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"'Governing at a distance' as a form of state-civil society relation: the case of NGOs"

The aim of this presentation is to understand state-civil society relations under a different theoretical light. For this purpose, we draw upon the work of French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault, and particularly upon his analysis of modern forms of power and mentalities of governing. The paper is structured in three parts: In the first part, we sketch out the two most common representations of civil society, namely the neo-tocquevillian understanding of civil society as a protective barrier against the encroachments of the centralized state and the more social democratic perspective that depicts civil society as a third sector between the state and the market. In the second part, we focus on Foucault's understanding of civil society from the viewpoint of his method of research and discuss the concept of "government" as a particular form of power, as well as its pertinence to state-civil society relations. Finally, in the third part, we wonder weather this theoretical perspective bears any relevance to contemporary actors in Greek civil society and particularly to Greek NGOs.

1) <u>Facets of Civil Society</u>

a) Drawing upon the insights of the classic work of Alexis de Tocqueville on Democracy in America, a major strand of scholars analyze the notion of civil society in terms of people's propensity for civil associations. Just like their French mentor, they argue for a sphere of voluntary associations that can pose barriers to the dangers of administrative encroachment of state's apparatus in people's everyday lives, while at the same time safeguard against the danger of individualism. In this respect, civil society is the field of voluntary associations that expands between the governor and the governed, from the threshold of the private realm (oikos) to modern state's gates of power.[1] Its mission is twofold: on the one hand it blocks the intrusiveness of modern administrative powers into the social and private realm, acting as a bulwark to tendencies of political centralization and

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[1] Michael Edwards, *Civil Society*, Cambridge 2008, 18-36.

intensification of bureaucratic control, while on the other hand helps weak individuals become strong. The associations formed by them act as "schools of citizenship" where individuals learn the habits of co-operation, trust and mutuality.[2]

According to this theoretical perspective, the role of civil society is deemed to be intrinsically good.[3] Civil associations contribute to the process of democratization, to such an extent, that they form an indispensable element of liberal democracies. They strengthen political institutions while at the same time cultivate an ethos of active participation in public affairs through trust and co-operation. In such a way, the forms and the norms of civil society are inextricably bound together in the sense of a win-win game. Civil associations make democracy work or as Ernest Gellner explicitly put it "no civil society, no democracy".[4]

Furthermore, in this account of civil society the issue of power is strongly underplayed or even ignored. Framed mostly in terms of an administrative or bureaucratic sovereign that threats to crush the voluntary associative efforts in civil society, power is analyzed in a narrow and unilateral way. It is mostly attributed to state authorities, while leaving the field of civil associations outside of its influence. In this respect, civil society is described as devoid of any power relations that may traverse its interior and shape the forms and functions of its actors.

Of course, according to this tocquevillian inspired approach, civil society never becomes a force that rejects state power as a whole, in the name of its self-governing abilities. "Civil society beyond and against the state" is a possibility that is overtly excluded from the political horizon. To the contrary, the aim is a mutual balance between the state and a field of liberty where state power is restricted at the maximum possible level.[5] To achieve this balance the state has to set the regulatory and legal framework for civil society. Civil society actors are then expected to develop their self-organizing capacities inside this framework, while remaining vigilant for excessive state interventions. Thus, links between state and civil society seem to be relational and oppositional, oppositional and relational, at the same time.

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[2] Francis Fukuyama, "Social Capital, Civil Society and Development," *Third World Quarterly* 22/1 (2001), 11.

[3] Sheri Berman, "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic," *World Politics* 49 (1997).

[4] Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil society and its Rivals*, Athens 1996, in Greek.

[5] Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty*, 48, 141,142, 236.

b) The second most common theoretical perspective on civil society depicts it a as sphere beside the state and the market.

Articulated more fully in the work of Jurgen Habermas, this theoretical approach analyzes modernity on the grounds of the fundamental distinction between the notions of the 'system' and the 'lifeworld.' The social spheres of the state and the market form part of the 'system' and are regulated by an administrative and exploitative logic respectively. In contrast to these two spheres, the lifeworld functions by following a communicative rationality and discursive ethics. The problem emerges when the powers and logics of the system expand and invade the lifeworld and the political public sphere that is rooted in it. This leads to the destruction of lifeworld's communicative rationality by its rationalization and commodification.[6]

According to this theoretical perspective, civil society is understood as an intrinsic part of the lifeworld as well as an indispensable component of the political public sphere.[7] In this light, civil society is formed by a complex network of voluntary associations outside the realm of the state and the economy, ranging from churches and sport clubs to grass-roots movements, labor unions and 'alternative institutions.'[8] The communicative interactions that take place inside and among the associations that constitute it, render civil society an important locus for shaping public opinion, legitimating state power as well as actively influencing the political system by placing new issues on the agenda.[9] Finally, it is depicted as the public sphere's organizational substratum and as the institutionalized infrastructure of the communicative interactions and democratic deliberations that take place in it.[10]

In this more social democratic and mostly habermasian inspired argument, civil society designates again a sphere which is equated with 'the good.' By virtue of its inherent relationship with the lifeworld its stands as the place where relations of association can be built, discursive ethics nurtured and consensus reached. Civil society associations enrich the

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[6] Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, trans. William Regh, 1996, 369.

[7] "Up to now, I have generally dealt with the public sphere as a communication structure rooted in the lifeworld through the associational network of civil society", Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 359.

[8] Hurgen Habermas, "Futher Reflections on the Public Sphere," in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1992, 453-454.

[9] Habermas, "Futher Reflections," 379-384.

[10] "Rather its institutional core comprises those nongovernmental and noneconomic connections and voluntary associations than anchor the communication structures of the public sphere in the society component of the lifeworld," Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 366-367.

public sphere and help it stay legitimated and alive. From this it's easy to deduce that the stronger civil society becomes the stronger and more democratic the public sphere turns out to be.

Secondly, civil society is depicted as the vector of communicative rationality and action but not of power relations. Clearly, the case is made by Habermas for a "political public sphere unsubverted by power".[11] Exactly as the lifeworld, civil society is considered to be a place outside of power where communicative interactions can take place in a power free way. Rational deliberation and common search for truth leads to consensus where the only possible form of power is the one of the better argument. Indeed, the exercise of power comes as an *external* factor, in the form of the colonizing encroachment of system's imperatives on areas of the lifeworld. Following this line of thought, civil society becomes the most adequate force for erecting a democratic dam against the colonizing impetus of system's imperatives.[12]

Finally, the preservation of the lifeworld and its particular logic by civil society actors doesn't mean that their resistance leads to the political replacement of the 'system' by the forces of the 'lifeworld.' Such a radical expansion of the self-organizing logic of civil society *cannot* and *does not* form part of civil society's political agenda. Instead, civil society, as a third sector between the state and the market, struggles to maintain and deepen its own autonomy and intrinsic political rationality, attaining a balance with the forces of the system.

As we have tried to show so far, two of the major theoretical arguments on civil society seem to suffer from at least three important inadequacies:

1. They give normative accounts and definitions of civil society based more on what it *should* be rather than what it *is*.

2. They represent civil society as a power-free zone, where voluntarism, trust, solidarity, and democratic self-organization will emerge if left by external forces to their own particular driving rationale.

3. They end up arguing for both state regulations on civil society *and* civil society's struggle for autonomy from the state. This complex and ambiguous relationship between state and civil society, once referred to by Michael Walzer as "the paradox of the civil society

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[11] Habermas, "Futher Reflections on the Public Sphere", 453.
[12] Habermas, "Futher Reflections on the Public Sphere", 444 and Samantha Ashenden, "Habermas and Foucault on Civil Society and Resistance," in Samantha Ashenden and David Owen (eds), *Foucault contra Habermas: Recasting the Dialogue between Genealogy and Critical Theory*, London 1999.

argument,"[13] remains heavily undertheorized. Its complexities and dynamics seem to lie beyond the theoretical and conceptual adequacy of these two civil society discourses.

Perhaps, an alternative to these deadlocks might be found in a theoretical perspective that proves allergic to normative groundings; that doesn't wish to close its eyes to the significance and multiplicity of power relations; and that avoids topological accounts of social phenomena for more relational and dynamic approaches of their historical formation. It is for such a theoretical vantage point that we shall now turn to the work of Michel Foucault.

2) Civil Society: what's Foucault got to do with it?

For sure, Michel Foucault cannot be considered a thinker of civil society. His work lacks a systematic and consistent analysis of its form and function. Besides some short comments on the state/civil society distinction that can be found dispersed in his interviews,[14] his most thorough analysis of civil society is in his 1978-1979 lectures at the College de France on "The Birth of Biopolitics."[15] Despite the scant references on the issue of civil society, Foucault's insights may prove helpful in reconceptualizing state/civil society relations in a way that avoids the above mentioned theoretical pitfalls. This could be achieved by taking into account his peculiar method of historical research as well as his analytics of power.

a) *"Civil society is like madness and sexuality…"*

For Paul Veyne, French historian and close friend of Michel Foucault, Foucault revolutionizes history because he includes in his historical research the process of the objectification of the object under historical inquiry.[16] This means, that instead of taking for granted the meaning of concepts that most historians do, he goes on to investigate the ways that made each particular phenomenon the object it is, in the first place. Of course, this method of research is heavily imbued with a nominalist spirit combined with the usual

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[13] Michael Walzer, "The Idea of Civil Society: A Path to Social Reconstruction," in E.J. Dionne (ed.) *Community Works: The Revival of Civil Society in America*, Washington 1998.

[14] Michel Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault" and "The Risks of Security," in P. Rabinow, *Power: Essential Works of Michel Foucault*, v. 3, New York, 2000, 290, 371-373.

[15] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the College de France 1978-79*, trans. Graham Burchell, New York 2008.

[16] Paul Veyne, "Foucault Revolutionizes History," in Arnold I. Davidson (ed.) *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, Chicago 1997.

skepticism that characterizes Foucault's philosophical attitude.[17] Following a genealogical method, he goes on to argue that our critical efforts should be oriented not towards the search for formal structures of universal value, but rather towards the *events* that have led us to constitute ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking and saying.[18] This implies the need to circumvent, as far as possible, all universals in order to examine them as historical constructs. In its turn, this can be attained by emphasizing the concrete practices that generate the forms of particular objects and subjects.[19] Modes of objectification and subjectification are formed by the influence of forms of knowledge and power. Thus, concepts like sexuality or madness are not, in a sense, already given in their content and meaning. They are constituted historically and so they should be understood as the *effect* of a specific regime of social practices, rather than its source.

Following this methodological path, Foucault extends his nominalist critique beyond sexuality and madness, to civil society.[20] Civil Society cannot be considered any more as a social universal endowed with abstract and ahistorical qualities. Proceeding with a normative understanding of civil society, that ascribes to it essential characteristics, such as social solidarity, trust, autonomy and opposition to state power, now seems to be problematic. The same goes for the classical dichotomy of state/civil society. If civil society, no less than the state, is not to be taken as an a priori entity that *affects* social reality, but as the *effect* of *preceding* social forces, then it is time to reverse our method of research and try to analyze civil society without reducing it to already given conceptualizations.[21] It's time to focus on the concrete, the local and the particular practices and forms of power, in order to grasp the singularity of the concept's historical emergence. This is carried out by Foucault in his analysis of liberal governmentality, as part of his genealogy of the modern state.

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[17] Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method," in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, Peter Miller (ed.), *The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago 1991, 86 and Michel Foucault, "Course Summary," in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 336-337.

[18] Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightment?," in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, New York 1984, 45-46.

[19] Maurice Florence, "Michel Foucault", http://foucault.info/foucault/biography.html.

[20] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 21-22, 314-317, Kaspar Villadsen, "Doing without State and Civil Society as Universals: 'Dispositifs' of Care beyond the Classic Sector Divide," *Journal of Civil Society* 4/3 (2008): 177-179.

[21] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 94-97; Thomas Lemke, "An Indigestible Meal? Foucault, Governmentality and State Theory," *Dinstiktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 8/2 (2007); and Acar Kutay, "Managerial Formations and Coupling among State, the Market and Civil Society: An Emerging Effect of Governance," *Critical Policy Studies* 8/3 (2014): 251.

b) *Liberalism and Civil Society*

Foucault traces, in the middle of the 18th century, the historical emergence of a new art of government which he terms *liberalism*. According to his analysis, liberalism is neither understood as a political philosophy nor as a set of economic policies, but rather as a particular political practice embodying a new rationality of government. This liberal way of governing emerges as a vehicle for criticism against the already existing governmental regime of Raison d' Etat. Its critical edge is the effort to limit the exercise of government. Liberalism, it is argued, is haunted by the question of the too much and the too little of governmental intervention. Its aim seems to be a frugal government that knows when to limit itself and avoid any excessive regulation.[22] This new rationality of government is accompanied by the rise of political economy as a form of knowledge, as well as the transformation of the function of the market from a site of justice to a site for the formation of truth.[23]

But these crucial transformations in the ways of governmental knowing and acting pose the question of the self-limitation of government in entirely different ways. It is not anymore the issue of opposing the all-encompassing power of the sovereign with barriers *external* to his arbitrary will (a contrast between royal power on the one side and those upholding the juridical institution on the other). Instead, what forms the criterion for such limitation is the *calculation* of the governmental utility.[24] This is a self-limiting factor that acts *internally*, so to speak, to this new art of government.

Furthermore, the liberal way of governing led to a different political objectification of the governed. The governed were not to be conceived and administered as a flock of sheep to be led or as subjects of rights to be treated according to the law.[25] Now, the governed were constituted as subjects of economic interest, as homo economicus.[26] How were, then, these interest-motivated agents to be governed, if not by contract and law? This problem of government became even more pressing by the claim of political economy, about the inability

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[22] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 27-29.

[23] *Ibid.*, 30-34.

[24] *Ibid.*, 37-38, 61.

[25] Of course, this doesn't mean that these older forms of objectification ceased to exist. To the contrary, they continued to play an important role in terms of the governmental rationality to which they were ascribed, pastoral power and sovereign power accordingly.

[26] The figure of homo economicus is to be understood as heterogeneous to homo juridicus or homo legalis. *Ibid.*, 276.

of the sovereign to unify the economic realm and comprehend it thoroughly. Thus, according to the liberal problematic, the economic world is by its very nature non-totalizable. The sovereign cannot exercise its power on economic relations, not because he just doesn't have the right to do so, but because he simply *cannot obtain* the adequate knowledge to do so. Political economy, by highlighting the essential incompatibility between the non-totalizable multiplicity of economic subjects and the totalizing unity of the juridical sovereign, is presented as the critique of governmental reason.[27] But this kind of critique poses the legitimate question: what will be the concern of government, if the realm of economic processes and its interest motivated agents cannot be its object? This is exactly where the issue of civil society comes in.

In this way, civil society emerges as a field, as a domain of reference on which the art of governing will be exercised. It helps addressing the above mentioned fundamental problem that the subject of interest (homo economicus) poses to the sovereign. Civil society, instead of being a philosophical idea, it is considered to be an indispensable element of the liberal governmental regime. In fact, it can be understood as a technology of government that is correlative to liberal rule.[28] In this respect, civil society forms the territory of government. It is inhabited by economic agents, active in pursuing their interests, but it doesn't block the exercise of power. It functions as the conduit of an omnipresent government, which respects the specificity of the economy and the rule of law, while at the same time allows the political management of those who act in it.

Following this line of thought, civil society cannot be depicted anymore as a field outside the state and its governing purview. To the contrary, Foucault argues, it should be understood as a 'transactional reality.'[29] What is meant by this is a reality that emerges out of "the interplay of relations of power and everything that constantly eludes them, at the interface, so to speak, of governors and governed."[30] This leads to a complex relation between civil society and the state, one of simultaneous exteriority and interiority.[31] Civil society becomes both the condition and the final end of governmental interventions. It is the

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[27] *Ibid.*, 281-283.
[28] *Ibid.*, 295-
[29] *Ibid.*, 297.
[30] *Ibid.* This means that civil society is the locus of resistance as well. Let's not forget, that according to Foucault where there is power, there is also resistance.
[31] *Ibid.*, "Course Summary," 319.

instrument and the effect of governmental practices, not their foundation or borderline.[32] This paradoxical relationship can be easily grasped if we focus on the political rationality underpinning these interactions.[33]

Liberalism and civil society don't stand for a form of government that is premised on the wisdom of the sovereign, but for one that is exercised according to the rationality of the governed. Governing, the liberal way, means hinging government on the rationality of the governed.[34] Now, since the governed are understood as subjects of economic interest, the liberal art of government will be exercised *through* their economic rationality. Hence, homo economicus, as the inhabitant of civil society, becomes the permanent point of reference and the vector through which liberal government will be exercised. This redistribution, this re-centering/ de-centering of governmental reason, is one of the most crucial consequences, Foucault argues, of the historical emergence of civil society.[35]

Perhaps, this effort to reconceptualize state/civil society relations, drawing upon Foucault's work, will be further elucidated, if we pinpoint the power relations that traverse them.

c) *Governing Civil Society at a Distance*

After the publication of his work "Discipline and Punish" Foucault elaborates a theoretical understanding of power that extends well beyond its disciplinary and top-down conception. Instead, discipline becomes *one* of the ways power is exercised.[36] Now, power takes on different features:

a) Power is a relation. Foucault underscores its dispersed, multiple and always embedded nature. As a relation, power cannot be acquired, accumulated or shared, while at the same time it is articulated in a strategic way.

b) Power has a bottom-up direction. Its primary source is the multitude of dispersed relations that traverse the social field. In contrast to a legal-juridical conception of power,

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[32] Lemke, "An Indigestible Meal?;" Foucault, "Governmentality and State Theory," *ibid.*, 56, 58.

[33] *Ibid.* Senellart, "Course Context," 330; "Society thus represents at once, 'the set of conditions of least liberal government' and the "surface of transfer of governmental activity."

[34] *Ibid.*, 311-312.

[35] *Ibid.*, 311.

[36] Michel Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth," *Political Theory* 21/2 (1993): 204 and Michel Foucault, "Politics and Ethics: An Interview," in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader*, 380.

practices of rule are invented in an array of social domains (family, production line, prisons, asylums) and then become intertwined with more centralized institutions. The strategic game of power relations stems from the bottom of the social field; it is then condensed, codified and formalized at the level of central institutions.[37]

c) Power is a 'positive' and productive force. Instead of repressing and restricting, power formulates, shapes and creates. It contributes to the creation and re-creation of our social world. It affects our own subjectivity by shaping and guiding our behavior, our preferences and our worldviews.

When these characteristics are attributed to the notion of power, it acquires a different content, one that is neither warlike nor juridical. Now, power is conceived as 'government.'[38] To govern others, according to Foucault's analysis, is not a matter of imposing the will of the governor on the governed or of annulling their ability to act. To the contrary, *to govern* means to act upon the actions of the governed, to structure the possible field of their actions.[39] This entails that the ability of the governed to act becomes a prerequisite of this particular form of power.

Furthermore, the freedom of the governed to act includes their ability to act upon themselves. So, to conduct the conduct of others means to affect the way the governed relate to themselves as well. Government can be also understood as *the contact point* that relates the way individuals are driven by others to the way they conduct themselves.[40] It designates the multiple and contingent interactions between structures of domination and ways of intervening upon oneself.[41] In this light, governing implies a strong ethical dimension concerning the forms of self-perception and action of the governed and the way these connect to the broader objectives of power structures.

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[37] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Power. Essential Works of Foucault*, New York 2001, 345 and Bob Jessop, "From Micro-powers to Governmentality: Foucault's Work on Statehood, State Formation, Statecraft and State Power," *Political Geography* 26 (2007): 38-39.

[38] Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 341.

[39] *Ibid*., 341-342.

[40] Michel Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth," *Political Theory* 21/2 (1993): 203.

[41] Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *Ethics. Essential Works of Foucault*, New York 1998, 299; Thomas Lemke, "Foucault, Governmentality and Critique," *Rethinking Marxism* 14/3 (2002) and Graham Burchell, "Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self," in Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose (ed.), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-liberalism and Rationalities of Governme*nt, London 1996, 20-21.

Thus, government, as a particular form of power, seems to presuppose a distance between the governors and the governed. This distance allows the governors to exercise their power not *on* the governed but *through* the autonomous actions of the governed. It's not a matter of subjugating them to the governors' own absolute and despotic will, but of managing their conduct in a way that it becomes aligned with their general political objectives.

This way of governing *through* the actions of others has been a crucial characteristic of what can be termed 'advanced liberal' or 'neo-liberal' forms of rule. Neoliberalism as a political rationality tends to govern individuals, collectives and organizations not by crushing their ability to act, but by fostering their self-governing capacities. This is premised on their conception as subjects of responsibility, autonomy and choice.[42] Furthermore, all their actions and decisions are interpreted according to an economic rationality, infused by entrepreneurial values and guided by a market mentality. In such a way, the governed are objectified as active and responsible homo economicus.

Of course, utilizing and instrumentalizing this regulated autonomy of the governed is a form of power that can take place by being embedded in specific practices, processes and techniques. Beyond its juridical definition, power is exercised by inscribing its particular rationality in many everyday and prosaic activities. Processes of evaluation and self-evaluation, audits, budgets, contracts, accounting techniques shape our actions, reconfigure our self-perception and delimit our political imagination in indirect but effective ways.[43]

Taking all the above into account, state-civil society relations can be reinterpreted as a form of governing at a distance.[44] Civil society emerges as a social domain that lies outside state structures but inside the purview of government. Particularly, in our neo-liberal era, civil society seems to instantiate, in a concise way, the post-welfarist regime of the social.[45] It is depicted as a domain constituted by a vast array of collectives, citizen's initiatives, associations and unions. Nevertheless, this multiplicity of actors is traversed by an economic and entrepreneurial worldview. The subjects that inhabit it are vectors of human capital

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[42] Nikolas Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," in Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose (ed.), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-liberalism and Rationalities of Governme*nt, 43, 46, 53-54, 57.

[43] *Ibid*., 54-61 and Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom. Reframing Political Thought*, Cambridge 1999, 51-55.

[44] Nikolas Rose και Peter Miller, "Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government," *The British Journal of Sociology* 43/2 (1992): 179-180, 198-201.

[45] Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality. Power and Rule in Modern Society*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, 1999, 171-174.

investing in the creation of stocks of social capital and vice versa. Political institutions stimulate their self-governing capacities and engage many of them in the delivery of public goods and services. Civil society actors are, thus, mobilized as participants in the policy-making procedure.[46] This is achieved not by absorbing them in expanding state structures, but by governing their freedom and autonomy at a distance. This way of acting upon the actions of civil society agents, of harnessing and regulating their initiatives, without destroying them, is accompanied by the proliferation of techniques and procedures that control and structure their subjectivity as well as their possible field of actions. They retain their ability to act, move and chose but their goals are framed and aligned with the ones of their governors.

To sum up, by moving beyond normative definitions of civil society, we can grasp it as related to our contemporary forms of neo-liberal ways of governing. Furthermore, if we don't ignore the power relations at play, then we may theorize state-civil society relations neither as a zero-sum game nor as a win-win game, but as the designation of contemporary forms of rule, best termed as 'governing at a distance.'

3) <u>The Greek NGOs Sector</u>

Does all this have anything to do with Greek civil society, and particularly with the Greek NGOs sector? Well, no, and yes!

No, because the Greek political system lacks a consolidated and well functioning policy-making procedure in which NGOs could participate, and thereby be governed at a distance, either as service providers or as policy stakeholders. Quite the contrary, the Greek NGO sector is widely considered as a synonym for corruption, economic mismanagement and the absence of transparency and accountability.

And yes, because there are powers already at play in the NGO sector that tend to crystallize constitutive elements of 'governing at a distance:'

a) The top-down creation of Greek NGO sector.[47] The proliferation of NGOs in Greece during the 90s was mostly the result either of state initiatives (NGOs in International Development) or of various European Union's programs. However, these top-down processes

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[46] Jacques Donzelot, "The Mobilization of Society," in Burchell, Gordon, Miller (ed.), *The Foucault Effect*, 178-179.
[47] Asteris Huliaras, "The Dynamics of Civil Society in Greece: Creating Civic Engagement from the Top," *The Jean Monnet Papers on Political Economy*, 2004.

were not implemented in the typically hierarchical form of administrative planning. Most of the times, they took the form of interventions that aim at creating a broader institutional framework for NGOs' actions. E.U. programs are, perhaps, the best example of the political rationality of governing NGOs at a distance; not by prescribing or enjoining their actions, but by setting their technical standards and defining their goals.

b) Organizational isomorphism. The multiple interactions between NGOs and the actors in their institutional environment (weather these are state structures, E.U. agencies, donors or the Media) tend to multiply their organizational similarities and adapt NGOs' structures to formal organizational patterns. This process seems to be necessary if NGOs want to respond effectively to their changing social environment and seize its opportunities. Again, this is a process that takes the form of "alignment at a distance" with dominant organizational standards and patterns of behavior, rather than the form of disciplinary enforcement.

c) Competition. There is a growing competition among NGOs for scarce funding resources.[48] The logic and practice of constant competition attests the omnipresence of power relations *in* the NGOs sector as well as the hierarchies and asymmetries that power engenders. Furthermore, it designates the importance of economic factors for their survival. So, competing over funding seems to go hand-in-hand with the economization of their mentality and everyday practices.

Needless to say, all these characteristics can be found in the Greek NGO sector in a dispersed and mostly non state-led way. Nevertheless, they should be taken into account, exactly because of our bottom-up approach to power. Relations and practices at play at the local level tend to connect, accumulate and take stable forms, affecting formal structures. These elements when combined with the multiple pressures on Greek NGOs (by Donors, Media, public opinion and fundraisers) aiming at their modernization (by adopting managerial tools to maximize transparency, accountability, efficiency and performance),[49] signify a vibrant tendency in the Greek NGOs sector. Will this social dynamic lead to a more

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[48] Marilena Simiti, "The State and the Voluntary Sector during the current Economic Crisis," *Greek Political Science Review* 42 (2014), in Greek, and Alexandros Afouxanidis and Maria Gardiki, "Mapping Civil Society in Contemporary Greece: Problems and Perspectives," *The Greek Review of Social Research* 143 (2014), in Greek.
[49] Susan M. Roberts, John Paul Jones III and Oliver Fröhling, "NGOs and the Globalization of Managerialism: A Research Framework," *World Development* 33/11 (2005); Marilena Simiti, "The Debate on Non-Governmental Organizations' 'Accounatbility,'" *CONCORD (European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development) Flash – Monthly Bulletin* 43 (2007); and Sotiris Petropoulos, "The Assessment of NGOs as a Tool of Funding and Accountability," *The Greek Review of Social Research* 143 (2014), in Greek.

systematic and stable institutional assemblage of governing Greek civil society at a distance? Well, this is a question we will have to leave open to further research.