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Civil Society and Appearances of Resistance

Sivil Toplum ve Direniş Biçimleri

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Abstract

Civil society is a social space in which people convey their political demands to one another and to the state. It is, besides, a political theory with too much confusion and complexity concerning the power various actors have and the rules they have to obey. This article primarily focuses on this theoretical confusion. It begins with the definitional difficulty of civil society and continues with the major theoretical approaches. The first statement is on what might be called organisational principle, which indicates that power of civil society depends on how and what degree it is organised in relation with the state. However, an objection rises against this argument on the basis of no matter what degree it is organised civil society shares the same social space with and thus is hardly separable from the state. Second argument is concerned about the power of civil society in degree of its influence on the state and even its participation in shaping its form. The article, then, continues with the ways of influencing state, namely, the social movements and resistance, both of which are the common ways of people to convey the needs and desires they

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have. Social movements and resistance are of, as Scott (1985) argues, different forms and aims. While the former is based on collective attempt and organisation of people the latter can be very individualistic in its form. This means that effectiveness lies in covert expressions in resistance and overt organisations in social movements. The article, finally, focuses on the fact that not only somehow dominated groups of people need political arrangements but also the advantaged people's will of political demands takes part in civil society. Politically dominant groups in civil society, however, are subject to very different dynamics from those of disadvantaged groups. They dominate not only the physical but also the symbolic means of production and lay down the rules to which dominated groups have to obey. This is a fact that establishes variance in motivations, actions, feelings, etc. between dominating and dominated groups. At simplest, while the latter is interested in better life conditions than they already have the former claims innocence of the conditions but the fallacy of the people. Even if they set down the very rules dominated groups have to play with, dominant groups still need consent to legitimize their advantaged existence. That means no matter what degree they are dominated people have their own free will to evaluate the very existence of domination. They might be considered as agents voluntarily accepting the dynamics of domination for the sake of reaching better life conditions. In summary, the article studies civil society as a social space of different people's politics.

Keywords: *civil society, social movements, resistance, dominated groups, dominant groups*

Özet

Sivil toplum insanların birbirlerine ve devlete siyasal taleplerini ilettikleri sosyal bir alandır. Fakat o aynı zamanda farklı aktörlerinin sahip olduğu güç ve uymaları gereken kurallar anlamında çok ciddi karışıklık ve karmaşıklık barındıran siyasal bir teoridir. Bu makale esas olarak bu teorik karışıklıkla ilgileniyor. Makale, sivil toplumu tanımlamanın zorluğu ile başlıyor ve temel teorik yaklaşımlarla devam ediyor. Vurgulanan ilk nokta organizasyonel ilke olarak isimlendirilebilecek ve sivil

toplumun gücünün devletle girdiği ilişkide nasıl ve ne dereceye kadar organize olabildiğine bağlı olduğunu ileri süren bir tartışmadır. Fakat bu argümana ne kadar organize olursa olsun sivil toplumun devletle aynı sosyal alanı paylaştığı ve dolayısıyla ondan ayrılmasının mümkün olmadığı iddiasıyla karşı çıkılır. Sivil toplumun gücü ile ilgili ikinci tartışma onun devlete etki etme ve hatta devletin biçimini belirleme derecesine odaklanır. Makale, sonrasında, insanların ihtiyaçlarını ve arzularını ifade ettikleri yaygın yollar olarak sosyal hareketler ve direniş ile devam ediyor. Sosyal hareketler ve direniş; Scott'ın (1985) ileri sürdüğüne göre farklı biçimlere ve hedeflere sahipler. İlki insanların kollektif çabasına ve organizasyonuna dayanırken ikincisi biçim olarak oldukça bireysel kalabilir. Bu gizliliğin direnişte ve açık organizasyonların sosyal hareketlerde etkili bulunduğu anlamına gelir. Makale son olarak sadece bir biçimde tahakküm altında olan grupların siyasal ayarlamalar içinde olmadığı aynı zamanda avantajlı insanların siyasi talep iradelerinin de sivil toplumda rol oynadığı gerçeğine odaklanıyor. Sivil toplumdaki siyaseten egemen olan gruplar tahakküm altındaki gruplardan farklı dinamiklere tabidirler. Onlar hem fiziksel hem de sembolik üretime egemendirler ve tahakküm altındaki grupların uyması gereken kuralları koyarlar. Bu egemen ve tahakküm altındaki grupların hedeflerinde, eylemlerinde, hislerinde, vs. farklılık yaratan bir etkidir. En basitinden ikincisi sahip olduklarından daha iyi hayat koşullarının arayışındayken ilki koşulların değil insanların yanlışlığına işaret eder. Tahakküm altındaki grupların oynamaları gereken kuralları ayarlasa da egemen gruplar kendi avantajlı varlıklarına meşruiyet kazandırmak için onların rızasına ihtiyaç duyar. Bu ne kadar tahakküm altına alınmış olsalar da insanların tahakkümün varlığını özgür iradeleri ile değerlendirebildikleri anlamına gelir. Onlar, daha iyi hayat koşullarına ulaşabilmek için tahakkümün dinamiklerini gönüllü olarak kabul eden aktörler olarak ele alınabilir. Özetle, makale farklı insanların politikalarını yürüttükleri bir sosyal alan olarak sivil topluma odaklanıyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: sivil toplum, sosyal hareketler, direniş, tahakküm altındaki gruplar, egemen gruplar

Introduction

People are more or less political since they try to occupy, or sometimes only imagine having, better economical, cultural and social positions than those they have already held. Interaction amongst them, accordingly, might be evaluated to a certain extent as power relations pursued in a very real or sometimes imagined social space. People are not the only actors of this social space though. State, having legitimate power to arrange social life with its visible and invisible rules, written laws, police, bureaucrats, and so forth, complicates the political characteristic of human beings and hence provides boundaries to obey in seeking or imagining personal goals. Thus, although one's action in different social contexts is shaped with several factors, such as his or her characteristics, knowledge, previous practices, aims, conditions of a given context, possibilities, cultural norms, and so on, state is also at work in what can be said and what can be done in a society. That is not to say that people are passive receivers of state regulations. As political beings, they may think about the state, comment on its principles, and criticise its decisions and applications. All these interactions, pursuits, conduct, imaginations, criticisms necessitate a kind of civil space that can be labelled as civil society.

Civil society is a social space, thanks to which people arrange their relationships with the state. Against such a legitimate power, people find a chance in its existence to organise themselves according to the common interests and world views they share. Forms of this organisation may vary, but, principle of unity seems to be a key in order to be more powerful inside it. In other words, people are organized in a civil society to negotiate their given situation with the state when either characteristics of the state may not cover the needs or desires they have or may threaten the very existence of

them. Under these circumstances, on the base of negotiation, may people demand from the state to consider what is desired in a given condition. This negotiation might reach to the point that people occupying civil society endeavour to change the state in accordance with the ideal they dream of. Form of idealization may vary from group to group but not the motivation of individuals about shaping the form of existent state. State, however, is not the simple receiver of demands of civil society as well. It may react in various ways like using violence, hardening laws, and so forth. Therefore, relationship between civil society and state can be considered as a dynamic and somehow conflicting one.

This picture of civil society, state, and their reciprocal relationships does not always match up with the complexity of social reality and is full of varying forms of social movements and resistance. This article is of no claims to comprehend the complexity of social realities concerning civil society but purely based on theoretical approaches. I will, firstly, focus on the theories of civil society. Secondly, I will concentrate on civil movements and resistance and seek the benefits of distinguishing them. Finally, I will try to answer the question of whether the civil movements and resistance necessitate the civil society, or vice versa.

Civil Society

It is very unlikely to find a single definition of civil society. The main reason of this definitional difficulty is, as Hall states, that “civil society is complicated, most notably in being at one and the same time a social value and a set of social institutions” (Hall, 1995: 2). That means, meaning and content of civil society depend on one's standpoint and direction of viewing it. One examining civil society as a social value may very likely reach

conclusions different from those seeking to grasp its institutional quality. Thus, instead of giving several definitions, all of which can partly explain the reality, it is worth to emphasise the attributed properties of civil society.

Two main approaches historically following one another diversify the picture of civil society. The first one is Ferguson's moral community and the second one is that of later scholars who consider the importance of the notion of citizenship. Hann explains these evaluations. According to him;

(1) In the work of Ferguson...we find the tensions and the paradoxes that have remained critical to the usefulness of the term [civil society] down to the present day. The fundamental tension is that between particular and universal interests, between the selfish goals of individual actors and the need for some basic collective solidarity in a moral community. ... (2) The extension of citizenship in the modern world is based on the notion that individuals have sacrosanct rights. But this universalism is deeply prejudicial to the maintenance of trust and sociability in the realms where individuals interact. Later thinkers have placed less emphasis on moral affections and natural sympathies, and stressed instead the virtues of a pluralism that is founded on equal and autonomous individual citizens (Hann, 1996: 3,4).

Ferguson's analysis of tension clearly indicates the diversity in the society between divergent interests and goals of individuals. It also suggests a need to organise these divergences around the universal and moral values for easing the degree of the tension. For him, society learns to appreciate the diversity to some extent for its own benefits. Process of learning to value diversity is the base of Ferguson's moral community. This relative cohesion

in the society, however, must be directed through co-operation and solidarity, since individuals noticing the complementary characteristics of their divergences may also learn, by this way, to appreciate the diversity for benefits of both society and themselves. Consequently, they are bound to one another with the notion of citizenship, whereby the key element of this cohesion, namely, trust gains legality and is placed to the core of the social space. Citizenship and trust are fundamentals for the latter evaluation of civil society.

However, an argument emphasised by many scholars writing about civil society remains incomplete unless the existence of the state and its interaction with the civil society are examined.

Chabal and Daloz state that until nineteenth century civil society was “synonymous with the state”, and that “it is commonly taken today to refer to the opposite - namely, that which is outside the state” (Chabal&Daloz, 1999: 17). To clarify the description here, for the clarification needed as a matter of the fact that the notion of the state and its appearances take different meanings and vary all over the world, Chabal and Daloz use Weberian “ideal type” of modern state as a criterion. They suggest that

From this [Weberian tradition] viewpoint, the modern state is the outcome of a process by which the realm of politics is gradually emancipated from society and constituted into increasingly autonomous political institutions. ... [T]he emergence of the modern state means [1] the end of patrimonialism - that is, following Weber, a complete break from the notion that the holders of political power possess any legitimate claim on the assets or resources which they administer. The public and private spheres become

functionally distinct... [2] a modern bureaucracy... [3] the emergence of a notion of citizenship binding individuals directly to the state - above and beyond the more proximate ties of kinship, community or faction (Chabal&Daloz, 1999: 5,6).

This ideal type modern state, as Chabal and Daloz are also aware, is a model for investigator to search for what current reality is. Nevertheless, it may give the meaningful account of what civil society ought to be. In other words, it may provide the understanding of ideal type civil society. This may be that

The notion of civil society would only apply if it could be shown that there were meaningful institutional separations between a well organized civil society and a relatively autonomous bureaucratic state (Chabal&Daloz, 1999:17).

Then, there is a significant criterion, namely, institutional separation for civil society. It corresponds to the emancipation of state and society from one another as well. Penetration of civil society and state to the boundaries of each other, however, is still a fact to be overcome because they share the same social space. In order to make this separation more apparent, therefore, Bayart argues that “[i]n the first instance, it may not be possible to speak of “civil society” where there is no “organisation principle”” (Bayart, 1986: 117). State has its own institutional form, and so to some extent do civil society. Nevertheless, neither state nor civil society are same everywhere. Each society constructs, conceives, and experiences them with their culturally and historically particular characteristics. Several factors, therefore, play different roles in determination of this separation and of institutional forms of state and civil society. For example, in Africa, Chabal

and Daloz argue, modernity and tradition are bound to one another with strong links, and relationship between leaders and followers is highly “patrimonialistic”. Moreover, “the state is both *vacuous* and *ineffectual*” (Chabal&Daloz, 1999:14). Consequently, they conclude, “there is as yet no evidence of functionally operating civil society in Africa” (ibid. 30). It is obvious that ineffectiveness of civil society in Africa is the result of its particular characteristics, such as understanding of modernity and tradition, presence of inseparable state from society, and so forth.

A division can be made, accordingly, between, on the one hand, a strong civil society properly functioning in the relationship with the state, and, on the other hand, a weak and ineffective civil society whose existence is not powerfully institutionalised and cannot be easily separated from the state. The latter is obviously the one that cannot function in an appropriate way. What is this function attributed to civil society? It might be argued that civil society is found to be fully functioning when it conforms to a certain extent to the ideal in reality that civil society has the ability to influence the state in its decisions and, consequently, has the power to participate in shaping the form of the state. As mentioned earlier, both state and civil society are of their own existences in a given time but they are, at the same time, shaped and reshaped in accordance with the effects upon one another. By definition, with its more or less strong institutional existence, state more likely has a chance to determine this continuous formation. I suggest that the same effect is expected from civil society, since people and organisations they create have some demands from the state and civil society is the space providing the possibilities to submit them to it. Therefore, it seems to me that relationship between civil society and state is very complex and dynamic which means that, they continuously shape and reshape one another.

I shall return to the possible characteristics of these demands later and try to answer how civil society may deviate from its aim stated above. Now, it seems better to focus on the ways, namely, social movements and resistance with which people occupying civil society can convey their demands to the state.

Social Movements and Resistance

Social movements can be thought to be the collective ways to show the discomfort in the society or to convey the needs and desires of groups participating in them. In other words, as Melucci points out, “social movements announce to society that a fundamental problem exists in a given area” (Melucci, 1985: 797). Therefore, existence of them in a given time depends on and signifies feeling the discomfort and deciding to announce it. Social movements, moreover, announce the discomfort not only to society but also to state capable of solving the problem or of providing the resource to needs and desires stated. By definition then there must be at least dominated groups and their expectations from dominant ones for the occurrence of social movements. As Escobar suggests “[m]ovements, thus, emerge out of the very experience of daily life under conditions of domination, and cannot be understood independently of this “submerged” cultural background” (Escobar, 1992: 407).

The way of how this domination is experienced by dominated groups is highly controversial though. For instance, while describing the conditions of domination felt by “subaltern subcultures”, Keesing suggests that

Shifts do generally occur in the world views and consciousness of those doing the resisting as they pursue their struggles. In seeking terrain on which domination can be contested... the

evolving strategies of subaltern strata are shaped to some extent by the structures created by the dominant strata to implement their hegemony. In adapting themselves to changing conditions of life, they must interiorize some of the categories associated with the forms of domination being imposed (Keesing, 1992 referenced in Gledhill, 1994: 92).

On the contrary, de Certeau considers dominated groups as entities capable of changing the conditions of domination. He suggests that

If domination proceeds, ... through strategies that organize space and knowledge in ways that lead to the colonization of physical, social and cultural environments, the “marginal majority”, that is, all those who have to exist within structures of domination, are not merely passive receivers of the conditions of domination. As “users” of these conditions, people effect multiple and infinitesimal transformations of dominant forms, in order to adapt them to their own interests and partially subject them to their own rules (de Certeau, 1984: 398, 399).

Both these approaches seem to suggest that by using social movements dominated groups may create some changes both in their dominated existence and in the conditions of domination or directly in those of dominating. In that case, this potential of making changes in both sides of domination is the key for understanding social movements. For they not only aim common benefits of the members of the dominated group but also desire to receive response to some extent from those dominating the conditions of social and cultural environment. Almost always very well aware of whom controls the domination and whose response is of power to solve, social

movements create an interaction between the agents of domination with the demands of dominated on kind of conditions better to live in. It seems to me that dominating agents circulate their own demands in the interaction created by social movements as well. They underline the necessity of change in dominated people themselves not in the existent conditions. They, therefore, spread an argument on being new and “better” people in old conditions. Conditions for them are innocent and not the reasons of domination. That is why Escobar states that “social movements be seen as cultural struggles in a fundamental sense, that is, as struggles over meanings as much as over socio-economic conditions” (Escobar, 1992: 412).

The concept of resistance deserves special attention in the study of civil society and social movements, since James Scott insistently separates it from social movements and gives it special meaning. According to him, definition of it is that

Peasant resistance is any act by a peasant (or peasants) that is intended either to mitigate or deny claims (e.g., rents, taxes, corvée, deference) made on that class by superordinate classes (e.g., landlords, the state, moneylenders) or to advance peasant claims (e.g., to land, work, charity, respect) vis-à-vis these superordinate classes (Scott, 1987: 419).

Apart from this definition, Scott's radical approach lies behind his explanations on what he calls “everyday forms of resistance” (Scott, 1987). He argues that peasants do not actually have any aim to change the state or regime but they simply want to make the conditions of life bearable. Therefore, they do not openly and directly confront state. Actually, success of their resistance depends on this covert and silent presence. Scott, moreover, states that peasants are well aware of the safety of being hidden

and silent. They prefer unorganised forms of resistance. Although resistance may narrow the choices of state, it actually does not include any broad purposes and aims for immediate gains emerging from immediate needs.

Characteristics of Scott's everyday forms of resistance are to the certain extent opposite of social movements examined throughout this essay. Secrecy and silence of everyday forms of resistance against open announcement of demands in social movements, unorganised forms of resistance against organisational principle of social movements, broad purposes against immediate gains are the oppositions that make Scott's approach interesting. For he states that "the generalized, persistent practice of everyday forms of resistance underwritten by a subculture of complicity can achieve many, if not all, of the results aimed at by social movements" (Scott, 1987: 422).

Peasants in this approach does not seem to take the power of their actions from communality, although they collectively share "hidden transcripts of the powerless-their rumors, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes and theatre" (Gutmann, 1993:78). They are more like independent agents who find the power for resistance in their existences and consciously choose what is better to do. To me, the individuals in Scott's analysis seem to be the symbol of complete separation from those in the literature on social movements since the latter is portrayed only as a part of the totality. To understand Scott's everyday form of resistance one may focus on the concept of consciousness that underlies intentions of both individuals and resistance. He suggests that

The relationship between thought and action is, to put it very mildly, a complicated issue. ... First, neither intentions nor acts are "unmoved movers." Acts born of intentions circle back, as

it were, to influence consciousness and hence subsequent intentions and acts. Thus acts of resistance and thoughts about (or the meaning of) resistance are in constant communication - in constant dialogue. Second, intentions and consciousness are not tied in quite the same way to the material world as behavior is. It is possible and common for human actors to conceive of a line of action that is, at the moment, either impractical or impossible (Scott, 1985: 38).

The main difference of resistance and social movements, therefore, seems to be that in the former people are well aware of what is impractical and impossible in a given moment of time and consciously choose not to struggle for it. However, one may ask how impractical and impossible can be transformed to practical and possible. This is what Gutmann asks. He argues that “Scott cannot account for such resistance [overt forms of resistance] because, despite his chapters on history, he treats human agency as capable of adaptation to rather than transformation of new historical conditions” (Gutmann, 1993: 86) (*parentheses added*). In Scott's account, social conditions seem to change automatically and people seem to play very limited role in it.

Everyday forms of resistance, nevertheless, are important in some respects since “there is a politics of daily resistance in practice, speech, and thought that persists whether or not there are mass movements or rebellions and without which mass movements and rebellions cannot be understood” (Scott, 1993: 94). Thus, everyday forms of resistance might be helpful to understand the daily forms and motivations of social movements. For it emphasises the construction of resistance in the context of individuals and their interactions.

Role of Dominant in the Resistance

Civil society is not only for the use of dominated groups. As mentioned earlier, dominating groups also play their roles in it. Bayart argues that

[C]ivil society is not merely the expression of dominated social groups. It encompasses not only popular modes of political action...but also the claims of those socially dominant groups (merchants, businessmen, the clergy) which are no less excluded from direct participation in political power (Bayart, 1986: 112).

In fact, civil society can be considered as “the result of a gap between levels of social and political organization which has to be filled if society and polity are to function” (Gledhill, 1994: 125). The point here is then “who fills the gap...and how this filling is carried out” (ibid.125). People occupying civil society somehow need to evaluate the conditions of their social environment to initiate the action of resistance in either organised or unorganised forms. Dominating groups, on the other hand, very less likely struggle with the conditions of a given time since they are the leading agents of domination. They, as Scott argued, “dominate not only the physical means of production but the symbolic means of production as well - and...this symbolic hegemony allows them to control the very standards by which their rule is evaluated” (Scott, 1985: 39). Dominated groups, therefore, have to play with the rules of dominating groups in their actions, evaluations, thought, decisions, and so on. What are the dynamics of this overwhelming power of dominating groups? While using symbolic means of production, what does Scott mean? Gramsci states that

[E]lites control the “ideological sectors” of society - culture, religion, education, and media - and can thereby engineer

consent for their rule. By creating and disseminating a universe of discourse and the concepts to go with it, by defining the standards of what is true, beautiful, moral, fair, and legitimate, they build a symbolic climate that prevents subordinate classes from thinking their way free (Gramsci, 1971: 81).

The rule of the domination or namely the questions of who fills the gap and how this filling is carried out is, at once, more obvious. Although dominated groups seem to be the active actors of civil society, they are limited with the boundaries of their subordination, either openly, as Chabal and Daloz argue in the context of Africa, or unrecognizably in their behaviours, thoughts and decisions. Gramsci's value lies in the concept of consent. For him, leading subordination needs to have legitimisation that is open or closed declaration of the subordinated to stay inside the boundaries of domination. The fact that they are disadvantaged does not mean that they do not have any free will. The point here is to consent domination for the sake of negotiating better life conditions.

If civil society is completely under the control of the values of dominant group, meaning of social movements and resistance which are people's weapons to arrange their relationship with domination eases off and people are thought to be having motivation only for economic gains. I suggest that dominated people are well aware of their position, feel not only economic but also social discomfort in their life, and demand in accordance with their needs and desires. Domination seems, therefore, to be not one-sided but reciprocal relationship between dominated and dominating groups. In this relationship, new actors emerge, new identities are created, and new meanings determine the conditions.

Now, it seems possible to answer the question of whether social movements and resistance necessitate civil society, and vice versa. I have already emphasised that civil society is the space on which people arrange their relationships with the social and economic conditions of domination and with the state. They demand in the forms of both overt and covert forms of resistance in accordance with the discomfort they experience and needs and desires they have. I, additionally, emphasised that degree and appearance of organisational principle determine the strength of civil society. Furthermore, it is not only dominated but also dominating groups occupy civil society with the advantages of having both economic and symbolic means of production. These advantages, however, does not seem to change the nature of reciprocal relationship between them and they equally shape and reshape one another. Civil society in which this relationship exists is either strong or weak in respect of the degree of its organisational principle and of emancipation from the state. But, its weakness, as Chabal and Daloz argue in the context of Africa, does not mean that it is totally non-existent in a given society. I suggest that possible weakness of civil society may reflect that it does not function properly, but cannot make it completely ineffective. Both dominated and dominating need civil society, even in its weak form, in order to express themselves in their political relationship. This relationship may be between dominated and dominating groups, but it can be between only dominating groups as well as between only dominated groups. Therefore, civil movements and resistance seem to necessitate a civil space, one may call civil society. Consisting of many forms of relationships other than those of between dominated and dominating groups, civil society does not seem to depend on whether or not there is any social movement or resistance in a given moment of time as well.

Conclusion

It is very unlikely to find shared notions and definitions on civil society, social movement and resistance among the scholars. For instance, some of them explain civil society with the degree of its independence from the state while others argue against the possibility of civil society's independence. For them, it is just an ideal and does not reflect the reality based on their continuous penetration to the spaces of one another. Unclear though, civil society, social movement and resistance are the terms, all of which are still in use to approach and continue to draw attention to the fact that people live in the conditions of domination and that they, as being dominated or dominating, try to arrange their relationships and to express their discomforts, needs, and desires. It might be suggested that instead of focusing on the boundary violations between state and civil society, both, but especially the latter for the discussion of this article, can be suggested as the spaces with mixed borders in which people arrange their political relationships. Actors of this arrangement differ in a degree of power they have and the ways they perform it. Dominated groups are disadvantaged in their politics since they can accept or reject the current position they hold and struggle to have better ones but they very unlikely have any choice about rejecting the social order created by dominant groups. The terms of civil society, social movement and resistance are weapons of the weak to negotiate their demands and desires. Dominating groups as well, however, take their parts in civil society. They are advantaged in a sense of laying down the visible and invisible rules with the power of having both economical and symbolical means of production. Against the demands of dominated on current conditions of life, they find people's "fallacy" to live as the root of their subordination. Seeking for consent to legitimize their

privileged position, however, they keep the ways of negotiation open for the dominated groups. Hence, both dominated and dominating groups enter into a negotiation about their own expectations with different degrees of power they have in a social space called civil society.

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