate in their grievances against their children's teachers.

Much the same conclusions can be drawn from this dispute as from the previous one, although here parents chose to establish an informal organisation rather than using the PTA. But it is particularly important to note that the alleged response of the acting principal bears strong similarities to the sort of attitude which underpins patron-clientelism. When parents refused to pay the moneys he demanded, he threatened to withdraw a service - the release of their children's examination results - to which all parents are legally entitled. The parents' response to the incident does suggest a propensity to resist clientelism.

Conclusions

Are Voluntary Associations a Microcosm of Civic-mindedness?

Several of the voluntary associations which have formed in the research neighbourhoods were certainly recognisable as such according to generally accepted criteria. They have a constitution or a set of rules of conduct accepted by the members; they hold meetings on a more or less regular basis; they have elected office-bearers who can be removed from office according to the rules or constitution.

In addition, the attitudes and values expressed by people in talking about their organisations suggest that they have certain 'civic-minded' expectations of the conduct of leaders and members. For example, ordinary members of burial societies and stokvels should contribute equally in terms both of money and labour; they should attend meetings regularly. Fines for failure to conform to these rules are a prominent feature of township organisations. Leaders, on the other hand, should, most importantly of all, be trustworthy in relation to the money of the society and accountable for their behaviour in this and other respects. They should also have an array of personal characteristics ranging from being articulate to being able to help resolve members' domestic problems. When asked about the requirements for good politicians, similar characteristics were enumerated suggesting that, at the very least, informants do see leaders as persons placed in positions of responsibility to serve the needs of those who placed them there, rather than as authority figures to whom deference is due.

However, a number of provisos need to be noted which prevent us from assuming that there is a robust civic-minded culture in the making in these neighbourhoods.

The first is that the number and variety of voluntary associations does not permit us to describe these neighbourhoods as having a 'vibrant associational life' (Putnam, 1993:91). One type of association, the burial society, is absolutely pervasive: but only a very small number of people in any of the neighbourhoods we studied were members of anything else. As noted above, the dominant type of association is one which meets 'survival' needs - it does not express a commitment to engage in a common activity. There is not the dense web of clubs and societies which Putnam describes for central Italy, which exemplifies the civic-minded political culture.

In addition, there are several kinds of burial societies. Where they are based on completely voluntary membership and stretch across boundaries of neighbourhood, place of origin, ethnic group and church membership, they are most likely to contribute towards stable democracy (see above). However, many

are based on neighbourhoods and come into existence only when there is a death. While someone in every household we interviewed belonged to a neighbourhood burial society, it was only in Mzimhlope and no longer in the hostel that people belonged to the more extensive type. In the hostel, amongst rural migrants, burials were an occasion for being reminded of common ethnic and geographic origins rather than for activating more universal ties and sentiments.

The second proviso is that the neighbourhoods where we conducted the research are quite strongly associated with particular political parties.

The IFP is absolutely dominant in the hostel. It is impossible for an ANC branch to emerge there, and ANC supporters do not want their affiliations to be known. It is also very difficult to found single-issue organisations, even though there are many issues to complain about which could probably be addressed by collective organisation. The Resident's Association, as noted earlier, is not dealing with these issues. It is perhaps significant that the only such organisation which had been formed in the hostel concerned a clinic. Health matters are generally perceived as women's issues in this country and no-one can object to women making a fuss around their role as mothers. This activity is therefore not perceived as politically threatening. The implication, of course, is that other forms would be seen in this light and would be strongly discouraged or prevented.

Similarly, the ANC is the predominant political organisation in Mzimhlope. In contrast to the hostel, there is no evidence that contrary sentiments exist in the township area - if they did (or do), it is at least conceivable that those who hold them would be as reluctant to express themselves as hostel residents who do not support the IFP. Until now, therefore, there has been no risk of opposition to the civic, which is closely identified with the ANC. The consequence is that the civic leadership has tended to ignore complaints and not deal with problems because it has been unlikely that any but prominent ANC supporters would ever be elected to its executive, whatever the level of discontent. People we interviewed complained that the leadership does not communicate with residents and that residents were generally unhappy about this. The growth of single-issue organisations responding to crises and not involving the civic structures is indicative of this discontent. In the more diffuse township environment, however, it seems easier to organise these initiatives than in the hostel.

In addition, to the extent that there are active voluntary associations in the areas researched, they differ from the Italian example in the sense that they arise, in the main, out of a need for collective economic sustenance or to address pressing material or interest issues. They are not devoted to the pursuit of common 'non-material' concerns such as hobbies or cultural interests.

One possible explanation - by far the most obvious - is that the circumstances of residents in the researched areas, and many like them in this country, leave little scope for these sorts of activities. Not only do activities such as singing or reading poetry or communing with nature require a degree of personal safety which may be lacking in the townships, but they might well be unattainable luxuries in deprived environments.⁶ This argument is not entirely convincing because associations of this sort do appear to have existed in the townships in the past, when residents were no less materially deprived and crime levels were high. A counter-explanation would link this phenomenon with two contradictory trends. One is the fact that the townships were, for many recent years, highly conflictual and politicised. The other is the growth of a consumer culture which is at least partly accessible to lower-income people and which tends, across social barriers, to encourage far greater enthusiasm for the consumption of entertainment than for communal recreational activity. This issue clearly cannot be resolved here. For our purposes, it is enough to point out that the willingness to participate in a PTA which challenges the teachers union or a creche committee which seeks to bring facilities to a shack settlement is as much evidence of 'civic-mindedness' and resistance to patronage as the Italian societies devoted to common recreational pursuits. It is conceivable, of course, that these forms of association do not possess the durability, and hence the resilience, of their Italian counterparts.

One dominant theme in this research demands analysis - the fact that members, whether of burial societies or soccer clubs, rarely if ever vote their officials out of office even though, in the latter case in particular, they do exercise the 'exit' option. One analysis, much like Putnam's 'historic' explanation for Italian civic-mindedness or its absence, emphasises collective cultural history. It notes that, when traditional tribal organisation was dominant throughout this country, varying degrees of control over traditional leadership by subjects were exercised, but that replacement of the chief by another person was not generally one of them. Rather, persons dissatisfied with the leader and unable to secure redress would decamp and join another traditional political unit. It is this culture, it is argued, which has been transferred, perhaps unconsciously (certainly none of our informants referred to it) into an urban setting.

But the explanation may be far simpler. This is that, in contrast to an organisation such as a civic or a residents' association (or a trade union), the rationale of voluntary associations devoted to a particular task (burial insurance, collective savings or sport) is not a representational one. In other words, members seek from their office bearers not the capacity to represent their interests, but the ability to perform tasks in an accountable manner. Since the persons willing to

perform the tasks are probably highly motivated and most members are not, the tendency to allow the person 'willing to do the work' to continue doing so is strong. And since membership of voluntary associations, unlike that of states, is not compulsory, the most convenient sanction if members cannot secure redress is to leave. There is, as noted above, no evidence that the associations studied here are any different to any others in other societies or social settings in this respect. The extent to which officers are removed may not therefore be an appropriate measure of the extent to which voluntary associations foster a democratic culture.

The willingness or otherwise of 'members' to remove persons who do have a representation function if they are perceived not to be playing their required role is, by contrast, a crucial test. In none of the areas researched does this seem to be a regular practice, if it happens at all. However, the willingness of parents to find their own ways of challenging or bypassing leaderships perceived to be unresponsive does indicate a degree of resistance to unresponsive leadership.

Finally, the predominance of women in the most pervasive of associations - the burial societies and Mothers' Unions - and their absence in the 'representative' ones calls for some comment. Apart from generalisations about the widespread sexism of South African society in all its manifestations, our research provided plenty of empirical examples of women's exclusion but little by way of explanation. Wells (1991) argues that women's organisations in South Africa have traditionally been active about issues which arise out of their role as mothers rather than simply as women. This is so because it is the only role in which they are permitted to be politically active whether by men and even other women. Thus, this argument suggests, women are active in burial societies because they can be conceived of as an offshoot of women's family responsibilities. They are concerned with the 'private' domain and therefore are not threatening to men's predominance in the 'public' domain. In addition, there is a marked prevalence of single woman-headed households in townships and rural areas of South Africa. Women can and do not expect much support from the fathers of their children, especially over the long term. Even the most willing and responsible fathers and husbands are often absent as migrant workers or unable to contribute financially because they cannot find work. As a result, women have taken on the responsibility of ensuring that their children and often their grandchildren and other relatives, are fed, housed and clothed. It is possible that voluntary activities are simply an extension of the kind of responsibilities women now have which require foresight and provision for emergencies.

There may be yet another explanation for women's more active participation in voluntary associations: it relates to their role in patrilineal societies.

All South African traditional social organisation is patrilineal and property, social position, and membership is passed from father to son. Patrilineal groups are exogamous, which means that men must marry women from a lineage other than their own. Much has been made of the fact that women in this situation - new brides leaving their father's home and their own patrilineage and kindred - move into the alien environment of their husband's patrilineage.

What has not been emphasised sufficiently, perhaps, is that women as co-wives had to create alliances with one another. Each co-wife coming from a different homestead and patrilineage, they had to become a cooperative, functioning domestic unit. They had to get along with other women in situations where they were structurally in competition with one another for resources and the attention of their common husband.

More importantly, perhaps, and a factor which is commonly overlooked, is that they were pivotal in creating alliances between their own kindred and that of their new husband, a position that, once again, requires negotiating and mediating skills to ensure that relations between the two groupings or patrilineages remain amicable.

This, I would contend, is far from being a 'primordialist' explanation of the position of women in modern township life. Aspects of traditional culture are actively and enthusiastically maintained in urban South Africa but they are mainly concerned with marriage. *Lobola*, for example, is almost uniformly part of properly constituted marriage, even where the marriage ceremony takes place in a church or magistrate's office. *Hlonipa* (the outward manifestations of respect for parents-in-law) is generally insisted upon by the husband's parents and acted out (albeit reluctantly) by daughters-in-law. In the enactment of these rituals of exchange and proper behaviour between kindreds, women's role as the pivot and constituent of kinship alliances is constantly given new life.

It is possible that the contradiction between the real power inherent in women's pivotal position and men's image of themselves as all-powerful (at least within the homestead and kindred) created stresses within traditional society that continue to be reflected in the denigration of women's capacities outside of their role as wife and mother.

This would further contribute to the confinement of women's activities to those that can be conceived of as extensions of their motherly roles. It would help to explain why women who have clearly proven their capacity for leadership in burial societies, Mothers' Unions and school committees are not often elected to the executives of Civics, for example. One Mothers' Union leader said, for example, that on the school committee her contributions are discounted because, they say, she is 'emotional' or because, since she is a widow and therefore runs

her own home, she wants to dominate proceedings. However, it is also possible that women trained, so to speak, in the Mothers' Unions, are beginning to make use of their skills in more political contexts. For example, one of the most influential people in the current Mzimhlope school crisis is a Mothers' Union leader.

In comparison with the rather disparate nature of voluntary activity in the other study areas, the level of activity in Powa Park suggests that local-level, voluntary associations, which are successful in improving life for the community as a whole, can develop under certain conditions. It is interesting that here there is lively participation in matters affecting the community despite the predominance of a single political party. Here we had a hegemonic party which promotes rather than stifles civic-mindedness.

As we noted earlier, the actions of the developing authority - the Johannesburg City Council Planning Department - have also been sensitive to this issue. There seems to be a positively reinforcing interaction between the way in which the residents were consulted about their needs and the already existing propensity of the residents to mobilise around their demands. The fact that all the residents are Xhosa speakers may have aided the capacity to mobilise their forces, but being 'Xhosa' is not an identity which is emphasised - rather, the stress is placed on ANC membership. Clearly, the test of the extent to which ethnicity is salient in the settlement would be the presence of significant number of people who are not Xhosa speakers, a test which at this stage remains hypothetical.

Some Political Implications

The evidence gathered here suggests an associational life - for those who participate in it - which defies neat categorisation.

On the one hand, the persons interviewed in this study who participate in the various forms of voluntary association are not members of organisations which are microcosms of democratic societies. While the formal rules may be similar at times - although, as we have noted, there are important divergences in the civics, hostel associations and soccer clubs - the practices are very different. We have tried to ascribe this at least in part to the different purposes and structures of voluntary associations on the one hand, democratic states on the other.

But this does not explain a phenomenon with clear political implications, namely the tendency to bypass or 'exit' from leadership which is evident in the burial societies and sports clubs. This is in contrast to, say, trade unions in which members do indeed vote out of office unpopular shop stewards. This tendency is mirrored by the fact that we found no evidence that unpopular civic or hostel

association leaders, people who are supposed to represent their members' interests rather than perform a task for them, are ejected from office.

On the other hand, we found significant evidence, at least among those people who do participate in associations, of a willingness to hold leaders or office bearers to account in other ways. These range from instituting strict internal controls designed to ensure accountability to, in the case of the dissatisfied parents, developing their own modes of organisation which do not directly challenge the civic leadership but attempt to ensure that local elites are indeed accountable to their presumed constituency.

To the extent that it is permissible to generate broad political analysis from a micro-study of this sort, it suggests a political culture in which dissatisfaction with elected representatives or officials is unlikely to express itself in voting them out of office, thereby switching allegiance to an alternative political organisation. This would appear to confirm the prediction mentioned earlier in this report (Friedman, 1994) that grassroots political culture is unlikely soon to ensure the sort of political system in which the identity of the party in office changes regularly. Clearly this does have negative implications for democracy's future since it makes it unlikely that political office-bearers will act on the realistic assumption that they will be removed by the electorate if they are unaccountable. It also, of course, creates plentiful opportunities for clientelism.

But it suggests also that elites who do seek to establish clientelist relationships with voters are likely to meet significant resistance, in at least two of the geographical areas studied here, although not necessarily in the hostels. This hypothesis is tentatively confirmed not only by this research but by another study which indicated a strong propensity on the part of new voters to subject their representatives to critical scrutiny (Charney, 1995). A pre-election survey also showed some 23 per cent of first-time prospective voters listing 'accountability' as the most desirable characteristic of a democratic government (Schlemmer and Hirschfeld, 1994). While less than a quarter of respondents stressed this quality, it is in our view a significant proportion of the electorate, given that new voters were often held to view democracy in purely instrumental terms - as a system whose purpose was to deliver them material benefits which they had been denied by apartheid.

In sum, the study, together with other evidence, does not vindicate the more romantic views which portray an electorate well-equipped to frustrate any attempt by the new elected elite to deny them the substance of citizenship. But it does reveal, among a significant section of the electorate, a willingness to challenge authority perceived to be unaccountable. If the evidence gathered by

this study is a guide, this willingness seems unusually concentrated among women rather than men, at least in the researched areas.

This, however, begs a crucial question which has been mentioned in passing in this report: the capacity to act on this willingness. Precisely because our research has not unearthed the 'dense network' of voluntary associations which Putnam discovered in parts of Italy, authority seems to be challenged through *ad hoc* initiatives rather than permanent organisation. Many of our respondents do appear to lack the 'social capital' which would enable them to be confident of securing their rights in the new democratic order. While the willingness to refuse to take authority at face value may exist in all our three researched areas, the capacity to act on it appears to be far more evident in townships than in hostels, or in shack settlements fortunate enough (as Powa Park has been) to be party to a sensitive and sympathetic participatory planning exercise than in those which have encountered a less favourable official response.

For those concerned to foster a democratic culture in this society, therefore, the prime task may not be to engender in the citizenry attitudes which in many cases may already be present but to identify ways in which the capacity to act on those sentiments through voluntary associations can be encouraged. It is with a brief consideration of this issue that this study concludes.

Strengthening Voluntary Association

While this study has not unearthed uniformly encouraging evidence on the extent and strength of voluntary associations at the grassroots of the society, it does appear to suggest that membership of associations or at least participation in civic minded activities does provide a brake on clientelism, a greater capacity to hold leaders or office bearers accountable and, therefore, a foundation for a democratic culture. The question, then, is how voluntary association and civic minded activity can be strengthened as a necessary component of a democratic culture.

One response common in this and in other societies is to advocate official policies which offer material rewards for those who associate - such as the Italian system of registration, which enables voluntary associations to apply for resources from the state. Whatever the merits of this approach in Italy, it seems a dubious option here in current circumstances precisely because, as noted above, associational life has been intensely politicised. State intervention of this sort could be more likely to spawn a range of associations noted for their congeniality to political elites than ones which strengthen capacity among the citizenry.

In any event, some of the dynamics outlined in this report suggest that the problem may be far more basic and that the first priority may be to encourage

political and governmental practices which remove the hidden constraints on voluntary association, rather than to engage political elites in a misguided attempt to further politicise associational life by creating a new category of officially licensed and encouraged associations.

The first task, then, may be to encourage among political elites an attitude which sees spontaneous and politically unaffiliated forms of associational life as a source of democratic strength rather than as a political threat. The tendency for local associations which are concerned with representing interests to be dominated by political parties and to claim the entire residential area as a constituency illustrates that this has not been past practice. But democratic culture and the civic mindedness which is one of its crucial elements would be greatly strengthened if politicians accepted that even those supporters who pursue their interests independently are unlikely to change their political allegiances, and that 'colonising' them by insisting that they direct their activities through the 'proper' political channels may do more to weaken democracy than to ensure active and committed party support. Given the legacy of the immediate past, it may well be necessary to make this commitment explicit, by actively and publicly asserting that these associations would strengthen and enrich democratic life.

The necessity for this approach is perhaps underlined by some of the evidence gathered in this study, which does suggest that political elites who wish to 'colonise' associational life, as well as those who seek to entrench clientelism, may encounter more resistance than they expect.

The second may be to encourage an environment of public administration in which there are clear benefits for voluntary association - not grants from the authorities, but the prospect of exerting a beneficial impact on community life. The Johannesburg City Council's intervention in Powa Park illustrates this point: where a public authority is able to intervene to encourage democratic participation by the full range of interest associations, the beneficial effect on associational life seems clear.

Thirdly and similarly, the two educational disputes recounted here suggest that citizens' capacity to challenge clientelism or even simply unresponsive local leaderships will depend on the degree to which they are taken seriously by the formal political system. If they are not, they may well lapse into passive cynicism. This requires both a degree of political courage by elected executives and representatives which seemed lacking in those examples - for example, the willingness of education authorities to ignore pressures from politically well-placed elites and to take the concerns of grassroots citizens seriously. More importantly, it requires political rules which ensure that elected representatives

are accessible to and obliged to consider the views of citizens who wish to exercise their rights and protect their interests.

None of these proposals address the need to encourage voluntary associations that have no explicit political or interest-based purpose such as cultural or recreational clubs. There is nothing which public authorities can or should do to attempt artificially to create these, although non-governmental organisations which do encounter attempts to establish associations of this sort would, in our view, be strengthening democracy's prospects if they responded to appeals for help from these associations. But, while it is inappropriate to attempt to create associations of this sort, it is imperative to foster an environment in which they can emerge if citizens want to form them. Implicit in this argument is the view that an environment in which citizens' associational initiatives are welcomed by political leaders and public authorities is likely to foster a flowering of associational life and a citizenry able to acquire more of the 'social capital' needed to consolidate a democracy that will serve their interests and not simply those of politicians.

NOTES:

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2. During the period when Putnam conducted his study, Italy used a proportional representation system which allowed voters to indicate preferences for candidates as well as parties. 'Personal preference' votes for individual candidates were seen as evidence of a personalised, and therefore, clientelistic style of politics.
3. Before SANCO's formation, the civic movement comprised hundreds of autonomous, geographically bound civic associations. Now these are all meant to have disbanded, to be replaced by SANCO branches - for example, the Thembisa Civic Association is meant to have given away to the SANCO Thembisa branch. As this report indicates, however, this change has not been implemented in Soweto.
4. Street committees were meant to replace the individual member as the 'building block' of the civics. Their members are purportedly elected by all residents of a particular street although there is some controversy about the extent to which this occurs in practice.
5. More recent visits to the hostel suggested that the ANC is, if anything, in the ascendant there. Certainly Inkatha no longer so overtly dominates the Residents' Association.
6. To name but one example, a drive through Soweto indicates that there is very little scope for nature-related activities since there are few, if any, unspoilt open spaces.

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