In approaching the subject of the Citizenship of Marginal / Subjugated Voices I look at one fundamental set of relations, namely, the interplay of the modern / neo-colonial state, the capitalist economy and civil society. I ask, rhetorically, at best, the question of the implicatedness of religion in producing and reproducing the culture of cynicism that I posit as an inevitability in the near future, given the crisis both of the state and the market, and the seeming ineptitude of and contradictions within civil society.

His/her majesty the citizen

When Freud coined the term His Majesty the Baby, he was pointing out the compromised situation of a parent who felt guilty for loading the child with "Don’ts". I borrow this expression and apply it to the problem of citizenship. His / Her Majesty the Citizen happens to be someone who, despite the tremendous power he/she might wield in manipulating the guilty conscience of the state (in a liberal representative democracy, at least), remains a minor whose power to self-governance is reduced to the power to vote, or, in other words, the power to delegate to a representative.

Marginal voices

If we are correct in understanding marginal as meaning on the periphery, away from the centre, the place of power, then we should be justified in suggesting that this term is not very helpful in our search for ways of talking about unheard voices. This is because it allows the discussion to proceed where agency is neither named nor analysed. Yet it is of the utmost importance to our analysis to identify who or what is carrying out the marginalisation of certain voices. Voices do not just become marginal. Marginalisation is not something that just happens. It is something that is done. It is something that someone does to someone else. For this reason, I propose at the outset that we change the title of this workshop group to Marginalised / Subjugated Voices.

This will allow us to keep track of the agents of this deed.

Subjugated Voices

To the extent that it indicates agency, this term is preferable to any passive formulation. It thus allows us to probe the question of the identity of the perpetrator/s. The moment we raise this issue we find that we are faced with a mammoth problem.

Problem

Simply put, this is the problem of saviours turning out to be culprits. Those institutions that are supposed to help, assist, save, are found to be doing the exact opposite of these noble things. In a discussion of human rights Jack Donnely regrets that it is "the modern state and modern markets" that have become the foremost
threats to human dignity. Speaking of the latter recently Cuban President Fidel Castro described the world as having "become an enormous gambling house". The one question that quickly comes to mind is, what (actually who) are the chips, the pawns on the table? Many analyses today cite not only the interaction of the state and the market economy in this respect, but their connivance in exploiting the citizen. They endeavour to show that in a liberal representative democracy, the shift from self-governance to delegation of this sacred responsibility to elected representatives creates a false impression of the autonomous citizen, armed with the weapon of freedom to choose.

This shift from direct participation in self-governing is comparable to the shift in the capitalist economy from workers’ decision-making power in the work place to the sovereignty of the consumer. But does the consumer really have the power of choice? Does the consumer make prices? If, as it has been cogently argued, the sovereign producer makes prices, then the worker has suffered double jeopardy: first by losing power in the work place, second by being teased with illusions of power as consumer.

It has been suggested that a third player, or referee between these rogues (political society and economic society) must join the fray in the name of civil society. If nothing else, this arrangement would at least prevent the occurrence of excesses in the above two arenas of politics (represented by the state) and economics (represented by markets).

However, it would be naive to think that civil society was autonomous and immune from reproducing the contradictions of the modern state and the capitalist economy. Under the best of circumstances, the "civil" in civil society lends itself to the criticism of not only elitism, but the most uncomplimentary chauvinisms of modern history.

Where does this leave us as nations and as a world? Perhaps cynicism is the key sentiment of the times. The next millennium and century may be marked by a fundamental collapse of confidence in not only the modern state and the market economy, but, it seems, those institutions and impulses connoted by civil society.

Points to ponder

If the world has become one big gambling house, with the modern state, and in Africa the neo-colonial state, offering the worker/consumer as a sacrifice on the altar of the market:

1. What sort of political and economic systems are needed to prevent global genocide?
2. What role does religion play in fostering this process within these arenas?
3. What role does religion play in reproducing these dynamics within its own structures?
4. What role, if any, can religion play in arresting the headlong plunge into global cynicism and transforming this trend into an outlook of confidence, trust and hope?

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