

**Engaging with Theoretical Approaches to State-Civil Society
Relations: A Case Study of Child Protection Organisations
informed by Christian Values in South Africa**

by

Chené Mostert

*Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (Political Science) in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
at Stellenbosch University*



Supervisor: Prof. Nicola de Jager

December 2020

Declaration

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31 August 2020

Abstract

For many decades, the definition of ‘civil society’, the role it plays in democratic societies, as well as its relationship with the state have been debated and contested in both theory and reality. Two key theoretical approaches have been identified, namely the ‘associational life’ and ‘public life’ models. The first approach endorses pluralism by recognising that multiple interests need to be represented in a democratic setting. In contrast, the second approach describes civil society as an arena for public deliberation in pursuit of the common interest; and thus requires groups to turn from their separate affairs and compromise on their truths for the sake of finding a shared ‘truth’. Consequently, this approach inadvertently ‘disqualifies’ groups, such as religious groups, who may be unwilling to conform, as they will not always be able to reach a shared truth.

The general goal of this study was to advance an understanding of the contribution religious-based, specifically Christian-based, civil society organisations are making in eradicating child abuse and neglect in South Africa and in strengthening broader communities. The study also sought to recognise what their contributions mean in terms of the associational life and public life theoretical approaches. To understand the role these organisations play and how these roles fit into the theoretical approaches, three organisations were selected as case studies and a key informant from each was interviewed. This research thus involved an in-depth analysis of three Christian-based child protection organisations in South Africa. The primary data gathered from the interviews were analysed using content analysis, also known as coding, by means of ATLAS.ti. The data was then interpreted and discussed.

The findings show that these groups play a central role in promoting the protection and wellbeing of children and also in empowering communities, holding the government accountable and ensuring a healthy democracy. The contributions of these organisations in South Africa include their wide reach, extending to the remotest corners of the country, advocacy and lobbying work in protecting children’s rights, fostering positive values, stimulating positive change and creating protective and nurturing environments. By highlighting the vital developmental role these Christian-based organisations play, this thesis argues that such religious groups should not be excluded from understandings of civil society.

This thesis further discusses state-civil society relations and argues for diverse relations as opposed to a single homogenous set of relations. Since there is insufficient integration between empirical and theoretical research on civil society in South Africa, this thesis aims to address this gap and add to existing literature regarding associationalism in contemporary South Africa. Ultimately, the findings from this study are more commensurate with the associational life theoretical approach and have highlighted the necessity of pluralism not only in South Africa, but also in any democratic state.

Opsomming

Die definisie van 'burgerlike samelewing', die rol wat dit speel in demokratiese samelewings, sowel as die verhouding met die staat, is al dekades lank bespreek en in teorie sowel as in die werklikheid betwis. Twee belangrike teoretiese benaderings is geïdentifiseer, naamlik die 'assosiasielewe' en 'openbare lewens'-modelle. Die eerste benadering onderskryf pluralisme deur te erken dat meervoudige belange in 'n demokratiese omgewing verteenwoordig moet word. Hierteenoor, beskryf die tweede benadering die burgerlike samelewing as 'n arena vir openbare beraadslaging ter wille van gemeenskaplike belang; en vereis dus van groepe om af te sien van hul afsonderlike sake en hul waarhede prys te gee ten einde 'n gedeelde 'waarheid' te vind. Gevolglik 'diskwalifiseer' hierdie benadering onbedoeld sekere groepe, soos godsdienstige groepe, omdat hulle nie bereid is om te konformeer en 'n gedeelde waarheid te bereik nie.

Die algemene doel was om vas te stel wat die bydrae is van godsdienstige, spesifiek Christelik-gebaseerde, burgerlike organisasies in die uitwissing van kindermishandeling en verwaarlosing in Suid-Afrika en die versterking van breër gemeenskappe. Hierdie studie het ook probeer om die betekenis van hul bydraes te erken in terme van die teoretiese benaderings van die samelewingslewe en die openbare lewe. Om die rolle wat hierdie organisasies speel te verstaan en hoe hierdie rolle in die teoretiese benaderings pas, is drie organisasies as gevallestudies gekies en onderhoude met 'n sleutel-informant van elk gevoer. Hierdie navorsing het dus 'n diepgaande ontleding van drie Christelik-gebaseerde kinderbeskermingsorganisasies in Suid-Afrika behels. Die primêre data wat deur die onderhoude versamel is, is met behulp van inhoudsanalise, ook bekend as kodering, op ATLAS.ti geanaliseer. Die data is daarna geïnterpreteer en bespreek.

Daar is gevind dat hierdie groepe 'n sentrale rol speel in die beskerming en welstand van kinders, in die bemagtiging van gemeenskappe, asook om die regering aanspreeklik te hou en 'n gesonde demokrasie te verseker. Die bydraes van hierdie organisasies in Suid-Afrika sluit 'n wye reikwydte in wat tot die buitenste uithoeke van die land strek, voorspraak en lobbywerk om kinders se regte te beskerm, die bevordering van positiewe waardes, die stimulasie van positiewe verandering en die skep van beskermende en koesterende omgewings. Deur die noodsaaklike ontwikkelingsrol wat hierdie Christelik-gebaseerde

organisasies speel uit te lig, argumenteer hierdie tesis dat sulke godsdienstige groepe nie uitgesluit moet word van sienings oor die burgerlike samelewing nie.

Hierdie tesis bespreek verder die verhouding tussen die staat en die burgerlike samelewing en is ten gunste van uiteenlopende verhoudings in teenstelling met 'n enkele homogene stel verhoudings. Aangesien daar 'n gebrek aan integrasie is tussen empiriese en teoretiese navorsing oor die burgerlike samelewing in Suid-Afrika, het hierdie tesis ten doel om hierdie leemte aan te spreek en 'n bydrae te lewer tot bestaande literatuur rakende assosiasielewe in die hedendaagse Suid-Afrika. Uiteindelik kom die bevindings uit hierdie studie meer ooreen met die assosiasielewe-teoretiese benadering en beklemtoon dit die noodsaaklikheid van pluralisme – nie net in Suid-Afrika nie, maar ook in enige demokratiese staat.

Acknowledgements

My first word of thanks goes to God, my heavenly Father, who has been my Rock and my Anchor. Your love, grace and provision have carried me. Thank you for guiding me, strengthening me and giving me the wisdom that I needed to complete this task. Thank you for Your faithfulness and for being my source of strength and comfort in times of need. I give You all the honour and glory for the fruit of my labour. Thank you to the Bay Christian Family Church and all my spiritual leaders for teaching me the uncompromised Word of God and allowing me to keep my faith strong throughout this journey. Your impartation has helped me stay sound-minded, positive and to finish strong.

To my biological father, thank you for your financial support and providing me with the opportunity to attend university and pursue a postgraduate degree. Thank you for the personal sacrifices you have made over the past six years and for working tirelessly to see your daughter achieve her goals. To my mother and grandmother, words cannot express how grateful I am for your constant love and emotional support. Thank you for all your prayers and words of encouragement. You have been pillars of strength. Thank you also to my boyfriend and his family for your prayers and loving support. I thank God for you. You have been so considerate and caring. I sincerely appreciate it.

To my academic supervisor, Prof. Nicola de Jager, accept my heartfelt and endless gratitude for your time, guidance and patience. Thank you for your constant support over the past two years. The knowledge and wisdom you have imparted have been a great help. Thank you for all your efforts, excellent feedback and going the extra mile. I could not have asked for a better mentor and guide. To my language editor, Dr Layla Cassim, thank you for all your suggestions for improvement and for the exceptionally thorough work that you have put into each chapter of my thesis. A special thank you for the words of motivation that accompanied your feedback and allowing me to believe in my academic writing and work produced. To Mariette Nortje, thank you for all the time and effort you have put into proof-reading my work and for being a great support when I needed you. My gratitude knows no bounds. Thank you also to the Postgraduate office at Stellenbosch University for the workshops you have organised and providing us as students with ample opportunities to develop valuable skills and be well equipped. Your support has allowed me to embark on this journey with confidence.

A final word of appreciation to Ms Nicolette van der Walt, National Manager of Child Protection at ACVV; Ms Dee Moskoff, founder of Connect Network; and Ms Tilda Fick, Office manager of Abba Adoptions's Western Cape Satellite office and Ms Elna Blanche Engelbrecht, Supervisor. Thank you for voluntarily participating in this research and for providing me with deeper insights into the contributions of Christian-based CSOs to child protection. The information you have shared has enriched this study significantly and has given me a more detailed understanding of the role your organisations play and the challenges you face. I salute you for the work you do and for transforming thousands of South African lives. Thank you for your commitment, selflessness, passion and excellence in seeing communities changed and children protected.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACVV	<i>Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging</i> (Afrikaans Christian Women's Association)
ANC	African National Congress
ATLAS	Archiv fuer Technik, Lebenswelt und Alltagssprache
CAQDAS	Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPC	Child Protection Collaborative
CPO	Child Protection Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CYCC	Child and Youth Care Centre
DCPO	Designated Child Protection Organisation
FBO	Faith-Based Organisation
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GRO	Grass-Root Organisation
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IICSA	Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse
NACOS	National Coalition of NGOs
NACSA	National Adoption Coalision of South Africa
NDP	National Development Plan
NGK	<i>Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk</i> (Dutch Reformed Church)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PCPF	Provincial Child Protection Forum
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SACP	South African Communist Party
SAIRR	South African Institute for Race Relations
TNDT	Transitional National Development Trust
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America

Chapter 1: Study Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

Research shows that child abuse and neglect are widespread in South Africa and have become an escalating problem over the years (September, 2006; Chames & Lomofsky, 2014; Seedat, Van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla & Ratele, 2009; Hall, Richter, Mokomane, & Lake, 2018). The ages of victims are becoming younger and the scope of abuse is worsening (September, 2006:67). Children experience abuse in different settings, including the home, school, community, alternative care and the justice system (Chames & Lomofsky, 2014:43). Children in South Africa are also exposed to several forms of neglect and violence – be it physical, sexual or emotional. Approximately 39% of girls reported that they had fallen victim to some form of sexual violence before turning 18 (Seedat et al., 2009:1013).

The University of Cape Town's Children's Institute publishes *The South African Child Gauge* (Hall et al., 2018:131). According to this annual publication, 19.6 million children lived in South Africa in 2017. About 14% of these children were orphans who had lost either one parent or both; 21% of South African children did not live with either of their biological parents; and 0.3% lived in child-only households. Seedat et al. (2009:1013) further highlight that approximately 15% of children reported that one or both of their parents were unable to care for them due to alcohol consumption; and 30% had been moved around between households during childhood. According to Statistics South Africa's (Stats SA's) 2017 Community Survey, approximately 61.8% of children under the age of 18 grow up without their fathers (Eyewitness News, 2018). Parents are their children's first line of defence. Therefore, the lop-sided structure of South African families and high rates of fatherlessness leave children powerless and vulnerable to abuse and neglect (Seedat et al., 2009:1015).

Furthermore, South Africa is characterised with high levels of poverty, underdevelopment and inequality (Seedat et al., 2009; September, 2016). The legacy of discriminatory *apartheid* policies has had a devastating impact on 'black' families in South Africa, in particular (Seedat et al., 2009:1014). These policies resulted in huge socio-economic inequalities that are still prevalent. According to Seedat et al. (2009:1014), great inequality leads to great anger, frustration and often violence, which increase children's vulnerability. Children's well-being and protection are heavily influenced by their socio-economic and political

context. South Africa's rapidly-changing political and social context therefore drastically impacts their everyday lives.

The South African Child Gauge (Hall et al., 2018:131) highlights that about 65% of children live below the "upper bound" poverty line (with a per capita income of below R1138 per month); approximately 30% live in households where no adult is employed; about 1.6 million children live in shacks and backyard dwellings; and 18% (one in six children) live in overcrowded households. Moreover, 20% of children do not have access to nearby health services; 30% have no access to clean drinking water; 22% do not have access to toilet facilities and 12% live in households that reported child hunger. These statistics show that child abuse and neglect is a serious social issue in South Africa that needs urgent attention.

The post-*apartheid* governments have made major legislative and policy strides to protect the human rights of children and to achieve both international and national goals for children's well-being (Human Sciences Research Council, 2009:14; September, 2006:65). While the state and civil society are jointly responsible for implementing these policies, the state is relying heavily on civil society to fulfil this task (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:32; Graham, 2015:177-178). Civil society organisations (CSOs), such as child protection organisations (CPOs), however, face several challenges, which makes it difficult for them to be effective and maintain quality services (Ranchod, 2007; Lehman, 2008). Funding from government, for example, remains problematic despite the vital role CSOs play in society. Another challenge includes the ambiguous relationship between the state and civil society, which can intensify social problems, such as the child protection dilemma. Fine (1992:30) underlines the importance of mediation between the state and civil society.

Melton and Anderson (2008:183) suggest that the protection of children is fundamentally a moral issue. Therefore, religious-based CSOs can play a central role by fostering certain positive values in communities and developing safety nets for children. Melton and Anderson (2008:173) acknowledge the fact that some religious institutions, like the Roman Catholic Church, have been found to threaten children's safety and contribute to child abuse. Erasmus (2005:142) also acknowledges that religion, particularly Afrikaner civil religion,¹ was central

¹ Afrikaner civil society generally refers to the religious self-understanding that places emphasis on so-called "creation ordinance", which implies that the Afrikaner 'volk' or cultural group is called to preserve its identity (Botha, 1983:252).

to the *apartheid* state's ideology that enforced colour prejudice and prevented the humane existence of millions of people, including children. However, religion was also central to the liberation of oppressed black people.

McGuire (1997:238) highlights that it is natural that certain aspects of religion will inhibit change, while other aspects will encourage change. This thesis is cognisant of the fact that religion can have negative implications and undermine development. However, there is also ample research to show that religion can be a force of positive change (De Jager & De Jager, 2019; Erasmus, 2005; Kuperus, 1999; Makoto, 2019; Ferrari, 2011; Soriano, 2013). A large network of religious organisations in South Africa is dedicated to the well-being and protection of children. Ferrari (2011:31) argues that, for most Christians, it is their responsibility to God that ultimately persuades them to take care of vulnerable groups in society.

Religion can play a central role in the development of a sound civil society and democracy. There is often a misperception that religion and politics, church and state are to be kept separate and that Christians are limited to spiritual affairs (Gramsci, 1971:134). For many decades, religion, including Christianity, has been confined to the private sphere and, therefore, does not have a place in public debate (Ferrari, 2011:35). However, this need not be the case. Christians are encouraged to take on different tasks and responsibilities in the political and social fields, and to instil positive values where they live, in schools, communities, workplaces and, ultimately, in civil society (Ferrari, 2011:34). Religions have now been given new responsibilities and opportunities not only in civil society but also in democratisation. For religious groups to make a positive contribution, a sound relationship is required between religion and civil society, and religious groups and the state.

Religion has a very personal dimension to it – it refers to a personal relationship between God and human beings. People are not born Christian, for instance, but become Christian because of a personal choice. While many people are born into a specific religion and naturally adopt the religion of their parents or family, as they grow older, they choose which religion they want to follow. Each person should be completely free to make this decision. A true religious experience can only exist within a state of liberty (Ferrari, 2011:32). This has paved the way for the development of the right of religious liberty. For most Christians, liberty includes being allowed to stand firm to their belief that the Gospel is the truth. In other

words, they want to be able to participate openly in civil society and public affairs without giving up or marginalising this claim (Ferrari, 2011:33). As soon as open debate applies an imposition of conformity, then this liberty is threatened.

1.2 Civil Society: Concept, Roles and Theoretical Approaches

Civil society is a concept that has been debated for many decades and is contested in both theory and reality. This section will highlight a few commonly accepted definitions of civil society and different state-civil society relations that exist. This section will further discuss two key theoretical approaches to understanding civil society, namely ‘associational life’ and ‘public life’, as discussed by Michael Edwards (2004). The associational life approach is, in essence, considered as the ideal approach in a pluralistic, democratic setting.

1.2.1 Civil Society as a Concept

Theorists with radically different ideological agendas and persuasions have attempted to unpack this concept, but, in the process, have left readers confused and faced with many questionable assumptions and ambiguities. Edwards (2004: vi), however, suggests in his book *Civil Society* that the aim should not be to search for theoretical consensus but rather to accept the fact that civil society means different things to different people and embrace the fact that it plays different roles at different times. Nevertheless, in both established and emerging democracies, civil society can offer substantial “emancipatory potential, explanatory power and practical support to problem solving” (Edwards, 2004). The solution is not to dismiss this concept as hopelessly compromised, but instead delve deeper into it and unpack the different models or approaches. In this way, one can reveal doctrine that imitates truth and confront policy makers who want to debate ideology (Edwards, 2004:5). With sufficient action in politics, economics and social life, civil society can be an effective vehicle for change.

Political theorists, such as Thomas Paine and Georg Hegel, first described ‘civil society’ as a space in which citizens associate according to their own interests (in Carothers, 1999:18). However, since the mid-19th century, political philosophers started focussing on the industrial revolution and civil society took a backseat. After World War II, the phrase was revived and Marxist theorist Gramsci portrayed it as “a special nucleus of independent political activity, a crucial sphere of [the] struggle against tyranny” (in Carothers, 1999:19). In the 1990s, after the Cold War, civil society became a global phenomenon, with the lowering of political

barriers. Democracy's growth worldwide sparked interest in civil society as a means of social renewal (Black, 2014:175; Carothers, 1999:19). In the new millennium, civil society has moved to the centre of the international stage, due to, among other reasons, the fall of communism and the subsequent democratic openings, a longing for togetherness and the rapid rise of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Black, 2014:175; Carothers, 1999:19; Edwards, 2004:2). According to the United Nations and World Bank, civil society serves as one of the keys to good governance and poverty-reducing growth (Edwards, 2004:3).

According to Black (2014:170) and Graham (2015:174), civil society is generally defined as “the sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organizations, networks, and individuals located between the family, the state, and the market”. However, the boundaries between these elements are complex and often blurred. Carothers (1999:19) highlights that it does not only include associations that aim to advance specific social and political agendas, but also many other associations, such as religious-based organisations, cultural organisations, student groups, sports clubs and informal community groups. In essence, civil society consists of associations that are voluntary, largely independent of the state and that are organised (Edwards, 2004:20; Way, 2014:36). De Jager and Hugo (2004:26) highlight key elements of civil society:

In general, civil society is used to signify that aggregation of voluntarily constituted citizens' organisations which for the most part enjoy relative autonomy from the state, and with whom they often find themselves at loggerheads, particularly in respect of building and maintaining a culture of democratic practice.

According to Naidoo and Finn Heinrich (2000), CSOs derive their legitimacy from their closeness to the people on the ground. This enables them to bring new issues on the public agenda, provide information, and act independently from government and business interests. For the purposes of this study, ‘civil society’ will be defined as those that fulfil the above roles, since this final description highlights its key role and pluralistic nature, which are essential for a healthy state of affairs. Scholars not only disagree on the conceptual meaning of civil society, but also on the role it plays in a democracy and its relationship with the state. State-civil society relationships can be both positive and negative. These will be outlined below.

1.2.2 Civil Society's Relationship with the State

Civil society can contribute to democratisation and socio-economic development, but can also undermine it. This sub-section highlights how civil society can play a positive role in democracies, in its adversarial and collaborative relationship with the state; but also, how civil society can play a negative role. While civil society is mostly welcomed, Edwards (2004) also warns against the dangers of civil society. Civil society, however, is not static and its specific role changes and adapts to the broader political context it finds itself in. State-civil society relations are, therefore, complex and not as rigid as depicted below.

1.2.2.1 Positive Roles

Most theorists seem to agree that a dynamic and diverse civil society can play a central role in advancing (liberal) democracy by playing an adversarial role and/or a collaborative role with the state (Carothers, 1999:21; De Jager & Hugo, 2004:27; Edwards, 2004:15; Graham, 2015:173; Mercer, 2002:6). It is mostly accepted that civil society and the state are separate but interdependent (i.e. they develop jointly and not at each other's expense).

Adversarial Relationship

It is argued that civil society can act as a 'watchdog' over the state and ensure legitimacy, accountability and transparency, which would then strengthen the state's capacity for good governance (Edwards, 2004:15; Graham, 2015:173; Mercer, 2002:7). A strong and plural civil society protects citizens against the excesses of state power. It furthermore legitimates the authority of the state when it is based on the rule of law (Mercer, 2002:7). According to Ikelegbe (2001:2-3), the main premise of civil society is that it is society's resistance to state excesses. Civil society is also the organisational, material and ideological centrepiece of the social movements and protests for reform and change.

De Jager and Hugo (2004:27) suggest that the central role of CSOs in Africa (where not all governments are democratic) remains to create, sustain and consolidate democracy, because it checks the "hegemonic tendencies of governments". Mercer (2002:7) regards CSOs as a crucial source of democratic change. Edwards (2004:34) argues that societies are more vulnerable to authoritarian rule if they lack a sufficient density, diversity or depth of associations. According to Graham (2015:190), a democracy can only be strong and healthy when it has a civil society that not only acts independently of the government, but also ensures delivery of constitutional goals.

Civil society also enables diverse interests to be represented and heard, including those of marginalised groups. Graham (2015:173) argues:

One of the key tests of the health of a democracy is the depth of civil society – that is, the extent to which participation in organisations that seek to influence government decisions filters down to all citizens.

According to Carothers (1999:20) and Black (2014:170), NGOs and other CSOs largely influence government decisions and the policy-making process. Not only do they shape policy by applying pressure on governments, but they also offer technical expertise to policy makers.

Mercer (2002:10) acknowledges the increasing body of (liberal democratic) literature that argues that NGOs “pluralize the institutional arena, expand and strengthen civil society, and bring more democratic actors into the political sphere”. Furthermore, CSOs promote citizen participation and civic education, and offer leadership training and opportunities for the youth to engage in civic life (Carothers, 1999:20). Carothers (1999) thus agrees that good non-governmental advocacy strengthens rather than weakens state capacity. Ultimately, civil society tends to foster civic and political engagement and social trust (Putnam, 1995:1-2).

Collaborative Relationship

Recent attempts have been made to move away from the conflictual content or adversarial role of civil society by adopting a new approach based on a partnership relationship. The Civil Society Initiative (CSI) in South Africa claims that civil society and the state should form a social partnership “to further the common national interest in a non-political arena” (in De Jager & Hugo, 2004:28). This approach thus stresses the collaborative role civil society plays in democracies. Critics, however, have dismissed this approach for trying to diminish the space for civil society to hold governments accountable (De Jager & Hugo, 2004:28).

Nevertheless, Mercer (2002:6) highlights the key role in democratisation that NGOs play in projects and programmes funded by donors, government and the World Bank. De Jager and Hugo (2004:27) highlight that CSOs also play a role in addressing the social requirements of society, which is made possible through its associations within society and its connections

with the grassroots level of communities. By establishing relationships with local communities, CSOs can assist and promote the development of the latter in various ways. Despite the suggested positive role civil society plays in democracies, CSOs and NGOs often struggle to secure domestic sources of funding and consequently depend on international funders. Whatever their contribution to civil society and democracy, it is important to acknowledge the diversity and difference of NGO sectors and therefore, one cannot simply generalise about the part of NGOs in the politics of development. In essence, the effect of NGOs on state and society is complex and differs from one context to the next.

1.2.2.2 Negative Roles

While most scholars agree that a strong and diverse civil society can strengthen the state and democracy, other research has shown that a strong civil society can signify dangerous political weaknesses and undermine democratic development (Carothers, 1999:21; Mercer, 2002:7). Carothers (1999:23) explains:

The proliferation of interest groups in mature democracies could choke the workings of representative institutions and systematically distort policy outcomes in favour of the rich and well connected or, more simply, the better organized.

Mercer (2002:7), however, argues that civil society plays diverse roles at each stage of the democratisation process and that its role is a highly subjective issue and far less predictable than most literature suggests. Further concerns include NGO performance, corruption, legitimacy, accountability, and reliance on international funding (Edwards, 2004:16).

According to Way (2014:36), not all civil society groups benefits democracy and political development. Civil society also has the potential to dangerously divide an already fragile polity and encourage greater violence; such divisions may be incredibly harmful and could ultimately lead to civil war. Way (2014:36) explains that, in an underdeveloped civil society or one that cannot be mobilised against the state, political control could be more easily monopolised by autocrats. During protests, numerous associations tend to promote violence outside state control, which directly undermines democracy (Way, 2014:42). Berman (1997) agrees that, in the absence of strong national institutions, associational activity may lead to further societal fragmentation, which, in turn, could threaten democratic development.

Moreover, Edwards (2004:45) underlines concerns about the “uncivil” society. An inevitable result of pluralism is high levels of difference and diversity. There is great confusion regarding ‘who belongs’ in civil society. This sentiment was exacerbated after the al-Qaeda attacks on New York City and Washington DC on 11 September 2001 (Edwards, 2004:16). However, the ultimate concern of those in support of civil society is not the extreme clashes of values that characterise the behaviour of violent groups, such as terrorists, but rather “the ambiguous moral effects of ordinary, non-violent associations with different views, purposes and characteristics” (Edwards, 2004:45). Extreme groups, for example, the Mafia and al-Qaeda, can be dismissed as violent criminals since they deliberately seek to destroy through violence the rights of others to participate. However, excluding other non-violent associations and disqualifying them from civil society membership because of their diversity is not that simple (Edwards, 2004:45).

In reality, associations can behave in an undemocratic or discriminatory way and still qualify as members of civil society (Edwards, 2004:84). Pluralism, therefore, sparks judgements and raises concerns and questions regarding who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’ of civil society, and where exactly the line is (or should be) drawn. The legal framework of democratic systems, however, can mitigate this. The next section will discuss two main theoretical approaches to understanding civil society and explaining its roles; one that recognises pluralism and another that advocates uniformity.

1.2.3 Two Theoretical Approaches to Civil Society

There are different contemporary understandings or approaches of this concept ‘civil society’. In his book, *Civil Society*, Michael Edwards (2004) explores three different theoretical positions or schools of thought, namely: (i) Civil society as ‘associational life’; (ii) Civil society as ‘the good society’; and (iii) Civil society as the ‘public sphere’. The first position is most dominant and sees civil society as a part of society and separate from state and market. It endorses pluralism and claims that civil society consists of diverse forms of associational life that do not necessarily share a normative consensus or common political agenda.

Edwards (2004:32) highlights the importance of institutional pluralism and explains:

Theories of associational life rest on the assumption that associations promote pluralism by enabling multiple interests to be represented, different functions to be formed and a range of capacities to be developed.

It was Alexis de Tocqueville's ideas about 19th-century America that led to the development of this model. De Tocqueville concluded that Americans of all ages, conditions and dispositions constantly form associations (de Tocqueville, 2002:581; Edwards, 2004:19). This interpretation of civil society has gained significant support since the fall of the USSR.

Robert Putnam's ideas of social capital have also received ample attention. Putnam (1995:1) argues, "The 'forms' of associational life produce the 'norms' of the good society". In essence, associations breed social capital, which breeds success. Putnam (1995:2) reasons that the superior effectiveness of government is due to dense networks of civic engagement promoted by a variety of civil associations. The second approach sees civil society as a type of society that is 'civil'. In other words, a breeding ground for positive attitudes and values, such as cooperation, commitment, trust, personal responsibility, tolerance and non-violence (Edwards, 2004:39-44). Since these two approaches have similar views on civil society, they will be considered as one approach in this study.

The last model, civil society as a public sphere, describes civil society as "an arena for public deliberation, rational dialogue and the exercise of active citizenship in pursuit of the common interest" (Edwards, 2004:viii). This public life approach requires groups to turn from their separate affairs and face each other in dialogue and discussion to find the common good (Edwards, 2004:54). It is this broad-based debate that defines the public interest. This approach also represents equality of voice and access where the full range of views and interests are hypothetically represented (Edwards, 2004:59).

Carothers (1999:21) argues that the notion that civil society fundamentally represents the public good is flawed. While some civil society groups may be based on non-material principles and values, a significant part of civil society is pursuing private and greedy ends (Carothers, 1999:21). According to Edwards (2004:70), consensus matters only when it is a real or honest consensus, and not simply an agreement between elites. Ultimately, if the general interest is not constructed from below, then it will most likely be imposed from

above. Ferrari (2011:34) adds, “The projects and initiatives that are generated by civil society can pursue the interest of the few instead of justice, create divisions instead of solidarity, intolerance instead of mutual understanding”. Even so, Edwards (2004:69) highlights that all public spheres are fractured by inequality and, therefore, determining the public interest and creating a single, unified public sphere is difficult to envisage. According to Edwards (2004:55), when certain truths, viewpoints and voices are silenced, then the broader ‘public’ interest suffers. In essence, the idea of a common public interest is a highly disputed area or topic.

Michael Edwards’ (2004) book, *Civil Society*, ultimately serves as the theoretical framework of the current study. Edwards’ examination of civil society provides a helpful foundation, for a more focused analysis applied in this study. More specifically, this thesis considers Christian-based CSOs in light of the associational approach. The reason for choosing this theoretical framework and approach is because of Edwards’s ability to clarify the muddied waters of civic life. Moreover, due to the pluralist nature of South African civil society, Edwards’ associational life approach has been deemed to be appropriate in this context. This approach also endorses religious pluralism and does not exclude religious groups from civil society. People should not have to look past their differences, but rather embrace them.

Alexis de Tocqueville, who promoted civic associationalism and pluralism in his book, *Democracy in America*, inspires this approach. De Tocqueville’s idea of civil society recognises pluralism and also recognises that there is life and vibrancy in this pluralism – in the differences, disagreement and different roles. Furthermore, Neo-Tocquevillians often focus on the non-profit sector, which functions as a central part of associational life (Edwards, 2004:22-23). Since this research will be focussing on CSOs that largely do non-profit work, de Tocqueville’s theoretical approach is thus suitable for this study.

The public life approach will be contested since it seeks a shared truth and, in turn, ‘eliminates’ religious groups. According to this approach, “Fundamentalists of all persuasions refuse to accept that shared truths can be negotiated or that different versions of the truth can coexist – read blind obedience and absolute righteousness as the mirror image of dialogic politics. Such attitudes violate the basic rules of engagement of the public sphere [...]” (Edwards, 2004:63). In other words, to engage in the public life, groups must be able to compromise on their truth for the sake of a shared ‘truth’. This approach further suggests that

“the governance of complex societies and the preservation of peaceful coexistence require that some of these particularities are surrendered to the common interest, in the form of rules, laws, norms and other agreements that cut across the views of different communities, and to which all citizens subscribe” (Edwards, 2004:62). This approach argues that through engagement, groups of people can change their minds and perspectives for the sake of political consensus (Edwards, 2004:58).

The current study will argue, however, that a shared truth cannot be found when it comes to religion. This could be due to different interpretations of what ‘truth’ actually means. Many Christians, for example, only consider the Bible as truth; and likewise for other religions and their religious texts. While it is possible to have shared values such as consideration, tolerance and moderation, a shared truth is not possible. The public life approach thus arguably conflates truth with values.

1.3 Problem Statement and Research Question(s)

Certain approaches to understanding civil society, such as the public life approach informed by Marxist views, tend to promote consensus – in essence, conformity instead of pluralism (Edwards, 2004:8, 58, 62, 63). ‘Unity’ is still largely a demand for political conformity and ‘the people’ are equated to a singular interest. Approaches such as these inadvertently ‘disqualify’ religious groups that can play a crucial developmental role in a country, as seen in the promotion of child protection in South Africa. Ferrari (2011:33) underlines that in many parts of the world, the right to religious liberty is violated. Furthermore, faithful believers of various religions (including Christianity) are persecuted because of their religion and therefore, have no equal civil or political rights. Religious groups are often excluded from politics and public debate or forced to compromise on their beliefs. However, these groups can help to create a robust and diverse civil society and healthy democracy (Putnam, 2000; Diamond, 1994; Edwards, 2004; De Jager, 2006; Foley & Edwards, 1996; Mercer, 2002). A pluralistic civil society that consists of diverse forms of associational life allows for a healthy state. Without sufficient support and financial resources, religious-based CSOs struggle to maintain quality services. An analysis of the contributions of Christian-based CSOs to child protection in South Africa serves to challenge the public life approach to civil society.

The primary research question guiding this study is, therefore, as follows:

“What are the contributions of Christian-based civil society organisations (CSOs) to child protection in South Africa?”

In order to address the above primary research question, the following sub-questions need to be answered:

- 1) What does the role Christian-based CSOs play in child protection mean in terms of the associational life and public life theoretical approaches to civil society?
- 2) What are the challenges that these religious-based CSOs face in fulfilling these contributions?

1.4 Significance of the Research

The significance of and reasons for this study include: (i) theoretical; (ii) practical; and (iii) empirical reasons. Each of these reasons will be unpacked below.

Firstly, the ‘civil society debate’ has failed to come to a conclusive definition of the concept; and the role civil society plays, or should play, in a democracy. As Edwards (2004:5) points out, “Without clarity and rigour, theories of civil society will be a poor guide to public policy and citizen action, whatever the values and goals at stake”. Delving deeper into this debate and adding to existing literature can certainly make a positive contribution. This thesis looks at different theoretical understandings of civil society. In essence, the public life approach calls for consensus and seeks a shared truth. Shared truth, however, arguably cannot be found in a diverse country like South Africa where so many different belief systems and religions coexist. Truth looks different to different people. While shared values such as trust and cooperation are perhaps a more attainable goal, shared truth is perhaps not. As soon as religious groups have to conform to a shared truth, then their religious freedom is under threat and, in turn, the health of civil society as well as the health of the democracy of the country.

Secondly, a diverse set of relationships exists between civil society and the state. These include non-engagement, adversarialism, collaboration and different forms of engagement. While some civil society groups support government in fulfilling its goals through partnerships, other civil society groups play a watchdog role in keeping government accountable. Sometimes one CSO can display both an adversarial and collaborative relationship with the state, depending on the specific issue at hand. Civil society can play a

vital role in ensuring accountability, especially in countries such as South Africa, where one political party dominates nationally. At the same time, civil society plays a vital role in providing social services to vulnerable groups such as children, implementing legislation and empowering communities. This thesis highlights this plurality of state-civil society relations that exists and the practical roles CSOs play in society. As mentioned earlier in section 1.2.1, civil society can offer significant emancipatory potential and practical support to problem solving in democracies.

Lastly, this research involves an in-depth analysis of three Christian-based CSOs that promote child protection in South Africa. The primary research that has been gathered through the conducting of key informant interviews, explores the positive contributions of Christian-based CSOs in society, the challenges they face and the nature of their relationship with the state. This research hopes to highlight the role Christian-based CSOs can and do play in instilling positive values into communities and influencing policy, and thus the positive impact they potentially have on local communities as well as on government. Furthermore, this thesis looks at what this role means in terms of the associational life and public life theoretical approaches to civil society. The primary research adds, in essence, to the theoretical research.

Creating awareness of the positive contributions of CSOs informed by Christian values and the challenges they face could generate additional support and challenge approaches such as the public life approach that tends to rule out religious groups. In essence, the theoretical as well as the empirical contributions of Christian-based CSOs to child protection will be discussed. This study will thus add to existing literature on associational life in contemporary South Africa.

1.5 Research Aims and Objectives

As highlighted in section 1.3, as part of the problem statement, certain approaches to civil society theory, such as the public life approach, tend to seek a shared ‘truth’ and thus, naturally exclude religious groups that are not willing to compromise on their truth. Many religious groups, including Christian-based organisations, are dedicated to addressing societal challenges such as the child protection dilemma. Religious groups and organisations can play a key developmental role in democracies and should not be excluded from civil society.

This study, therefore, aims:

- i. To advance an understanding of the contribution Christian-based organisations are making in eradicating child abuse and neglect in South Africa.
- ii. To challenge the public life approach that calls for consensus instead of pluralism.

In order to achieve these research aims, the following research objectives have been identified:

- i. To highlight what the concept of civil society entails, its expected roles in democracies, as well as the main theoretical approaches to civil society;
- ii. To determine what the role of religion, specifically Christianity, in civil society is, in theory and reality;
- iii. To promote an understanding of state-civil society relations in South Africa;
- iv. To provide background on the child protection dilemma in South Africa;
- v. To identify the contribution Christian-based CSOs make in child protection in South Africa through three relevant case studies; and
- vi. To propose relevant recommendations to civil society literature from the conclusions drawn from this exploration.

1.6 Research Design and Methodology

1.6.1 Self-reflexivity

As a faithful and practicing Christian woman who values my relationship with God, I acknowledge that my research comes with predisposed ideas regarding religion and the role Christianity plays in society. My religion will thus serve as my main point of departure, and secondly my gender. As a woman, and once a girl, I have been exposed to several forms of abuse over the years – both in my own life as well as the lives of other women and children. My real-life experiences have shaped the way I view the world and have increased my passion for justice, liberty and protection of and for children.

1.6.2 Research Design

The research design determines how the data is collected and analysed (Visagie, 2018:10). In this study, the design follows a qualitative strategy through an exploratory study. According to Cassim (2017:17), quantitative data is expressed in numerical form. In contrast, qualitative data cannot be reduced to numerical form. The reason for choosing a qualitative approach,

instead of a quantitative approach, is because the participants' beliefs, thoughts and actions needed to be captured. Qualitative data, collected through interviews, also gives the researcher a better understanding of people's experiences and the research question (Cassim, 2017:17). Since the concept of civil society is socially constructed and different viewpoints exist regarding its definition and role in democracies, a qualitative approach is fitting (Cassim, 2017:11). Ritchie and Lewis (2005:4) explain that qualitative research is information rich and can produce patterns of association, detailed descriptions and explanations. Qualitative research allows for emergent issues to be explored and an in-depth and interpreted understanding of certain phenomena (Ritchie & Lewis, 2005:3). Skovdal and Cornish (2015:4) add that qualitative research gives a voice to people whose perceptions are rarely considered and "it can help explain 'how', 'why' and 'under what circumstances does a particular phenomenon, or programme, operate as it does'".

The data was collected through face-to-face key informant interviews, which is discussed in greater detail in section 1.6.3.2 under the heading "data collection". The main aims of an exploratory study are to generate new insights into a given phenomenon, and explain the central constructs (Mouton & Marais, 1996:43). In the case of this study, the contribution of Christian-based CSOs in child protection is explored, as well as the concept of civil society and the dynamic of civic life in South Africa.

Moreover, according to Mouton and Marais (1996:43), three methods are often used when conducting exploratory research: (i) a pertinent literature review; (ii) an assessment of individuals or subjects with practical experience of the problem to be studied; and (iii) an exploration of 'insight-stimulating' examples. Mouton and Marais (1996:43) thus highlight the necessity of a flexible and open research strategy, and using all three methods to allow for deeper insights and comprehension. All three methods (the literature review, case studies and interviews) are incorporated into this exploratory analysis. This analysis is based on primary data collection and interpretations of secondary academic sources.

This thesis makes use of three case studies to answer the primary research question and the two secondary ones. The case studies in this research involve an analysis of three Christian-based CSOs. The sample size of three is thus very small. A major advantage of case studies is that it allows for in-depth exploration. Case studies are particularly useful when detailed knowledge is required of a particular situation (Cassim, 2017:42; Hofstee, 2006:123;

Mouton, 2001:150). The researcher is so engaged with the specific case that he or she can identify all the variables and patterns within this case and create or test a theory based on that. The case study method is therefore appropriate because of the detailed knowledge required on this research topic. According to Hofstee (2006:123), case studies are mostly used to test a researcher's hypothesis and perhaps also in the hope to discover principles that can be extrapolated to similar cases. Mouton (2001:150), however, suggests that in some cases no hypothesis is formulated but certain expectations or general ideas guide the empirical research.

Some limitations of using case studies, though, include the difficulty of keeping the case study focused and obtaining unbiased results (Mouton, 2001:150). Case studies also limit the study in the extent to which the findings could be generalised because of the very small sample sizes that are normally used for case studies (Cassim, 2017:42; Hofstee, 2006:123; Mouton, 2001:150). Since only three organisations are selected as case studies, this study is careful not to generalise too widely. To counteract this disadvantage, secondary data has been used to support the primary data to strengthen the study's conclusions. While being aware of the limitations of the small sample size, this study will identify trends and patterns that may perhaps also be applicable to other CSOs that share similar demographic variables.

1.6.3 Research Methodology

1.6.3.1 Case Selection

The three Christian-based CSOs that I used for my case studies are the ACVV ("Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging"), Connect Network and Abba Adoptions. The reason I have chosen them is, firstly, because of their vision and values and their commitment to protect children. These organisations are all informed and driven by Christian values. They also work to promote child protection and ensure the well-being of the future generation, and are thus appropriate to the topic being investigated. The second reason is their geographical location in the Western Cape. Since these three organisations are located close together geographically, they were expected to share some similarities, making it easier to compare them.

The ACVV is one of only a few designated child protection organisations (DCPO) in South Africa. According to section 107 of the Children's Act, No. 38 of 2005, this means that they

may render the full scope of child protection services, from prevention programmes to statutory intervention. The ACVV aims to nurture, protect and develop those in need. The organisation has several social work offices; child and youth care centres; and child protection programmes and services across the country, reaching almost one million vulnerable children in South Africa (ACVV, 2019).

Connect Network is a collaborative network of NPOs and churches working together for women and children at risk. The organisation wishes to see South African communities transformed. The goal of Connect Network is “to bring affiliated organisations who offer health services to mothers and children together to learn from each other, and to empower mothers and carers working with children to know how to access health services, provide good nutrition for their families and do basic first aid in each of the communities we work in”. The network consists of over 90 organisations, reaching approximately 345 000 children in South Africa (Connect Network, 2019).

Abba is a specialist adoption and social services organisation that aims to build and support families within an Integrated Child Protection Framework. This CPO provides a variety of services linked to adoption in all nine South African provinces. Abba forms part of the Apostolic Faith Mission’s Executive Welfare Council and openly values Christian beliefs. This organisation reaches approximately 500 children each year, of whom more than half are placed for adoption (Abba, 2019).

1.6.3.2 Data Collection

Data has been collected through semi-structured interviews with key-informants from the organisations mentioned in the previous sub-section. An appointment with each participant was scheduled in advance. However, due to the national lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews had to be conducted over *Zoom*, a cloud-based video communications platform. Fortunately, all three participants had Internet connection and were able to use this platform. *Zoom* also allows one to take a video recording of the meeting. A voice and video recording of each interview was, therefore, taken after the interviewee gave her permission. This helped with the transcribing and analysis process. A core list of questions for each interviewee was set up beforehand (see Appendix B) and follow-up questions were asked where necessary, as described by Rubin and Rubin (1995:31). When using semi-structured interviews, the interviewer can digress from a set format, depending on

the circumstances (Hofstee, 2006:132). According to Rubin and Rubin (1995:28), in-depth qualitative interviews allow the researcher to discover rich and detailed information. All three interviews were conducted in English and therefore, there was no need for a translator. The duration of each interview was approximately one hour.

Even though the interviews could not be conducted in person, the *Zoom* platform and video technology still allowed for ‘face-to-face’ interviews. A major advantage of conducting face-to-face interviews is that it allows the interviewer to capture verbal and non-verbal cues, such as body language, discomfort, enthusiasm and other emotions and behaviours (Hofstee, 2006:136). Hofstee (2006:136) suggests that the most effective way of asking for more information is often to remain silent and simply observe non-verbal forms of communication, such as nodding, looking puzzled and smiling. Furthermore, the interviewer is the one who has control over the interview and can keep the interviewee focused. On the other hand, interviews can be time-consuming: scheduling appointments, setting up, interviewing, transcribing and analysing data (Mouton, 2001:150). Moreover, the petrol used to drive to the interviewees can be costly. Fortunately, this cost was eliminated. Transcribing the data can also be costly if an external transcriber is used, which was not the case in this study. To counteract these disadvantages, proper planning and time management was undertaken. Any additional personal expenses, such as Internet costs, were budgeted for.

1.6.3.3 Analysis

According to Mouton (2001:108), the aim of analysis is “to understand the various constitutive elements of one’s data through an inspection of the relationships between concepts, constructs or variables, and to see whether there are any patterns or trends that can be identified or isolated, or to establish themes in the data”.

Patton (2002:432) describes data analysis as the process of transforming qualitative data into findings. In the current study, the qualitative data from the interviews was analysed using coding, also known as qualitative content analysis. Wildschut (2014:17) explains that qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to categorise and engage with the data for a more detailed understanding of the studied phenomenon. It allows the researcher to identify the dominant themes. Cassim (2017:23), however, highlights some disadvantages of coding, which includes subjectivity and possibly overlooking an important piece of data that does not occur often.

Charmaz (1983:114) defines coding as: “[...] the labelling of selected segments of textual data by means of a code (a summary term which expresses some essential quality of the phenomenon)”. Coding is used to create order and to highlight all the segments in the data that could be useful for answering the research question(s). Coding makes it easier for the researcher to search, retrieve and interpret the textual data (Wildschut, 2014:17). Coding can be inductive or deductive in nature. Inductive analysis is used when the codes are generated from the data itself. In other words, there are no pre-determined categories or codes. The aim is to describe a phenomenon. Deductive coding, on the other hand, is used to extend or validate theory and uses pre-determined codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1279). In other words, the initial coding scheme and structure of analysis is determined by using existing research or previous knowledge. In the current study, the data from the interviews were analysed using a deductive approach. A coding frame was further developed, which includes the name and definition of the code, as well as an example of a quotation (see Appendix A).

ATLAS.ti² (version 8) was used to manage and analyse the data from the interviews. ATLAS.ti is a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package that helps researchers to code and immediately retrieve data (ATLAS.ti, 2020). Wildschut (2014:12) underlines that CAQDAS programmes do not analyse data but rather assist with the analysis process by allowing the researcher to manage, code, retrieve and comment on the data. The transcripts of the interviews were uploaded to ATLAS.ti and coded accordingly. Afterwards, the codes were exported as a report and the findings compared.

Qualitative analysis also includes the interpretation of the data. Rubin and Rubin (1995:192) emphasise the importance of paying attention to variation, differences in emphasis and to shades of meaning. According to Mouton (2001:109), interpretation is done when the researcher relates his findings to existing theoretical frameworks or models to establish whether they are supported by his new interpretation. Creswell (2013) highlights the importance of comparing the cases and codes to find similarities and differences. In essence, the responses were studied and compared, and the leading contributions of these organisations were identified and highlighted. Data was sifted through, organised and made sense of so that conclusions could be drawn regarding the role Christian-based CSOs play in child protection, and how this contributes to the understanding of civil society in democracies

² ATLAS.ti stands for "Archiv fuer Technik, Lebenswelt und Alltagssprache", which translates into “archive for technology, the life world and everyday language”. The extension "ti" stands for “text interpretation”.

as either associational life or public life. Furthermore, what the challenges are that these CSOs face in fulfilling their contributions to child protection.

This study looks at the distinctive characteristics of the associational life and public life approaches that feature in the literature and then compares these with the findings from the interviews. The idea is to explore which characteristics (associational life or public life) are highlighted by the three case studies. These characteristics include the following:

As explored earlier, the associational life approach, as described by Edwards (2004:18-20, 26), considers civil society as:

- i. 'Part' of society but distinct from states and markets: Members include any non-state and non-market institutions or any association and network between the family and the state;
- ii. Legally-protected, non-violent, self-organising and self-reflexive non-governmental institutions;
- iii. Associations that are permanently in tension with each other as well as with the state institutions that enable their activities;
- iv. Apolitical associations that can have political effects;
- v. Voluntary or consensual membership into associations: There is no threat of possible loss of status or public rights or benefits when one decides to leave the group;
- vi. Diverse and pluralistic: Civil society consists of diverse forms of associational life that do not necessarily share a normative consensus or common political agenda;
- vii. Groups or associations that help find more meaning and fulfilment in life;
- viii. A breeding ground for positive attitudes and values: These include, for instance, cooperation, commitment, trust, personal responsibility, tolerance and non-violence; and
- ix. Strengthened when associations are linked together in ways that support collective goals and cross-society coalitions.

If the interviews highlight any or all of the characteristics above, the data are more commensurate with the associational life approach. Furthermore, if the interviews highlight that these religious (Christian-based) organisations make an important contribution to child protection and, in turn, development in the country, then it shows that religious groups play

an important developmental and civic role and, therefore, should not be ruled out as a stakeholder.

According to Edwards (2004:54,58-61), the public life approach, on the other hand, describes civil society as:

- i. The arena for argument and deliberation;
- ii. A public sphere that searches for collective visions and shared truth through dialogue and discussion: This leaves little space for groups that are unwilling to conform to a shared truth;
- iii. Groups that care about finding the common good, public interest or consensus: To reach a legitimate normative consensus, it is required that different groups have equal voice and access; and
- iv. Groups of people that are willing to change their minds and perspectives, refine their opinions and cede some territory to others: This is a space in which participants agree to cooperate and find a peaceful resolution of their differences.

In the current study, if the interviews show that these Christian-based organisations are challenged or overlooked because of their beliefs or if they feel pressured to compromise on what they deem to be truth, then it proposes that a shared truth or common good cannot exist without infringing on the existence of important CSOs. In other words, it will again consider associationalism as more ideal.

1.7 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted at Stellenbosch University and, therefore, falls under the scope of the institution's *Policy for Responsible Research Conduct at Stellenbosch University (2016)*. Since this study involves human participants through key informant in-depth individual interviews, the above Policy's basic values of "equity, participation, transparency, service, tolerance and mutual respect, dedication, scholarship, responsibility and academic freedom" have been upheld. Moreover, in line with the *Policy For Responsible Research Conduct at Stellenbosch University*, research participants were "well informed about the purpose of the research and how the research results were intended to be disseminated and (participants) have consented to participate" (Stellenbosch University, 2016:4). This was accomplished through the signing of consent forms. These forms were provided to them prior to the interviews being conducted. All three participants agreed to have their names visible.

None of the participants were remunerated for their participation in the study. None of them received any form of rewards. Even though this policy does allow remuneration, the participants were not remunerated since it could be seen as an inducement. This study respected research participants by ensuring that their “rights to privacy and confidentiality are protected” and giving them the freedom to withdraw (Stellenbosch University, 2016:5). This research has been conducted with integrity and the reporting and analysis has reflected the data as accurately as possible. The participants of the key informant interviews served as the gatekeepers or information officers, and therefore it was not necessary to request further permission to conduct these interviews, other than the ethical clearance that was received, as approved by the REC (Research Ethics Committee) of Humanities on 1 October 2019.

1.8 Brief Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 provides an analytical review of the theoretical and relevant literature connected to the conceptualisation and development of civil society. It also explores the two models or approaches to civil society that were mentioned earlier, namely the associational life and public life approaches. The chapter further discusses the role of religion in civil society, and the contribution of religious groups and organisations in democratic societies.

Chapter 3 builds on the conceptual and theoretical foundation laid for an analysis of civil society in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 then serves as a contextual chapter with a narrower focus. This chapter explores the history, development and nature of civil society in South Africa and its relationship with the state; the role of religious organisations; as well as the child protection dilemma that exists in the country. This exploration helps bring clarity on where and how the literature and theoretical models discussed in Chapter 2 fit into the South African context and what the dynamic in the country is regarding civic activity and associational life.

With the conceptual, theoretical and contextual groundwork laid, Chapter 4 discusses the primary data gathered from the interviews. As the interviews temporarily move away from the perspective of the researcher and literature, they provide the research subjects with a safe space to comment on the topic at hand and air their views. Chapter 4 provides an understanding of the contributions and challenges of Christian-based CSOs in South Africa and what their contributions mean in terms of the associational life and public life approaches to civil society.

After discussing the primary data, Chapter 5 discusses the content against the theoretical backdrop of the secondary data. This chapter answers both the primary research question as well as the research sub-questions. The study's main findings and contributions are highlighted and recommendations given for addressing the phenomenon of civil society. This chapter, in essence, draws conclusions about whether religious groups have, or should have, a place in civil society based on their contributions. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief mention of the challenges that were faced in the study, as well as suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2: Civil Society Theory and the Role of Religion

2.1 Introduction

As noted in Chapter 1, civil society is a complex and highly contested concept, defined differently by different scholars. Civil society conceptualisation stems from different ideological roots, thus causing contention. Different interpretations of civil society and its roles have influenced much theoretical debate and empirical research.

This chapter will provide an analytical review of the theoretical and relevant literature connected to the conceptualisation and development of civil society. The first section will conceptualise civil society as well as state-civil society relations, and what exactly is being measured. The next section will look at the historical development of civil society and how different key thinkers have contributed to this concept. Here, I will highlight different understandings of civil society, the intended role it plays and its relationship to the state. The historical development is divided under three sub-sections: (i) state and civil society as separate spheres; (ii) civil society as a crucial sphere of the struggle against tyranny; and (iii) civil society as a promoter of democracy.

Finally, this chapter will discuss the role religion plays in civil society and where religious groups as civil society fit into these approaches. The theoretical groundwork laid in this chapter is essential in order to answer the first research sub-question: “What does the role Christian-based civil society organisations play in child protection mean in terms of the associational life and public life theoretical approaches to civil society?” This theoretical and conceptual chapter provides an overview and foundation on which Chapter 3, which focuses on the South African context, will be built.

2.2 Conceptualisation and Operationalisation of Civil Society

To recap, for the purpose of this study, civil society is understood as deriving its legitimacy from its ability to bring new issues on the public agenda, provide information, act independently from government and business interests and from its closeness to the people. In essence, civil society is voluntary, self-generating, mostly self-supporting and autonomous from the state.

The concept of civil society has largely developed in the West, where it has been historically linked to the political emancipation of citizens from former feudalistic ties, monarchies and the state during the 18th and 19th centuries (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:4-5). Although other notions of this concept might have existed in other regions or at different times, they have rarely been included in the literature on civil society theory. Even so, civil society is a reality in the global South as community-based organisations (CBOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other civil society organisations (CSOs) continue to play significant roles in their respective countries, addressing local needs as well as holding incumbent powers to account and calling for better political systems. There is thus a need to study civil society in the developing world context too.

Furthermore, civil society's role in relationship with the state can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, civil society can play an adversarial or collaborative role. Adversarial means that civil society acts as a 'watchdog' over the state and ensures legitimacy, accountability and transparency, which allow for good governance. The collaborative role civil society plays refers to a partnership relationship with the state where they work together to address social needs (De Jager, 2006:106). On the negative side, civil society can also undermine democratic and political development since it has the potential to dangerously divide an already fragile polity and encourage greater violence (Edwards, 2004:84).

There will always be disagreement among scholars regarding the concept of civil society; however, what this thesis aims to measure is the role Christian-based CSOs play in South Africa and the nature of their relationship with the state. This will be measured by exploring the role religion plays in democratic societies and the role these Christian-based CSOs play in child protection, broader communities and government decisions. This chapter looks at the origin and growth of civil society and how its role in relation with the state changed and developed over the years. Chapter 3 will then unpack state-civil society relations in the context of South Africa and Chapter 4 will discuss the relationship between the state and the three case studies.

2.3 The Historical Development of Civil Society

This section explores the evolution of civil society and different viewpoints regarding this concept. While some scholars, such as Alexis de Tocqueville, argue that the state and civil society are to be kept separate, others, such as Karl Marx, argue that they are intrinsically linked to one another. This section is structured chronologically and divided into three subsections: state and civil society as separate spheres; the struggle against tyranny; and finally, civil society's role in democratisation.

2.3.1 State and Civil Society as Separate Spheres

According to Carothers (1999:18), the phrase 'civil society' can be traced through the works of the Romans to the ancient Greek philosophers where civil society was equated with the state. The first author in modern times to regard civil society as separate from the state was John Locke (1632-1704). Locke viewed civil society as an independent body without state interference. It is thus a sphere that is pre- or un-political. People form a community where their social life is developed and the individual's rights and property are protected against arbitrary state interventions (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:4).

The next key contributor was, French philosopher, Charles Montesquieu (1689-1755). Montesquieu elaborated on Locke's model of the separation of powers and also viewed political society and civil society as separate. However, he provided less contrast between the two spheres. Unlike Locke, Montesquieu argues that a balance needs to exist between central authority (monarchy) and societal networks. In essence, the central authority "must be controlled by the rule of law and limited by the countervailing power of independent organisations (networks) that operate inside and outside the political structure" (in Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:4).

In the Scottish and Continental Enlightenment of the late 18th century, several political theorists, from Thomas Paine (1727-1809) to Georg Hegel (1770-1831), who influenced Karl Marx, contributed to the idea of civil society (Baker, 1998:81; Carothers, 1999:18). These theorists viewed civil society as a domain parallel to the state but, separate from the state. In essence, civil society was regarded as a realm where citizens associate according to their own interests (Carothers, 1999:18). According to Carothers (1999:18), this new understanding of civil society reflected changing economic realities, such as the rise of private property,

market competition, and the bourgeoisie. As capitalism and the market economy expanded, civil society gained greater independence from the state (Webster, 1995:164). This thinking also grew out of the popular demand for liberty that was highlighted in the American Revolution³ (1775-1783) and French Revolution⁴ (1789-1799).

For Marx (1818-1883), however, any separation of spheres had to be overcome entirely in order to attain true political freedom (Baker, 1998:81). Marx [1844 (1977)] argues that a separation of spheres was allowing the state to further the dominance of the bourgeois class over subordinate classes in the market realm, civil society. He suggested, instead, that the working class take over otherwise alienated state functions, while also abolishing the selfish, individualistic pluralism of civil society [Marx, 1844 (1977)].

One of the most (if arguably not the most) influential contributors to the civil society discourse is Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859). De Tocqueville took the ‘separation of powers’ model even further and viewed civil society as comprising independent associations, which he wrote about in his book, *Democracy in America*. According to de Tocqueville, these associations can be described as “schools of democracy in which democratic thinking, attitudes and behaviour are learned” (in Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:4). Civic virtues and attitudes include tolerance, acceptance, honesty and trust. These virtues need to be integrated into the character of civilians.

De Tocqueville [1835 (2002)] also emphasised the importance of protecting individual rights against potentially authoritarian regimes and tyrannical majorities in society. He said that these associations should be built voluntarily and at local, regional and national levels (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:4). According to Foley and Edwards (1996:38), “this approach puts special emphasis on the ability of associational life in general and the habits of association in particular to foster patterns of civility in the actions of citizens in a democratic polity”. De Tocqueville [1835 (2002)] specifically celebrated the rich associational life in the United States of America (USA) in 1832. In the mid-19th century, the ‘civil society debate’ took a backseat and political philosophers rather focussed on the social and political consequences of the industrial revolution (Carothers, 1999:18).

³ The American Revolution was an insurrection by American Patriots in the thirteen colonies to British rule, resulting in American independence (History.com, 2020a).

⁴ The French Revolution showed the world the power inherent in the will of the people and, therefore, played a vital role in shaping modern nations (History.com, 2020b).

2.3.2 The Struggle against Tyranny

After World War II, the ‘civil society debate’ resumed in Eastern Europe through the writings of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), an Italian Marxist (Carothers, 1999:19). Gramsci characterised civil society as having the potential for dual autonomy from both the state and the economy (in Baker, 1998:81; Gramsci, 1971:245). He was thus the first to propose the idea of civil society being a special nucleus of independent political activity resisting state power. Gramsci viewed civil society as an arena of willed and purposive action, a crucial sphere of struggle against tyranny (Carothers, 1999:19; Baker, 1998:82; Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci’s books were especially influential in the 1970s and 1980s as people, under the banner of civil society, fought against dictatorships in Eastern Europe and Latin America (Carothers, 1999:19; Way, 2014:36). In Eastern Europe, especially in Poland, opposition movements used Gramsci’s agency-centred approach in theorising their struggle to create a protected societal domain separate from the state (Baker, 1998:82). The observations arising from the Eastern European opposition movements were also compatible with de Tocqueville’s observations – in essence, the need for strong, independent associations to stand between the individual and the state (Baker, 1998:82).

The Eastern European model did not portray civil society as merely a site of democratic opposition, but rather as a form of political praxis. It was exactly this agency-centred emphasis – the ideal of ‘self-limitation’ and autonomous self-organisation as an end in itself – that prompted renewed talk of civil society (Baker, 1998:83). It is important to note, however, that this portrayal of civil society did not include a longing for state-free self-government in which civil society takes all power for itself (Baker, 1998:83). Cohen and Arato (1992:78) explain:

Independent society was strong enough to survive and even to challenge the legitimacy of the authoritarian state. But it was not strong enough to compel genuine compromise or to secure a transition beyond authoritarian rule.

The autonomous self-organisation of civil society ultimately signifies the liberal separation of state and society. Opposition theorists, such as Gramsci, argued that, without this separation in theory and praxis, the self-organisation of society would involve ceaseless and violent engagement with the state (Baker, 1998:83). In essence, the idea is the promotion of a limited liberal state. According to Keane (1988:123), a democratic civil society requires a framework

of state institutions to prevent the outbreak of serious domestic conflict. The democracy should therefore contain various, often conflicting elements, which would constantly be subject to controversy, innovation, the unknown and the unintended.

Gramsci's agency-centred emphasis is reflected in most accounts of the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Baker, 1998:82; Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006). The general understanding of civil society within political science shifted from a minimalist understanding of associational life free from state control, to more nuanced perspectives on the left that view civil society's independence as providing the impetus for the deepening of democracy (Baker, 1998:82). Left-wing theorists, such as Cohen, Arato and John Keane, define civil society as a communicative, self-reflexive and autonomous public sphere whose boundaries must be protected against the intrusion of economic and bureaucratic power (Baker, 1998:82-83).

Jürgen Habermas (1929-), a German philosopher, was the next influential contributor. His theory focuses specifically on civil society's role within the public sphere. While he also promotes the separation of spheres, he aims to redefine these in his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. According to Fraser (1992:134), Habermas's idea is that the public sphere's discursive authority could not be expanded to encompass decision-making and opinion-making as this would threaten the autonomy of public opinion. The public would then effectively become the state and lose any possibility of critical check on the state. In other words, the public opinion that is converted into communicative power cannot 'rule' of itself but should rather guide administrative power in specific directions (Habermas, 1994:9-10).

Habermas (1992) argues that the political system needs the articulation of interests in the public sphere to put different concerns on the political agenda. However, this function cannot be left entirely to established institutions, such as political parties. Political parties and parliaments need to obtain informed public opinion beyond the established power structures. Marginalised groups should organise and find a way to voice their interests (in Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:4). Webster (1995:162), agreeing with Habermas, highlights that much information produced by political parties is misinformation and has the intention to entertain or even to deceive. Governments rely heavily on information and communication to persuade people and manipulate public opinion to maintain social control (Tumber, 1993:37). For this

reason, the articulation of different concerns and interests cannot be left entirely to political parties.

Jean L. Cohen (1946-) and Andrew Arato (1944-), influenced by Habermasian critical theory and also key contributors to the ‘civil society debate’, agree that civil society represents a sphere distinct from the state (Arato & Cohen, 1992:74). These left-wing theorists promote a limited, constitutional state that will facilitate (rather than obliterate with administrative power) the self-reflexivity of society (Baker, 1998:84; Walzer, 1990:2). Arato was seemingly the first to reapply the term ‘civil society’ in the Western academe after writing about the role and nature of solidarity in Poland.⁵ In one of Arato’s most influential books, *Civil Society Against the State: Poland 1980-1981*, Arato highlights the ‘self-defence’ of civil society against the state (in Baker, 1998:82; Arato, 1981). Tismaneanu (2001:986) describes the radical transformations in Poland as “complete disarray of elites in the face of mounting civil disobedience and the breakdown of traditional sources of authority and control”.

Cohen and Arato (1992:25-26) underline the importance of maintaining the boundaries between state and civil society as a basic structural precondition for democracy. They are in favour of simultaneously reinvigorating the ‘public sphere’ to deepen democratisation. Keane adds that the aim is not to eradicate the political power of state institutions, but to rather prevent the encroachment of these entities upon matters that have little to do with them (in Baker, 1998:84). Tismaneanu (2001:979) considers civil society as the alternative to the control of human existence by bureaucratic instrumental reason. Tismaneanu (2001:979) describes civil society as an “anti-political form of political action”. According to Tismaneanu (2001:977), the ‘civil society’ concept is used in most explanations for the decline in and sudden breakdown of the former Soviet bloc. It was arguably this ideal of civil society – as independent civic activism – that inspired the revolutionaries of 1989 to challenge the Leninist absolutist order. Other approaches, however, insist on economic and social (instead of moral and cultural) causes of the revolutions (Tismaneanu, 2001:978).

⁵ The Polish Crisis (1980-1981) began with a wave of strikes across Poland and the formation of the first independent trade union in a Soviet bloc country, called Solidarity, which was formed in September 1980. By early 1981 the Polish labour union had about 10 million members and represented majority of the work force of Poland (Wilson Centre, 2020, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020).

In essence, while previous approaches underline the positive effects of association or civil society for democratic governance, oppositional theorists emphasise the importance of civil association as a counterweight to the state (Foley & Edwards, 1996:39). Civil society as an anti-authoritarian, anti-conformist impetus (Tismaneanu, 2001:977). Associations must thus be autonomous. In other words, civil society is regarded as an autonomous sphere of social power. Within this sphere of action, all members of the public can protect themselves from tyranny, pressure authoritarians for change and democratise from below (Foley & Edwards, 1996:42).

2.3.3 Civil Society and Democratisation

According to Robert D. Putnam (1941-), an American political scientist, the core element of civil society is social capital, which includes social networks, a rich associational life and the accompanying norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness (in Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:5; in Foley & Edwards, 1996:39; Putnam, 2000; Putnam, 2002). Two studies conducted by Putnam drew a lot of attention. The first one was Putnam's (1995) *Journal of Democracy* essay, *Bowling Alone*, where he examined trends in the USA from the 1960s to the 1990s. From his analysis, Putnam (2000) raises concerns about the health of civil society in the USA and suggests that the basis of civil community eroded in the country during this time, which negatively affected the economy and, in turn, the state.

The second seminal study was Putnam's (1994) attempt to understand the different outcomes of regional governments in modern Italy, entitled *Making Democracy Work*. In this book, Putnam argues that it was the dense networks of civic engagement fostered by diverse civil associations that led to the superior effectiveness of northern Italy's regional governments (in Foley & Edwards, 1996:39; Putnam, 2002). Putnam (2002:173,176) writes:

The denser such networks in a community, the more likely that its citizens will be able to cooperate for mutual benefit [...] [S]ocial capital[,] as embodied in horizontal networks of civic engagement, bolsters the performance of the polity and the economy, rather than the reverse: Strong society, strong economy; strong society, strong state.

In the 1990s, the 'social capital debate' emerged in the USA and Western Europe about the performance of major social institutions and the relationship of these to political culture and civil society (in Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:5). Putnam (2002:14) argues that the features of civil society have a substantial impact on the health of democracy and the performance of

social institutions. Putnam (2000:31-180) focuses specifically on ‘civic engagement’, which refers mostly to the participation of individuals in civil life and groupings. The term ‘civil society’, on the other hand, mostly refers to the activities of groups, organisations, associations and movements (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:3). Putnam (2000:22) also differentiates between positive and negative social capital – ‘positive’ social capital is formed when associations develop strong bridging ties and include members from other ethnic and social groupings.

Associations built on ‘negative’ social capital are more likely to act violently against others. Civil society thus needs to exclude groups that show uncivil and violent behaviour in order to advance and foster democracy (Putnam, 2000:23). According to Mercer (2002:10), autonomous organisations, such as Islamic extremists in Sudan in the late 1980s, for instance, can destroy civil society. Foley and Edwards (1996:39), however, critique and problematise Putnam’s definition of civil society for several reasons. Firstly, these authors argue that Putnam underestimates the ability of newer organisations and political associations to foster aspects of civil community and to expand democracy. Secondly, Putnam’s (1994:173) talk about “networks of civic engagement” fails to acknowledge the potential of conflicts among civil society groups that could lead to civil disruption, violence and potentially become the basis for civil strife. Foley and Edwards’ (1996:39) third point is that one cannot understand any polity without looking at the political settlements at its foundation and the effects such settlements have on social forces and civil society.

Nevertheless, in the 1990s, after the Cold War, civil society received considerable attention as it moved to the centre of the international stage due to the fall of communism, the lowering of political barriers and the subsequent democratic openings, a yearning for togetherness and the rapid rise of NGOs. (Black, 2014:175; Carothers, 1999:19; Edwards, 2004:2). The global trend toward democracy sparked interest in civil society as a form of social renewal. During the 1990s, civil society started operating outside the confines of the state and the market (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:6). In other words, it was no longer limited to government control and operated beyond profit orientation. While civil society is seen as independent from the state, it is not entirely isolated, since it is still oriented towards and interacts closely with the state and the political sphere (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:3). Diamond (1994:6) highlights that, although civil society is related to the state, it does not aim to win formal power or office in the state: “Civil society organisations seek from the state concessions, benefits,

policy changes, relief, redress, or accountability”. Civil society must be autonomous but not completely alienated from the state; it should guard the state, while still respecting its authority (Diamond, 1994:15).

As mentioned previously in section 1.2.2.2, civil society plays different roles at different stages of the democratisation process and therefore one cannot generalise about the political role it plays. Non-governmental organisation sectors are also diverse and differ from one another in their contribution to civil society. Nonetheless, NGOs, organised social groups, religious organisations, trade unions, human rights organisations and other CSOs are all “a crucial source of democratic change” (Mercer, 2002:7,12). The important role that these groups, especially NGOs and religious organisations, play in democratic development is supported by the experiences of several developing world countries, such as Brazil, Chile, the Philippines, Bangladesh, India, South Korea, Taiwan, China, Nigeria, Kenya, Thailand and South Africa (Mercer, 2002:12; Diamond, 1994:5). In all these countries, extensive mobilisation of civil society was a vital foundation to democratic change. Due to several countries’ experiences, the role of civil society is often generalised and homogenised across regional spaces. However, civil society is not spatially and temporally homogeneous (Mercer, 2002:13).

Civil society encourages wider citizen participation, community mobilisation and public examination of the state. The 1990s consequently witnessed a large increase in worldwide NGO activities (Edwards, 2004:21; Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:6). A wealth of literature highlights the key role NGOs play in promoting democratic development (for example, Mercer, 2002; Diamond, 1994; Edwards, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Tismaneanu, 2001; Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006; Foley & Edwards, 1996). Mercer (2002:7) explains the relationship between NGOs, civil society and democratisation: NGOs (being part of civil society) strengthen civil society through their activities, which, in turn, strengthen the democratic process. Civil society can serve as an important forum for the development of democratic attributes, such as tolerance, moderation, and a respect for opposing viewpoints (Diamond, 1994:8; Mercer, 2002:11).

Furthermore, NGO literature stresses that (liberal) democracy requires a dynamic and independent civil society and an effective state that can balance the demands of different interest groups (Mercer, 2002:7). According to liberal democratic theory, it is the state’s duty

to provide accountable government, subject to free and fair elections, while civil society should enjoy civil and political rights and associational autonomy (Mercer, 2002:7). A strong and plural civil society restricts state power and legitimises the authority of the state when that authority is based on the rule of law (Diamond, 1994:5). In essence, organised pressure from below ensures the advancement of political and social equality and deepens the quality and responsiveness of a democracy (Diamond, 1994:8).

By ensuring legitimacy, accountability and transparency, civil society is playing a key role in the consolidation of democracy by strengthening the state's capacity for good governance (Mercer, 2002:7-8). Diamond (1994:11) suggests that a vigorous civil society gives citizens more respect for the state and allows them to positively engage with the state, which, in turn, improves the ability of the state to govern, as citizens are more likely to voluntarily obey the state. According to liberal democratic theory, state and civil society are still separate but complement each other (Mercer, 2002:7).

While civil society can strengthen democracy, it can also have a detrimental impact on democratic consolidation. A weak, fragmented, and corrupt civil society lacking 'democratic culture' can threaten the consolidation of democracy (Mercer, 2002:8). Therefore, the role of civil society (including NGOs) in democratic development is a complex and contested topic that has varied interpretations and viewpoints besides the liberal democratic view of politics. According to Diamond (1994:5), more complex conceptualisations and nuanced theories are needed to better understand civil society's role in democratic development. Having noted the historical development of civil society and the contending ideas about the relations between state and civil society, the discussion now turns to two broad theoretical approaches to civil society, as recognised and discussed by Michael Edwards (2004) in his book, *Civil Society*.

2.4 Two Theoretical Approaches to Civil Society

The next sub-sections, 2.4.1 and 2.4.2, will explore two theories of civil society, as identified by Edwards (2004). While acknowledging other understandings of civil society, these two approaches will serve as the analytical framework of this study. The first approach that will be discussed is civil society as associational life, and then, secondly, civil society as public life. To understand the role that Christian-based CSOs play in South Africa and what this role means in terms of the associational life and public life theoretical approaches, one first needs

to understand what these two approaches promote and where religious groups fit into these understandings of civil society.

2.4.1 Civil Society as Associational Life

One of the bodies of civil society discussed by Michael Edwards is associational life or civil society as ‘part’ of society, which descends from Alexis de Tocqueville’s ideas about 19th-century America (see 2.3.1). De Tocqueville [1835 (2002:581)] highlights that Americans irrespective of their age, condition, or disposition, constantly form different associations that serve as a powerful means of action. Citizens are individually powerless but when they unite, form associations and assist each other, they acquire great strength [de Tocqueville, 1835 (2002:582,589)]. In democratic nations, governments should not be the only active powers, but associations should also wield power. De Tocqueville [1835 (2002:584)] describes an association as a recognisable power, whose actions set an example and whose voice is acknowledged. In order to create and maintain tranquillity in society and allow the laws to be respected, the right of association needs to be confined within narrow limits [de Tocqueville, 1835 (2002:593)].

According to Edwards (2004:20), civil society, as described by the associational life approach, contains all associations and networks between the family and the state that contain ‘voluntary’ membership and activities. These include formally registered NGOs of many different kinds, labour unions, professional and business associations, social movements, churches and other religious-based groups, community and self-help groups, and the independent media. ‘Voluntary’, in this sense, means that membership is consensual rather than legally required. In other words, there is no threat of possible loss of status or public rights or benefits when one decides to leave the group. The ‘ideal-typical’ associational life would include legally-protected, non-violent, self-organising and self-reflexive non-governmental institutions that exist in permanent tension with each other and with the state institutions that enable their activities. However, in reality, associational life is more complicated than the ideal suggests (Edwards, 2004:20).

For hundreds of years, voluntary associations have existed in many parts of the world. In his article, *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) highlights the drastic decline in Americans’ involvement in civic association of all sorts. In essence, people in the West are becoming less involved in civil society and CSOs are declining. However, over the past few decades, the

world has witnessed a contrary development in the developing world, with a rapid expansion in different forms of associational life. There is thus a need to study civil society and associational life in the global South, where CSOs are increasing in number and relevance. Some commentators even speak about an ‘associational revolution’ or ‘power shift’ (Edwards, 2004:21,23,35).

Neo-Tocquevillians often focus on non-profit organisations, as a subset of associational life. According to the largest-ever survey of the non-profit sector in 22 countries, cited in Edwards (2004:21), the numbers of registered NGOs have increased rapidly in developing countries, such as Nepal, Bolivia, Tunisia, India, Brazil, Egypt and Thailand, since the 1990s. This survey has also found that the non-profit sector in the last four countries mentioned above accounted for one in every 12 jobs and almost 11 million volunteers. An increase in registered NGOs also means an increase in services that are provided. In Ghana, Zimbabwe and Kenya, for instance, the non-profit sector delivers more than 40% of all healthcare and education services. The ‘associational revolution’, therefore, not only signals an increase in membership, but also structural changes in politics, economics, and social relations. It is important to note, however, that the above data is largely based on registered organisations and therefore trends in other areas of associational life, such as community groups and grassroots movements, are difficult to identify. One thing is certain; associational life is never static, and the shape of civil society is continually changing in significant ways in every part of the world.

Even though states, markets and civil society are separate from each other, boundaries are blurred. According to Edwards (2004:24-27), civil society and the state have always been interdependent; while states provide the legal and regulatory framework a democratic civil society needs, civil society exerts pressure and keeps elected governments accountable. Even though the state and civil society are clearly two different sets of institutions, they cannot function separately, because then the positive effects of each on the other can be negated. Government policies have a substantial effect on the strength and shape of associational life, and apolitical associations can have political effects. However, state institutions cannot form part of associational life. If the two become too connected, governments can be ‘captured’ by particular sets of interests in civil society and then civil society can no longer play its

watchdog role on government.⁶ Edwards (2004:27) highlights that “while the state is definitely ‘out’ of civil society and the non-partisan political activity of associations is definitely ‘in’, everything between these two extremes remains an object of dispute”. The boundary between civil society and the market is even less clear.

The most contested question about civil society involves which associations belong in civil society and which do not. This thorny issue largely revolves around the definition of ‘civil’ and ‘uncivil’ society. The associational life approach finds it difficult to exclude any non-state or non-market institutions that meet the structural and analytical criteria for membership described above – in essence, legally-protected, non-violent, self-organising and self-reflexive, as described by Edwards (2004:29-34).

Furthermore, civil society is strengthened when grassroots groups, non-profit intermediaries and membership associations are connected in ways that support collective goals, cross-society coalitions, mutual accountability and shared reflection. Non-governmental organisations provide much of the ‘connective tissue’ of civil society by providing capacity-building, specialist support, and advocacy services to broader networks and alliances. Moreover, a sufficient diversity, density, and depth of associations allow societies to be less vulnerable to authoritarian rule.

Diamond (1994) argues that democracy will benefit from a more pluralistic civil society that has not become fragmented. Diamond (1994:16) explains:

[T]he more active, pluralistic, resourceful, institutionalized, and democratic civil society is, and the more effectively it balances the tensions in its relations with the state – between autonomy and cooperation, vigilance and loyalty, scepticism and trust, assertiveness and civility – the more likely it is that democracy will emerge and endure.

Pluralism encourages civil society groups to cooperate and negotiate with one another. Pluralism also ensures accountability and representativeness, since members can ask assistance from other organisations if their own does not perform (Diamond, 1994:12). A pluralist system includes “multiple, voluntary, competitive, non-hierarchically ordered and

⁶ South Africa’s ‘state capture’ serves as an example of this. It refers to “the way private individuals and companies have commandeered organs of state to redirect public resources into their own hands, and have gutted those institutions responsible for protecting the country against such corruption. These include the police, the prosecution authority, the tax collection service and even parliament itself” (The Guardian, 2019).

self-determined [...] [interest associations] which are not specially licensed, recognized, subsidized, created or otherwise controlled [...] by the state” (Diamond, 1994:13).

In sum, the associational life approach promotes a pluralistic civil society that includes voluntary, legally-protected, non-violent, self-organising and self-reflexive non-governmental institutions that are permanently in tension with each other as well as with state institution. This approach endorses diversity and does not search for consensus or a shared ‘truth’. On the contrary, it suggests that there is vibrancy in the disagreement. A pluralistic civil society is a healthy civil society; and a healthy civil society leads to a healthy state. The next section will discuss the second body of civil society discussed by Michael Edwards, namely the public life approach.

2.4.2 Civil Society as Public Life

Edwards (2004:55) describes this public space or sphere as “the arena for argument and deliberation as well as for association and institutional collaboration: a non-legislative, extra-judicial, public space in which societal differences, social problems, public policy, government action and matters of community and cultural identity are developed and debated”. It is the space in which shared interests are developed and citizens are willing to cede some territory to others (Edwards, 2004:54-57). It consists of a polity that cares about the ‘common good’ and has the capacity to deliberate about it democratically. Edwards explains that the common good or public interest suffers if only certain truths are represented, if alternative viewpoints excluded or suppressed, and if one set of voices is heard more loudly than others. All societies have a range of these public spheres at different levels. These public spheres rise and fall according to the issues at hand. It is argued that these public spheres provide space for deliberating over differences to forge a shared and inclusive framework of norms and values.

John Keane (1998) found that the public sphere was originally rooted in the USA’s founding fathers’ belief in a system of government that would refine opinions through public debate and practical compromise. This system was questioned from the beginning because of inequalities of voice and discrimination of vote in the attempt to find political consensus. The most well-known theorist to elaborate ideas about the public sphere is Jürgen Habermas as mentioned in section 2.3.2. According to Habermas (1989), the public sphere should enable citizens to discuss common concerns about conditions of freedom, equality and non-violent

interaction. In essence, if debates do not take place under these conditions, the debates do not qualify as democratic. Edwards (2004:59-60) proposes that the public sphere, as the basis for “dialogic politics”, unites civil society and politics. However, this process can only be just when the full range of views and interests is represented and when all participants agree to cooperate and find a resolution.

Edwards (2004:69) questions the legitimacy of the public sphere and its ability to shape state policy. He argues that the public sphere can never function as predicted by theory because of the inequalities that characterise all contemporary societies. He underlines the importance of being honest about the reality of dialogic politics and public interaction, not just the theory. In pluralistic societies, it is arguably unlikely that ‘shared truth’ can be negotiated. It is argued that ‘shared truth’ can also simply be a more pleasant word for insisting on conformity.

Edwards (2004:64-65, 69) raises further concerns regarding the public sphere: a tendency to lowest common-denominator consensus, politics being distorted by money, elitist education systems, inequalities in public participation and voice, and inactive citizenship due to the modern capitalist economy leaving citizens with less time and energy. A unified public sphere or determination of the public interest is, therefore, difficult to envision and may even be undemocratic. Public spheres cannot protect the common interest if communication remains privatised. According to Edwards (2004:71), the public life approach cannot explain how to deal with the structural challenges mentioned above and seems incomplete as an idea or vehicle for social change.

Edwards (2004:70) sums up his argument regarding the public sphere and consensus:

Consensus [...] does matter, but it has to be a real consensus and not simply an agreement between elites. One cannot long for a vibrant public sphere and avoid the political conflicts that drive people into or out of it. The best consent, let us remember, emerges from dissent, not the rosy glow of polite conversation that fuels liberal fantasies about social transformation.

While Habermas is a promoter of the public sphere, he also acknowledges that public affairs often become occasions for ‘displays’ of the dominant powers instead of arguments between opposing policies and outlooks. Habermas (1962:195) describes public debate as a “faked

version” of a genuine public sphere and explains that public relations masks the interests it represents by disguising these as the ‘national interest’. Webster (1995:165) further highlights the important role mass communication plays in the effective (or ineffective) operation of the public sphere, emphasising that media allows scrutiny of and access to public affairs. However, media can no longer be considered a reliable information provider since media institutions are increasingly becoming arms of capitalist interest and a “public opinion former” instead (Webster, 1995:165).

According to the public life approach, public opinion is formed through open debate. The quality, availability and communication of information, therefore, play a vital role in the effectiveness of the process. In essence, reliable and adequate information will ensure sound discussion, while poor or tainted information will result in prejudicial decisions and inept debate (Webster, 1995:168). As mentioned earlier in section 2.3.2, governments rely heavily on information and communications to manipulate public opinion and sustain social control (Tumber, 1993:37). According to Webster (1995:190), extensive literature exists that refers to ‘public opinion’ as softened propaganda. Due to the unreliability of information and media communication, political debate loses much of its validity and legitimacy (Webster, 1995:196).

According to Tismaneanu (2001:979, 987), totalitarianism ultimately suppresses independent thought and action. If certain voices in the public sphere are, therefore, suppressed and not treated similarly, perhaps characteristics of totalitarianism exist in the public sphere in the search for the ‘common good’ and so-called ‘shared truth’. As Ferrari (2011:34) underlines, in the process of finding the ‘common good’, civil society can pursue “the interest of the few instead of justice[;] create division instead of solidarity, intolerance instead of mutual understanding”. Again, this underscores the key concern of the public sphere approach; the expectation of shared truth and reaching consensus is essentially anti-pluralist and, perhaps, totalitarian.

In sum, the public sphere approach raises key concerns, especially in its tendency towards conformity rather than pluralism and in its search for a shared truth. The public sphere, thus, leaves no space for religious groups that are unwilling to conform and compromise on their truth. The associational life approach, on the other hand, promotes pluralism and diverse forms of associational life, including religious groups that do not necessarily share a

normative consensus or common political agenda. The associational life model recognises that there is life and vibrancy in the difference, disagreement and different roles.

In this research, the public life approach is ultimately contested and the associational life approach embraced in recognition of the historically and empirically evident role that religion has played in society. Edwards' (2004) examination of theories of civil society ultimately provides a useful foundation for its application to a more focused analysis. The next section will explore the role that religion, particularly Christianity, can play in democratic societies and why religious groups should not be ignored and excluded from civil society.

2.5 The Role of Religion in Civil Society

Building on from the civic associationalism approach, 'truth' cannot be shared – especially not in diverse and pluralist societies. 'Truth' means different things to different groups of people and each religion has its own 'truth'. Even within one religion, different denominations can also have opposing 'truths'. Since the public life approach argues that a 'shared truth' can be reached, religious groups are naturally excluded from civil society. However, civic associationalism recognises pluralism and thus religious groups as active participants in civil society and public affairs without having to compromise on their beliefs. This section will delve deeper into the key role religion plays in democracies.

2.5.1 The Concept of Religion

In order to understand religious freedom and the role religion plays in civil society, it is useful to have an understanding of what religion is. According to Zagzebski (2009:1), religion has existed for as long as humankind. Sweet (2012:160) highlights that nearly 10 000 religions have been identified and about two new religions are formed every daily. Due to the plurality of religion, it remains a multi-faceted and contested concept, especially in the 21st century. In contemporary discourse, it is unclear what exactly the concept 'religion' refers to, and historians, sociologists and anthropologists have different views on the subject matter of religion. The study of religion has largely been limited to discussions within religious studies and has received minimal attention in discourses of international relations, human rights, democracy, and political science. Finding a definition that is approved by both religious and secular scholars therefore remains a challenge.

Meister (2009:6) suggests that religion involves “a system of beliefs and practices primarily centred around a transcendent reality, either personal or impersonal, which provides ultimate meaning and purpose of life”. In other words, themes such as “a system of beliefs”, “a transcendent reality” and “human attitudes of concern, meaning and purpose” form some of the central themes within every religion. Zagzebski (2009:2) emphasises that religion is a “human practice” that involves distinctive emotions, acts and beliefs.

Domingo (2013:429) underlines three distinctive features of religion: (i) an institution or church; (ii) a religious creed; and (iii) a moral code. Domingo (2013:492) further believes that religion is a private and public phenomenon, which operates differently in each of these spheres. According to Sullivan, Hurd, Mahmood and Danchin (2015:7), religion “brings together a vast and diverse, even shifting, set of social and cultural phenomena that no longer convincingly underwrite and justify legal action in its name”. Sullivan et al. (2015:7) continue by explaining that protecting religion or religious freedom in law invites discrimination since it is a “deeply ambiguous legal standard in domestic and international law, one that is often dependent on parochial anthropological and philosophical understandings of the human and human society”.

Religion is a profound and collective commitment that shapes communities. Abbink (2014:85) argues that it should be understood as “identity politics”. The search for one’s individual identity is a basic anthropological need that is satisfied in religion (Woodhead, 2011:128). Religion is also considered as a matter of “social belonging” (Woodhead, 2011:129). This understanding of religion is especially relevant when looking at the relationship between church membership or attendance and civic participation, which will be discussed in section 2.5.5. According to Sweet (2012:161), most understandings of religious freedom see religion within the context of religion as daily practice – how people engage it, present it, associate and act on it.

For the purposes of this thesis, religion is understood as a personal belief or truth that shapes people’s social reality and influences their behaviour and actions. Religion is further understood as a deep individual or collective commitment that shapes communities. It is something that human beings owe devotion to and that carries considerable moral weight.

2.5.2 Freedom of Religion

The initial mandate of religious freedom was to institute peace across Christian denominations (Sullivan et al., 2015:5). However, due to increased globalisation and Western secularism, the understanding of religious freedom has diversified and expanded far beyond that. Its origin can be traced back to documents such as the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), the US Constitution (1789) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), as well as the European Convention on Human Rights (1953). All these documents represent efforts to limit violence and ensure peaceful coexistence in pluralistic societies (Kamffer, 2017:48).

In his Annual Message to Congress in the State of the Union Address on 1 June 1941, US President Franklin Roosevelt formulated religious freedom as “the freedom of every person to worship God in his own way – everywhere in the world” (Konvitz, 2003:3). Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”. The Vatican II Council declared that religious liberty is a right that “has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person” (in Ferrari, 2011:33).

Religion, particularly Christianity, is a personal relationship between God and human beings – it is a personal choice, which is why the right to religious liberty exists. This means that every individual should be completely free to choose his or her religion. An authentic religious experience can only exist in a true state of liberty (Ferrari, 2011:33). According to Soriano (2013:581), there could never be social peace and harmony among the various existing religious groups in society without religious freedom. Soriano (2013:590) further states that this right is denigrated, for instance, when individuals feel restricted or hindered in their freedom to choose their religion.

‘Freedom of Religion or Belief’ (FoRB) is a human right that should be respected and protected by law and institutions (Sweet, 2012:167). However, as mentioned in section 1.3, in many parts of the world, individuals are persecuted because of their faith and do not enjoy the same civil and political rights as other citizens. Sweet (2012:172) explains that FoRB is recognised as a political right because of its inclusion in constitutions, laws and charters,

especially in those of democracies such as South Africa. It is also recognised as a moral right, since it serves a purpose in communities and supports values and principles of the community (Sweet, 2012:172). It is this political and moral right that allows a person to seek ‘truth’ and to commit his or her life to that truth or way of life (Kamffer, 2017:53). Soriano (2013:596-602) argues that religious pluralism is healthy and that religious differences should not be eliminated, unified or homogenized.

According to Soriano (2013:596):

Upon acknowledging the fact that pluralism is an insurmountable element of a contemporary and democratic society, tolerance should be promoted in the sense of respecting religious freedom, regardless of existing theological divergences. It would be a mistake to encourage tolerance based only on what the various religious confessions have in common [...] [A]lthough it is not always possible to find common ground in religious matters, atheists, agnostics, and religious people do not have to agree about their convictions in order to respect each other.

2.5.3 Freedom of Religion and Democracy

George (2015:9) argues that violations of religious freedom infringe the very centre of our humanity and do tremendous harm to the health of societies. In other words, abuses of religious freedom harm society as a whole and not only individuals or religious groups. Many scholars argue that religious freedom is vital for the emancipation of individuals and communities from conflict, human rights abuses and/or oppression and poverty.

Religious freedom also leads to democracy, greater civil and political liberty, and prosperity (Sullivan et al., 2015:1). Although religion has caused war and persecution, it has also resisted injustice and supported movements for social and moral progress (Leiter, 2013). Studies have shown that religious freedom and tolerance can reduce social conflict and that religion, specifically Christianity, can pose a threat to totalitarian regimes or authoritarianism (in Soriano, 2013:601). In fact, states that do not protect religious freedom are generally more susceptible to war, poverty, terror and extremism (George, 2015:9).

Without religious groups, liberal democracy can be in danger. Liberal democracy is understood as “a complex set of institutions that restrain and regularize the exercise of power through law and a system of checks and balances” (Kamffer, 2017:66). Soriano (2013:582)

states that religious freedom and democracy cannot be separated. The World Conference on Human Rights, held by the United Nations in Vienna Austria in 1993, also declared that democracy, development and respect for human rights are interdependent and mutually reinforcing (in Kamffer, 2017:84-85). Kamffer (2017:88) emphasised that religious freedom has a significant impact on the consolidation of democracy, economic development, and social harmony.

As previously mentioned in section 2.3.3, Putnam (1995:1) reasons that the superior effectiveness of government is due to dense networks of civic engagement fostered by civil associations of all kinds, including religious groups and organisations. Putnam (1995) argues that associations breed social capital, and social capital breeds success. In essence, “the ‘forms’ of associational life produce the ‘norms’ of the good society” (Putnam, 1995:2). Religious groups potentially play a key role in the development of norms in society.

2.5.4 Shared Values instead of Shared Truth

Ferrari (2011) highlights the important role religion plays in the development of a sound civil society. Ferrari (2011:30) explains that the process of pursuing the common good can only occur in a context of freedom. Associations with diverse aims, schools with different value systems, and political parties with distinct programmes should be able to coexist and interact. For this to be possible, certain values and attitudes need to be fostered, such as social commitment and cohesion. Individuals also need to live in a responsible and trustful way. Civil society organisations can play a crucial role in fostering these values and civic virtues that support the state’s laws and political activity (Ferrari, 2011:31). As mentioned earlier in sections 2.3.1, 2.3.3 and 2.4.1, civic virtues and attitudes include tolerance, acceptance, honesty and trust (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006:4).

In essence, civil society can aim to have shared *values* but not a shared *truth* – while democratic values can be shared, truth cannot. The public life approach thus arguably conflates truth with values. Religious groups play a key role in promoting these values in societies and are generally committed to transform the existent state of affairs and create a better future. De Tocqueville [1835 (2002:612)] highlights that Americans, for instance, feel the need to impart morality to democratic communities through religion.

Finding a shared truth among groups that are found on the same religion can also be challenging. For instance, Christian-based organisations often disagree on certain issues such as same-sex marriage, the death penalty, abortion and divorce. The same is true when it comes to religious organisations working in the field of child protection. For instance, there has been a robust debate in South Africa concerning the Constitutional Court's ruling concerning 'reasonable chastisement'⁷, which had previously permitted caregivers to physically discipline (e.g. smack) children in their care. Different views were held by different organisations, with there even being disagreement between Christian organisations, with a number of such organisations supporting 'reasonable chastisement'. However, finding shared values such as trust and cooperation among these groups are perhaps a more attainable goal.

2.5.5 The Role of Religion in Civic- and Political Participation

In his article, *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000:65-67) states that churches largely produce civic skills, civic norms, community interests and civic recruitment. He found that churchgoers are more likely to participate in secular organisations and political affairs, to vote and to have deeper informal social connections. Active involvement in church or religious activity can thus increase voluntary activity in society. It is often religious values and social ties that drive the civic involvement of churchgoers – a combination of their faith and their connectedness. Churches and other religious organisations can thus play an extremely important and unique role in civil society. Putnam (2000:62) found in his study that “nearly half of all associational memberships in America are church related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context”. In essence, religious participation is vital for American social capital.

Putnam (2000:67) also stresses that religious ideals are powerful sources of commitment and motivation. It is largely individuals' commitment to God that makes them behave in a responsible and committed way (Ferrari, 2011:31). When a 'divine force' drives individuals, they will make enormous sacrifices for their faith (Putnam, 2000:67). For individuals who are

⁷ This involves the “review of cases of child chastisement, suggesting that it must be reasonable and moderate in relation to its end and the welfare of the child is the key consideration” (Spink & Spink, 1999). This was a common law defence for a charge of assault on a child by a parent. Under “reasonable chastisement”, parents were allowed to physically discipline their children, provided such discipline or chastisement was moderate and reasonably justified. In other words, if a parent had been charged with assaulting his or her child, the parent could rely on the defence of reasonable chastisement. However, in 2019, the Constitutional Court of South Africa ruled that the common law defense of reasonable and moderate parental chastisement of children is unconstitutional (De Oliveira, 2019).

committed to God, there is generally only one truth and that is the truth of their faith. That does not mean that they feel the need to affirm the supremacy of their religion or oblige everybody to accept it – it simply means that they are not willing to compromise on their truth for the sake of finding a ‘shared truth’ (Ferrari, 2011:32).

Moon et al. (2006) underlines that broad political participation is a core feature of democracy. Without broad political participation, democracy is threatened. Pluralism invites a wide variety of people into political systems (Annan, 2016). While democracy secures pluralism, pluralism, in turn, strengthens democracy. The same counts for religious freedom – where democratic institutions break down, abuses of religious freedom are visible. Where such abuses are visible, a breakdown of democracy will follow (Kamffer, 2017:94). True democracy gives everyone a voice and protects the rights and freedoms of all citizens in law and institutions, irrespective of their race, gender, or religion (Kamffer, 2017:90). This includes respecting and protecting religious freedom. Religious groups should, therefore, be able to participate freely in public affairs and civil society without being marginalised. In essence, if individuals have to give up, compromise or marginalise the truth of their faith when participating in open debate, their right to religious freedom is infringed upon.

As mentioned in section 1.1, for many decades, religion was limited to the private sphere and excluded from public debate. However, many Christians today deem it their responsibility to participate in social and political fields and to share the values they endorse in different parts of civil society, for instance in their communities, schools, families and workplaces (Ferrari, 2011:34). As Putnam (2000:62) notes, religious institutions support a variety of social activities, and not merely conventional worship. Churches continue to be key institutional providers of community development projects and social services, such as food pantries, self-help groups and recreational programmes (Putnam, 2000:67-68). Putnam (2000:67) further found that churchgoers pay greater attention to the needs of their fellow ‘brothers and sisters’. De Tocqueville [1835 (2002:598)] also states that Christianity teaches individuals to look out for and take care of each other for the love of God.

De Tocqueville [1835 (2002:615)] goes on to say, “Christianity must be maintained at any cost in the bosom of modern democracies”. According to De Jager and De Jager (2019), historical and empirical studies show a positive relationship between the proportion of Protestant Christians and the development of liberal democracy. De Jager and De Jager

(2019:226) argue that this has a cultural reason, because religion is regarded as a carrier of values. Protestantism promotes the valuing of the individual, which is equally important to a liberal democracy and good governance. Faith-based organisations, serve civic life both directly and indirectly – directly in the sense that it provides social support and services to its members and the wider community; and indirectly by nurturing civic skills, instilling moral values, and fostering civic recruitment among churchgoers (Putnam, 2000:79).

To recap, there is much dispute around the definition of religion. This thesis, however, understands religion as a personal belief or truth that shapes people's social reality and influences their actions. In democratic states, individuals have the right to religious freedom, which allows them to exercise their religion in teaching, practice, worship and observance. The moment individuals feel hindered in their freedom to choose their religion, this freedom is infringed upon. Violations of religious freedom greatly harm the well-being of societies and liberal democracy.

This section has further highlighted that religious pluralism is 'wholesome' and that religious differences should, therefore, not be homogenised. Religious freedom and pluralism can enhance good governance, social and economic development, civic participation, social harmony and allow for a sound civil society. Religious institutions, such as churches, foster civic virtues such as tolerance, acceptance, honesty and trust; provide social services; and promote social connectedness, which are all essential for a sound civil society and healthy democracy. As highlighted in section 2.5.4, this thesis suggests that civil society can search for shared *values*, but not a shared *truth*.

2.6 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented theoretical approaches and relevant literature regarding the concept of civil society and state-civil society relations. The chapter highlighted different understandings of civil society, the proposed role it plays and its relation to the state. While key theorists such as Locke, Montesquieu, Paine, Hegel and de Tocqueville view civil society and the state as two separate spheres, other thinkers such as Gramsci, Keane, Cohen and Arato view civil society as 'a struggle against tyranny'. Putnam, meanwhile, emphasises civil society's key role in democratisation and producing social capital. This chapter has also discussed two of the most prominent theoretical approaches in civil society theory, namely the associational life approach and the public life approach, as discussed by Michael Edwards, in his book *Civil Society*. Edwards (2004), among other theorists, highlights

concerns regarding the public sphere and argues that the public life approach remains incomplete as an idea or vehicle for social change.

The important role civil society plays in democratic states was highlighted and the focus was then turned to the role of religious groups within civil society. After looking at what it means to have a right to religious freedom, it became apparent that individuals can rightfully have their own personal belief or truth and should not feel hindered or restricted in their freedom to choose their religion. This chapter further highlighted that religious pluralism is healthy and that religious differences should be embraced. Chapter 2 has thus argued for the associational approach, which includes pluralism and thus a place for religion in the development of civil society. With the theoretical groundwork laid in this chapter, Chapter 3 will now turn to a more focused discussion looking at the role of civil society and religion in the South African context; as well as the role religious-based organisations play in the child protection dilemma.

Chapter 3: State-Civil Society Relations and Child Protection in South Africa

3.1 Introduction

After exploring different theoretical views regarding the role of civil society and its relationship with the state, it became clear that there is considerable contestation around this topic. However, this thesis considers the associational life approach that understands civil society as pluralist and dynamic, that does not share a normative consensus as the ideal approach in a democratic setting. A pluralistic civil society is a healthy civil society, and a healthy civil society leads to a healthy democratic state. Chapter 2 further noted that the public life approach instead requires groups to conform to a shared ‘truth’ and, therefore, naturally excludes religious groups from civil society. However, religious groups can play a key role in democracies. Religious freedom and pluralism can contribute towards good governance, social and economic development, civic participation, social harmony and a sound civil society (Kamffer, 2017; De Jager & De Jager, 2019; Ferrari, 2011; George, 2015; Leiter, 2013; Putnam, 2000; Soriano, 2013). While members of civil society, which includes religious institutions, can share the same values, they cannot share the same truth. ‘Truth’ means different things to different people, and thus in a pluralistic society to expect a ‘shared truth’ is to silence contending voices.

With the theoretical groundwork laid in the previous chapter, Chapter 3 now turns to state-civil society relations in the context of South Africa. The first section of this chapter will explore how state-civil society relations have evolved over three periods, namely *apartheid* (Pre-1994), the transition period (1990s) and *post-apartheid* (Post-1994). The next section will look into the dynamic of state-civil society relations in contemporary South Africa. The previous chapter has explored the role of religion in democracies and the current chapter builds on this and aims to understand the role religious institutions play in South Africa and why they should not be excluded from civil society. Finally, this chapter will focus on the contributions religious-based organisations make in eliminating child abuse and neglect, which is a serious social issue nationally and globally. This chapter therefore seeks to begin to answer the research question: “What are the contributions of Christian-based civil society organisations (CSOs) to Child Protection in South Africa?” The subsequent chapters will provide empirical data to address this research question by exploring three case studies of

Christian-based CSOs and the role they play in promoting child protection. This thesis will interpret and view the primary data of the interviews against the theoretical backdrop of the secondary data provided in Chapter 2 and the context provided in Chapter 3.

3.2 The Evolution of State-Civil Society Relations in South Africa

Civil society is greatly impacted by the political context of a country. The regime and state policies ultimately determine the role civil society is 'allowed' to play. The evolution of the political system in South Africa also led to the evolution of civil society. At the same time, civil society played a central role in the transition from the authoritarian *apartheid* regime to a democratic regime. In other words, civil society has been moulded by the political transition in South Africa but has also influenced it. This section explores how the political transition in the country has shaped state-civil society relations. This political transition is broken up into three phases: *apartheid*, democratisation and post-*apartheid*. Each of these phases is discussed in greater detail in the subsequent pages. The democratic transition has, in essence, transformed civil society and its relationship with the state.

3.2.1 *Apartheid* Period (Pre-1994)

Before 1994, civil society's relationship with the state was characterised by an adversarial-collaborative divide, which largely took a racial form. While much of white civil society established collaborative relations with the state, the majority of black civil society adopted an adversarial mode of engagement (Habib, 2003:228). White civil society consisted mostly of pro-*apartheid* institutions, such as the *Broederbond* and the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK)*, but also other liberal-oriented organisations that distanced themselves from the *apartheid* government and challenged it from 'within' the system. The latter includes the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), the South African Institute for Race Relations (SAIRR), Black Sash, the English media and some of the Afrikaans-media, for example the *Vrye Weekblad* (Graham, 2015:176; Masiko, 2013:27). While the white population had the freedom to form associations, black social structures were either marginalised or destroyed and could not interact with the state.

For a long time, the development of civil society as an arrangement of associations protecting the interests of diverse groups was stunted among the black majority of the population. Consequently, they were forced to apply pressure on the state from outside the formal

structures (Greenstein, 2003:13). In the early 1970s, different anti-*apartheid* NGOs, trade unions and organisations associated with the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) that challenged the state and socio-economic system from ‘outside’ the system became more active and noticeable (Greenstein, 2003:13; Habib, 2003:230). They were, however, heavily suppressed and served, therefore, as a sideshow to the more formal contest and engagement within civil society and between civil society and the state (Graham, 2015:176).

Civil society drastically changed in the 1980s when anti-*apartheid* CSOs resurfaced after much repression from the state (Graham, 2015:176; Habib, 2003:229-230; Masiko, 2013:27). South Africa witnessed a remarkable growth in associational life and, within a few years, these anti-*apartheid* agencies became the dominant element within civil society. Black civil society actors who were previously banned or prohibited from participating in public affairs now enjoyed more liberty and influence. According to Fine (1992:24), the 1980s was “a decade of civil society in South Africa” with initiatives and popular organisations arising in every corner of social life, including youth, students, women’s, community, cultural and ethnic associations.

Habib (2003:230-231) mentions two developments in the country that allowed for the significant growth and re-emergence of anti-*apartheid* CSOs. The first development includes the reform and liberalisation of the political system announced by the PW Botha regime in the early 1980s. This liberalisation involved “reform of the more cruder aspects of Grand *Apartheid*, the attempted political co-option of some sections of the disenfranchised communities, and allowing the emergence of some civic activity within, and representation of, the black population” (Habib, 2003:230). This reform further led to a series of institutional reforms and the legalisation of independent black unions and liberation organisations. As part of this reform process, some political exiles returned, some political prisoners were released, negotiations were offered for a new constitution and many *apartheid* laws were abolished (Fine, 1992:26; Louw, 2004:87).

The second development that facilitated the re-emergence and growth of anti-*apartheid* civil society, according to Habib (2003:231-232), was the increasing availability of resources to non-profit actors in South Africa. These resources included human resources and fiscal resources. In the early 1980s, many university students and graduates who were politicised by the activities of the 1970s, as well as political prisoners who were released, came together to

form non-profit institutions to support these mass struggles. The fiscal resources initially emerged from private foundations and foreign governments after the 16 June 1976 student revolt in Soweto, which received broad international coverage. Local actors such as corporates and churches also increasingly supported and funded anti-*apartheid* non-profit activity as the struggle intensified (Stacey & Aksartova, 2001; Graham, 2015:176).

Despite the reform and liberalisation of anti-*apartheid* civil society, the state still treated these CSOs with suspicion and state-civil society relations largely took an adversarial form throughout the 1980s (Fine, 1992; Habib, 2003; Graham, 2015:5). The liberalisation initiative was still undemocratic. Since most resistance organisations were denied representation in the state, they were left with little choice other than mobilising against the state (Friedman & Reitzes, 1996:56). A few years into the reform programme, the state began to actively repress elements within the anti-*apartheid* camp, and this became more severe under the states of emergency of the 1980s. Nevertheless, anti-*apartheid* civil society preserved its popular legitimacy. As a result, it was able to make a strong and quick re-emergence when De Klerk replaced Botha as President and reintroduced (and extended) the state's liberalisation initiative (Graham, 2015:177; Habib, 2003:231).

The national liberation movement of the 1980s was mostly led by the African National Congress (ANC), in alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), who aimed to create unity among the disparate elements of civil society (Fine, 1992:25; Greenstein, 2003:14). This alliance was known as the Tripartite Alliance (Graham, 2015:174). The ANC expanded this manifold movement through mediating institutions, such as the United Democratic Front (UDF), as well as through symbols of unity, notably the Freedom Charter and the release of Nelson Mandela. The UDF was a non-racial coalition established in 1983 and consisted of hundreds of civic groups, church-based organisations, students' movements and trade unions that all formed part of the anti-*apartheid* resistance until the release of Nelson Mandela and his electoral success in 1994 (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:24; Friedman & Reitzes, 1996:56; Ranchod, 2007:3-4; Van Wyk, 1993:139). The UDF played a vital role in putting sustained pressure on the *apartheid* regime (Graham, 2015:177). Whenever activists within these movements demanded more resources or a greater say, they did it in the name of 'civil society' (Friedman & Reitzes, 1996:56).

Seething beneath the surface of civil society, however, were strong disintegrative forces at work (Fine, 1992:25; Masiko, 2013:32). The social and political frustrations among these anti-*apartheid* groups led to distorted forms of communal and gangster violence. Many of the civil society associations were, thus, not remotely ‘civil’ (see sections 1.2.2.2 and 2.3.3). Friedman and Reitzes (1996:59) argue that in order for civil society to be ‘civil’, certain preconditions are necessary: “an inclusive constitution; inclusive legal citizenship; a culture of rights and duties; representative democracy; political tolerance; legal equality of all individuals; and a legitimate government and state”. According to Friedman and Reitzes (1996:60), many institutions, such as some sections of the liberation movement, that were identified as ‘organs of civil society’ were, in fact, misidentified since none of these preconditions existed during *apartheid*. The purpose of these institutions was to fight against an undemocratic polity – not to participate in a democratic one – and the consequences were neither civil nor democratic.

The ANC leadership failed to resolve the violence between competing interests and rather promoted a militant form of radicalism with slogans such as “non collaboration with the state; render South Africa ungovernable, no education before liberation, people’s power and insurrection” (Fine, 1992:25). The political leadership of the liberation movement targeted ‘enemies of the people’ and called for ‘unity’ in the form of political conformity. Fine (1992:25), as well as Friedman and Reitzes (1996:60), problematise this unitary idea of the ‘people’, which implies an abstract and monolithic ‘general will’ or singular interest. This call for ‘unity’ or political conformity disregards the actual and divergent empirical wills of the constituent members of civil society, which increases fragmentation on the ground. Greenstein (2003:15) adds that the notion of ‘the people’ does not allow for much internal differentiation and contestation. This type of civil society that existed during *apartheid* was, in essence, one that aligns with the public life approach, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Friedman and Reitzes (1996) argue that the demand for uniformity contradicts the very notion of civil society, which consists of diversity. Greenstein (2003:33) highlights the diversity of interests and concerns of CSOs, which includes “working conditions, rent, environmental degradation, urban services, agricultural productivity, AIDS awareness, liberation theology, people’s education, school curriculum, and so on”. These concerns extended beyond the issue of state power. Habib (2003:228) underlines that different institutions within civil society will reflect diverse and often contradictory political and social

agendas and, as a result, state-civil society relations will reflect this plurality. In other words, while some relationships between the state and civic actors will be adversarial or conflictual, others will be more collaborative. Habib (2003) suggests that this plurality should be celebrated for it represents the political maturing of South African society. This is the reason why the associational life approach is endorsed in the current study.

In sum, the relationship between the state and white civil society was mostly collaborative, while the relationship between the state and black civil society was largely adversarial. There was a distinct racial divide. It is noted, though, that this did not reflect the full reality and spectrum, as many liberal-orientated white CSOs, such as the SAIRR, Black Sash and some of the English and Afrikaans media (see section 3.2.1), were active and consistent critics of *apartheid*. The history of the liberation struggle shows that civil society played a central role, despite the fact that civil society during *apartheid* was politically managed and enjoyed limited autonomy from the state (Van Wyk, 1993:139). Furthermore, the national liberation movement, led by the Tripartite Alliance, called for unity and targeted ‘enemies of the people’. Activists within this movement demanded a greater voice and more resources in the name of ‘civil society’. However, civil society was embedded with competing interests, which increased violence and fragmentation on the ground. Civil society, in essence, cannot be homogenised – especially not in a country as diverse as South Africa. The next section will explore state-civil society relations during the democratisation phase of the 1990s.

3.2.2 Transition Period (1990s): Democratisation Phase

The democratisation process offered new opportunities as well as new challenges to civil society actors, reshaping state-civil society relations (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:24). Greenstein (2003:12) highlights that the nation-state cannot be studied in isolation from the international context. In order to make sense of the specific developments in South Africa and how state-civil society relations unfolded, one has to understand the regional and international environment in which the events played out. Important international events that all had an impact on the interactions between state and civil society in South Africa include:

[...] the decline of the welfare state in the West, the collapse of socialism in the East, and the disillusionment with the state-oriented development paradigm in the South [...], the prominence of free trade and export-oriented policies, multiculturalism, the expansion of media such as the Internet, and the blurring of boundaries between the local and the global (Greenstein, 2003:12).

The state, in general, was no longer seen as the key to development by the late 1980s. South Africa's authoritarian regime was considered a pariah state in the international arena and, as a result, civil society received increasing financial support and became more active. More organisations thus started participating in the struggle against *apartheid*. These organisations included NGOs, human rights groups and advocacy organisations staffed by white middle-to-upper-class intellectuals and professionals, which strengthened and de-racialised the opposition to *apartheid* (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:29). Civil society's protest now started cutting across class divides and racial cleavages. As a result, the racial adversarial-collaborative divide started to blur as more sections of white civil society began distancing themselves from the *apartheid* regime (Habib, 2003:228). The main goal of most civil society groups was to remove power from a racially prejudiced, oppressive, minority regime (Masiko, 2013; Noyoo, 2000).

State officials in South Africa came to the realisation that they had limited control over the political process and that they needed to negotiate with opposition forces (Greenstein, 2003:13). After decades of viewing the state as the 'evil enemy', the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance moved into a corporatist pact in the 1990s, which involved "elite-pacting" and social partnerships (Fine, 1992:26-27; Lehman, 2008:118). As part of this politics of corporatism, many CSOs formed partnerships with the state. The state offered financial advantages to those organisations that entered into an institutional agreement to act as government partners in delivering services and implementing projects (Lehman, 2008:118; Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:31).

The Tripartite Alliance called for a new revamped theory of an all-inclusive pan-South African nationalism, which involves uniting people around a common national identity and turning away from any racial differences. Van Wyk (1993:138) refers to it as "populist nationalism". It was a call to look to the future and not the past, and to find the 'national interest' or 'general will' (see public life approach: sections 1.2.3 and 2.4.2). The plurality of opinions and concerns was refuted by this homogenous idea of 'public opinion'. Fine (1992:28) explains: "the policy choices of one party or movement were dressed up as the 'general will' of the people or nation as a whole; and definite political perspectives were presented in the language of rational necessity". According to Van Wyk (1993:138), it is anathema to the very notion of civil society to see civil society as being homogeneous. Again, it was evident that from the perspective of the Tripartite Alliance, there was a single

understanding of civil society, one that promoted political conformity in the name of a common national identity.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu also envisioned a new South Africa, a “Rainbow Nation” – an inclusive human community transcending barriers of race, class, tribe, ethnicity and religion (in Tshawane, 2009:8). While the idea of inclusivity and non-discrimination should be celebrated, it is also important to celebrate the diversity of the South African community and leave room for disagreement. As mentioned in Chapter 1, section 1.3, ‘unity’ is sometimes largely a demand for uniformity.

After many months of negotiation within the ANC, its alliance partners and other CSOs, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was drafted in the early 1990s, giving recognition of the concerns of civil society (Mafunisa, 2004:491). For instance, COSATU wanted to ensure that the concerns of organised labour were attended to (Friedman & Reitzes, 1996:56). Trade unions, sectoral social movements and civic groups were encouraged to develop RDP action plans, programmes and campaigns within their own sectors and communities (Mafunisa, 2004:491). Many of these civil society groups, however, found it difficult to transform their activities from being largely oppositional to more developmental in nature.

The RDP document further suggests that holding elections does not in itself ensure democracy, but that citizens should be able to actively participate in public affairs (ANC, 1994:120-121; Friedman & Reitzes, 1996:61). According to Mafunisa (2004:489-490,492), the RDP forms the foundation of civil society’s involvement in government affairs, in promoting good governance and enforcing social justice. The RDP, in essence, highlights the ‘empowerment’ and key role of civil society in facilitating democracy. Greenstein (2003:16) adds that elections are a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy – additional avenues for popular expression also need to exist. If the democratic state is unwilling to nurture the diversity and plurality of civil society, the state will not fully consolidate and gain maturity.

To summarise this section, at the end of the 1980s, the *apartheid* state, under domestic and global pressure, began the process of liberalisation; for example, it lifted the ban on the formation of black trade unions. As a result, civic participation increased and more groups

started participating in the pro-democracy movements. The racial adversarial-collaborative divide started to blur as more sections of white civil society began distancing themselves from the *apartheid* regime. The 1990s was characterised by politics of corporatism, which involved many partnerships between CSOs and the state. The ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance further promoted an all-inclusive pan-South African nationalism, which aimed at uniting people around a common national identity. It was a call to find the ‘national interest’, ultimately homogenising civil society. With the development of the RDP document, civil society’s importance was recognised and it started gaining more autonomy and legitimacy. The next section will discuss state-civil society relations after the 1994 democratic elections, as well as the role civil society played in developing democracy in South Africa.

3.2.3 Post-Apartheid (Post-1994): Democratic Development Phase

Civil society was central to the transition from authoritarianism in South Africa. While civil society played a key role in the democratisation process in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it has been burdened with the expectation to be the cure for many social ills (Friedman & Reitzes, 1996:56). The election to power of South Africa’s first democratic government in 1994 and the phase of democratic development has had an inevitable impact on the nature of state-civil society relations (Mafunisa, 2004:492). The power dynamics and objectives have significantly been altered during this phase due to shifting resources, political opportunities and a general reframing of goals (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:23). While ample research exists on civil society’s role and nature during the transition period in the early 1990s, little research has been conducted on the opportunities and challenges civil society faced after 1994.

Friedman and Reitzes (1996:58) note: “the impression that a deep chasm has opened between the ANC in government and its erstwhile partners in civil society is [...] oversimplified”. Many differences and tensions surfaced after 1994, which were largely hidden by the anti-*apartheid* alliance. These tensions primarily revolved around the extent and form of civic participation in government decisions (Friedman & Reitzes, 1996:58; Greenstein, 2003:18). Dealing with a legitimate, representative government required new methods of formal engagement (Ranchod, 2007:4). Civil society had to adapt and adjust from the resistance struggle to other wider functions available in a democratic society, which included lobbying, advocacy, petitions and public demonstrations (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:24).

Surveys conducted by the Democracy and Government Research Programme on Social Movements of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) show that there has not been a decline in civil society participation since 1994, but rather that the involvement became channelled differently (in Mafunisa, 2004:493-494). The HSRC surveys also found that trust in civil society institutions, including churches and religious organisations, has been generally high since 1994. There was a significant effort in the country to create civil society institutions that could consolidate and protect democracy.

While great enthusiasm existed in the civil society arena, great challenges existed simultaneously. The process of democratisation was challenging for South African civic life and destabilised it in many ways due to different ideational, economic and political factors (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:30-35; Habib, 2003:234; Lehman, 2008:119; Ranchod, 2007:4). Firstly, the ultimate goal of anti-*apartheid* civil society – to generate a democratic system of governance – had been achieved. Civil society groups entered the post-*apartheid* era without clear policy objectives. Civil society's role, focus, structure and strategies therefore had to change. Secondly, after 1994, many civic leaders left the civil society arena after taking up highly remunerative positions in government and the private sector. This resulted in a sudden 'brain drain'.

Furthermore, with the establishment of a democratic government, many foreign donors redirected their resources to government policies; and diverted their civil society aid programmes towards bilateral agreements with the state. Many international donors felt that their funding was better channelled to areas of need when placed in the hands of the new legitimate government (Ranchod, 2007:4). De Jager (2006:109) adds that the aim was to strengthen government structures. Consequently, civil society experienced a sudden shortage of funds; large NGOs professionalised their operations and became government consultancies; social movements disbanded; and smaller organisations entered a long phase of crisis. This shortage of funds shrank the budgets of many associations within civil society, which forced them to adjust their activity and scope (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:30-31).

The first few years of the post-*apartheid* era were guided by the RDP document, which aimed to address the injustices of *apartheid* and create a developmental state – “a viable, globally-competitive economy coupled with social welfare” (Ranchod, 2007:4). As part of the 'developmental state' approach, the state adopted certain policies that placed the public

sector at the forefront of South Africa's economic policy (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:31). As a result, state-civil society relations became ambiguous. While the national government officially declared that civil society would continue to play a key role in the country's development, it viewed civil society more as a partner for implementing government policies, rather than an independent actor capable of influencing these policies (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:32; Graham, 2015:177-178).

Ranchod (2007:5) argues that the ANC-led government wanted the state to spearhead the economy and the transformation of society, and saw civil society as a partner in making this a reality. Needless to say, the first few years after the 1994 elections were largely marked by partnership between the state and civil society (Greenstein, 2003:21). Friedman and Reitzes (1996:57) suggest that the ANC might have found enthusiasm for civil society dispensable since the 'struggle' against the authoritarian regime was over. The state has essentially overlooked civil society's independent role to challenge, contradict and influence policy.

In 1996, the ANC government's macro-economic strategy changed from the RDP into Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) (Lehman, 2008:119; Ranchod, 2007:4). This involved a state-led technocratic approach to policy making and, similar to the RDP, limited and specified civil society participation. The GEAR programme highlighted poverty alleviation as the central role of CSOs while overlooking the role they play in decision-making (Ranchod, 2007:4). The state's expectation was that CSOs would expand access to social and economic services that create jobs and, in this manner, eradicate poverty among the poorest of the poor (Habib, 2003:227; Swilling & Russel, 2002:8).

During the first few years of democracy, a firm reassertion of institutional politics was established. There was an expectation that the newly elected government would be more proactive and take on more tasks and commitments (Greenstein, 2003:14). Consequently, the power of the ANC was hardly scrutinised and the party's reputation was undisputed. The ruling party enjoyed a fair degree of loyalty from civil society and the general population. This led to an increase in technical NGOs and think tanks providing advice to government departments; and the marginalisation of certain (more radical) social movements (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:32). The state, however, did not have the capacity to meet the social welfare objectives and establish a competitive economy simultaneously (Ranchod, 2007:4). Greenstein (2003:14) mentions some factors that prevented government from broadening its

reach: “Budgetary constraints, the legacy of inefficient and corrupt state management, and the growing realisation in state circles that their capacity to intervene in society is inherently limited”.

By 1997, the democratic government adopted three initiatives to create an enabling environment for civil society. The government reorganised the security, political and fiscal environment of the country (Habib, 2003:233; Graham, 2015:177). Firstly, the *security environment* was reorganised by repealing repressive legislature and permitting public scrutiny and protest activity. Secondly, government passed the Non-Profit Organisation Act⁸ that restructured the *political environment* and officially recognised civil society. This Act (the *Non-Profit Organisation Act No. 71 of 1997*) also included a system of voluntary registration for its constituents and provided NGOs with financial benefits if they provided government with proper audited statements. As part of creating a new political environment, the state encouraged NGOs to partner with the state in service-delivery as well as policy development. This ultimately provided CSOs with new opportunities and transformed their relations with the state. Lastly, the state reorganised the *fiscal environment* after NGOs confronted their shortage of funds as international donors redirected their funding from CSOs to government. This restructuring included the creation of institutions to ensure a flow of resources to civil society and the financial sustainability of this sector. These three initiatives have ultimately facilitated the development of a collaborative relationship between formal NGOs and the state. These NGOs have mainly been contracted by the state to assist in policy development, implementation and service-delivery (Habib, 2003:234).

The Transitional Development National Trust⁹ (TNDT) conducted a study on service-delivery partnerships and identified five obstacles that exist in this relationship between the state and CSOs (Bench & Lipietz, 1998):

- i. Negative attitudes: Government complained about civil society wanting to maintain its independence by advocating and lobbying while delivering services to or for government. Civil society felt that it was not taken seriously, that power was skewed in favour of government and that its efforts were undervalued;

⁸ This Act (*Non-Profit Organisation Act No. 71 of 1997*) defined NPOs as: “A trust, company or other association of persons established for a public purpose and the income and property of which are not distributable to its members or office-bearers, except as reasonable compensation for services rendered”.

⁹ The Transitional National Development Trust was announced in September 1995 by the then Minister without Portfolio, Jay Naidoo, as an interim funding mechanism to address the short-term and crisis funding needs of civil society (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 1998).

- ii. Government did not have a clear vision for state-civil society partnerships. Civil society also felt that its contribution to development has been misunderstood and often ignored;
- iii. Capacity constraints, which include insufficient skilled staff and adequate financial, management and human resource systems in CSOs;
- iv. Financial difficulties: Many CSOs were unsuccessful in receiving funds from the government and were forced to spend more time on raising funds than on actual service-delivery and development work; and
- v. Legal obstacles: Greenstein (2003:25) highlights “the complex tender system, strict government financial regulations, cumbersome budget approval procedures, and a lack of tax incentives for donors”.

Greenstein (2003:31) argues that civil society’s autonomy has been compromised by the state and that civil society’s active participation in policy making and holding the government accountable has been secondary to the need for quick service-delivery. Lehman (2008:118) also warns against state attempts to co-opt civil society groups by drawing them into state-led decision-making structures, for instance the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC).¹⁰ Fioramonti and Fiori (2010:35) add that co-optation attempts could seriously undermine the autonomy and legitimacy of CSOs. It is important that these CSOs that form partnerships with the state balance their roles as delivery agents and as critical watchdogs (Greenstein, 2003:27). Graham (2015:178) underlines that in a democracy such as South Africa’s, where one party dominates, civil society’s role in keeping government accountable and overseeing government action is essential.

Furthermore, while the post-*apartheid* government has created formal channels for CSOs to participate in the decision-making process, these channels are not open equally to all these organisations. Due to the shortage of funds in the civil society sector, larger NGOs have dominated the formal process. Even though informal channels remain open to the smaller CSOs that are not as well financed, the trend has been towards greater state control (Lehman, 2008:118). Greenstein (2003:22,27) underlines the vital role smaller, less formal community-based organisations (CBOs) play in democratic societies, particularly in poverty alleviation,

¹⁰ NEDLAC consists of government, business, labour and community groupings. This council also provides for civil society representation, for example with the South African National Civics Organisation, the South African Youth Council, National Women’s Coalition, Disabled People South Africa, Financial Sector Coalition and the National Co-operatives Association of South Africa (Graham, 2015:177).

since they can respond to problems on the ground quickly and more efficiently. Community-based organisations work at a local level to improve life for residents and they are able to address the immediate needs of poor communities. A large part of the population is restricted from participating effectively in civil society due to poverty, highlighting further the need for poverty alleviation (Mafunisa, 2004:495). Smaller CBOs often continue with their activities without seeking a partnership relationship with the state. If they were to be integrated with government activity, it would mostly be at a local level, based on immediate circumstances, instead of through an overall national or provincial policy framework. Since informal CBOs may have limited capacity to adhere to the requirements of contractual work, they are often marginalised (Greenstein, 2003:27,31).

In summary, the advent of the democratic dispensation had a significant effect on the nature of state-civil society relations in South Africa. Civil society organisations entered the new era with ambiguous objectives and were largely forced to co-opt with the state due to several economic and political constraints. The first few years after 1994 were thus mostly characterised by partnerships between the state and civil society. Civil society was primarily seen as a policy implementer and service deliverer, and its adversarial role overlooked (if not considered illegitimate). Civil society organisations and social movements concerned with public accountability and good governance were often marginalised.

It is also acknowledged that with the 1997 restructuring of the security, political and fiscal environments, civic participation was encouraged. The *NGO Act of 1997* provided civil society with new opportunities and transformed state-civil society relations. Even so, after the restructuring, civil society's relationship with the state was still largely collaborative. Civil society was, however, not only seen as a partner to implement government policy but also to assist in policy development and decision-making. Finally, this section has noted that the channels for participation have not been equally open to all CSOs. Despite the vital role CBOs play in poverty alleviation, they have been marginalised. The next section turns to state-civil society relations in the current political context.

3.3 The Nature of State-Civil Society Relations in Contemporary South Africa

As mentioned earlier in section 3.2.1, the adversarial-collaborative divide that existed during *apartheid* largely adopted a racial form, with the majority of white civil society collaborating with the state and the majority of black civil society taking on an adversarial or conflictual form of engagement. During the transition period, however, this racial divide began to blur as more sections of white civil society distanced themselves from the *apartheid* regime. In contemporary South Africa, adversarial and collaborative relations extend across the entire civil society arena (Habib, 2003:228; Graham, 2015:177). De Jager (2006:110) suggests, however, that the adversarial role of post-*apartheid* civil society should be redefined – from that of countering authoritarian state tendencies to maintaining state accountability. A plurality of state-civil society relations, in essence, allows for a healthy democracy.

De Jager (2006:107-110) highlights that with the promotion of partnerships between state and civil society, the lines of separation are becoming dangerously blurred. Civil society should have a measure of autonomy from the state. If too many partnerships are formed between the state and civil society, it could undermine civil society's role in keeping government accountable and enriching democracy (De Jager, 2006:107,110). The adversarial role played by CSOs forces government to remain accountable to its citizenry. Some CSOs are expected to act as watchdogs over state actions, spending and legislature, as well as to lobby and make demands on the state for various public goods (Ranchod, 2007:3). At the same time, if state-civil society relations are only adversarial, it could result in unequal power relations and undermine the state's power. Habib (2003:240) refers to these diverse relations as the “push and pull effects” – sometimes assisting the state and at other times compelling the state to meet its responsibilities to its citizenry.

De Jager (2006:109-110) explains:

In any normal healthy relationship there will be a certain amount of conflict and disagreement[;] to negate this as a possibility is to promote an unhealthy relationship where inevitably one party must have its goals and values suppressed and subverted to that of the other [...] Such conflictual engagement, often done with a desire for the best possible solution, is the positive result of allowing oneself to be accountable to another.

A single homogeneous set of relations between the state and civil society is unattainable, given how pluralised and diversified civil society has become. According to Habib (2003:239), “democratisation and globalisation have facilitated the reassertion of the plural character of civil society and undermined the homogenous effects that the anti-*apartheid* struggle had on this sector”. Ranchod (2007:3) refers to contemporary civil society’s engagement with the state as “political pluralism”, which involves accommodating different views, passions, interests and demands. It is important to recognise the inevitable plurality in state-civil society relations in contemporary South Africa.

According to De Jager (2006:101,110), the democratic government, on the one hand, endorses ethnic and cultural plurality in its policies, so long as these differences do not contend with the state. Government also refers to its domestic policy as being ‘people-centred’. Mafunisa (2004:4890492,496) shows that several sections in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)* address the issue of good governance through a diverse civil society. Sections 9, 16, 18, 19 and 32 provide for a Bill of Rights that include necessary conditions and values for good governance, such as equality, as well as freedom of expression and association. Section 181 provides for state institutions that enhance constitutional democracy, for instance the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. Members of CSOs have the right to report complaints to these institutions for investigation. The 1996 Constitution, thus, clearly promotes and protects the diversity within civil society and acknowledges the different interests that are represented by CSOs (RSA, 1996).

On the other hand, De Jager (2006:102) argues that the ANC-led government considers itself to be the only legitimate voice to represent the views of the people by virtue of democratic elections. By institutionalising the role civil society plays and by confining it to implementers of government policy, the state fails to acknowledge the plurality of civil society (De Jager, 2006:107,110). If the state truly endorsed a people-centred society, it would embrace the plurality of voices within civil society. The centralisation of the government system largely removes citizens from participating directly in the decision-making process. In practice, certain freedoms are compromised and some groups marginalised if they do not align with government objectives. As a result, civil society becomes an important avenue for articulating the concerns of the citizenry.

By the start of the 21st century, a sense of entitlement was generated in many citizens. Social movements and CSOs arose that decided to reclaim the rights of citizens to have their voices heard and their needs met (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:33). These groups have largely been guided by a rights-based approach to socio-economic justice and have been more concerned with the substantial and social aspects of a democratic society. Citizens, mostly rural dwellers, tired of unfulfilled demands and broken promises, have participated in a series of uprisings to mobilise against “the lack of basic services, poor accountability by local government officials and rampant corruption in the public sector” (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:34). These social movements and CSOs have differentiated themselves from several well-funded NGOs that emphasised the procedural features of liberal democracy and that refrained from taking direct action against the state. Most of these social movements have demonstrated active forms of resistance against the government and members have been arrested for resorting to the same instruments of civil disobedience practised by the anti-*apartheid* movement (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010:33).

Service-delivery protests have also been widespread in contemporary South Africa. Alexander (2010:27-28) highlights that protest action became a prevalent part of political life in South Africa during Mbeki’s presidency. However, during Zuma’s presidency it drastically increased. There were more service-delivery protests during the first seven months of the Zuma administration than in the last three years of the Mbeki administration. Alexander (2010:27) concludes that the protest action in South Africa indicates disappointment with the fruits of democracy. Unemployment and income inequality remain vast and even though people can vote, elected-representatives are often self-seeking and real improvements are few.

According to Habib (2003:236-239), there have been two ways in which the civil society arena has been reconstructed or two new blocs that have emerged in civil society, which he frames as a response to the effects of neoliberalism. The one development includes the increase in social movements, mentioned above, that have been actively challenging the implementation of neoliberalism. Secondly, there has been an increase in informal CBOs, networks and associations that assist the poor and marginalised communities. These two blocs within civil society have very different relations with the state. Habib (2003:239) underlines that the boundaries between these blocs, however, are not as rigid as depicted

here. Sometimes one organisation can display both an adversarial and collaborative relationship with the state, depending on the specific issue being addressed.

Generally, the bloc of informal or survivalist CBOs have no relationship with the state since these organisations receive no resources or recognition from the state. Meanwhile, the bloc of social movements tends to have a more explicit relationship with the state, somewhere between adversarialism and engagement. This latter form of engagement, however, differs considerably from the engagement between formal NGOs and the state. While formal NGOs are often contracted by the state to assist in service-delivery and policy implementation, the bloc of social movements engage with the state through lobbying, court action and resistance. Many formal NGOs thus enjoy a partnership and collaborative relationship with the state. In essence, a plurality of relationships exists between contemporary civil society and the state – non-engagement, adversarialism, collaboration and different forms of engagement.

Habib (2003:228) underlines the importance of acknowledging civil society as a heterogeneous group with diverse agendas and different relations with the state. This ultimately allows for good governance and a healthy democracy. In a society with massive backlogs and limited institutional capacity, CSOs play a vital role in social development. Community-based organisations, for instance, play their part by enabling ordinary people to survive and expanding access to basic services. The more formal NGOs promote good governance by assisting the state with service-delivery to citizens. Social movements enhance democracy by creating fluidity of support at the base of society, which ultimately allows the redistribution of power within society (Habib, 2003:239). Mafunisa (2004:492) further adds that CSOs have the potential to widen access to public institutions and increase participation in public affairs. Ranchod (2007:3) highlights that even though elections provide citizens with an opportunity to participate in their own governance by voting for the party that best represents their interests, this is not sufficient given the long periods between elections. Civil society's interaction with the state is thus essential as it allows the public to have greater influence in decision-making between elections.

Ranchod (2007:6-7) mentions various formal and informal methods of interaction and influencing policy. Formal methods include contributing to green and white papers, and submissions to portfolio committees where CSOs can make formal representations to government on new laws or policy. Informal methods include negotiations and unofficial

discussions between CSOs and government officials; petitions; lobbying; general public policy debates, for example in the media; and mobilising pressure groups. Despite the wide variety of modes of interactions available, most CSOs make use of informal methods such as mass mobilisation and protest action (Ranchod, 2007:22). For some CSOs, mobilisation is the only effective method available to have their voices heard since they do not have the means to participate in more formal methods of influencing policy. The formal engagement space is generally occupied by more organised and resourced NGOs. While mass mobilisation remains the most popular tactic by civil society, it is not always the most effective long-term solution. It needs to be followed with constructive communication, policy alternatives and strategic planning in order to ensure long-term policy change. Civil society, in essence, fails to take advantage of the many different routes of influence available to it in contemporary South Africa (Ranchod, 2007:22). However, as Mafunisa (2004:496) argues, CSOs must be independent, capacitated, resourced and legitimate to be effective.

To summarise, CSOs have evolved significantly since the pre- and post-1994 phases. Civil society that existed prior to 1994 largely consisted of anti-*apartheid* groups with a common goal and adversarial relationship with the state. After the 1994 democratic elections, most civil society groups formed partnerships and collaborative relationships with the state. However, by the 21st century, civil society greatly evolved and more groups started actively putting pressure on the democratic state for basic rights, social justice and service-delivery. As a result, the civil society arena diversified significantly and developed different objectives and functions. State-civil society relations thus reflect this plurality in contemporary South Africa. Habib (2003) argues that the diverse set of relations between civil society and the state is the best guarantee for promoting democracy in South Africa.

The nation of South Africa is, after all, a ‘Rainbow Nation’, as described by Desmond Tutu. Not only should this imply an “inclusive human community” but also a nation that consists of a rich diversity of races, cultures and languages (Tshawane, 2009:23). A democratic government should thus celebrate the plurality of civil society and embrace the diversity of state-civil society relations. Again, this affirms the associational life approach as it acknowledges civil society’s diversity. This theoretical approach thus acknowledges a variety of CSOs, including religious institutions, to actively participate in civil society and have their voices heard. The next section will explore the important role religious organisations play in South Africa.

3.4 The Role of Religious Organisations in South Africa

A significant part of civil society in South Africa consists of churches, religious groups and religious-based organisations (Kuperus, 1999:652). While ample research is available on the role of ‘civil society’ in development and governance in southern Africa, minimal research is available on the role of ‘religion’ (Makoto, 2019:77; De Jager & De Jager, 2019). One reason for this is the complexity of this topic since there are countless avenues by which different religions influence different development activities. Secondly, there is a rich diversity of religions and religious practices in South Africa. Even within one religion, for example Christianity, there are several denominations with different views. It is therefore difficult to generalise. Lastly, there is great ambiguity regarding what religion actually is (Makoto, 2019:70,78). As discussed in Chapter 2 in section 2.5.1, this thesis conceptualises religion as a personal belief or truth that shapes people’s social reality and influences their behaviour and actions. South Africa is considered a very religious country with the church being the most influential CSO (Erasmus, 2005:139). This section aims to gain a better understanding of the role religion, specifically Christianity, has played in South Africa’s democratisation, consolidation, development and social transformation.

Until the 1960s, social scientists thought that the centrality of religion would fade as the world became more industrialised and urbanised (Makoto, 2019:73, 79). It was expected that as modes of social life became more bureaucratised and individualistic, fewer people would find religion meaningful. The future of religion and its place in public and political life was thus bleak. However, religion has shown remarkable resilience, especially in the developing world, indicating that modernisation does not necessarily lead to secularisation (De Jager & De Jager, 2019:228). Religion shows no sign of fading in public importance, particularly in southern Africa. Approximately 86% of South African population follows the Christian faith (CIA, 2019).

A study by De Jager and De Jager (2019:225-226) notes that Christianity, specifically Protestantism, is growing steadily in sub-Saharan Africa. Historical and empirical studies have further found that there is a positive correlation between Protestant Christianity and liberal democracy, suggesting the potential for greater democratic and governance outcomes in the region. This argument is based on the theory that “Protestantism produces individual-valuing societies that in turn produce the basis for political equality and impartiality” (De

Jager & De Jager, 2019:242). Makoto (2019) also explores religion's relative contribution to socio-economic development in southern Africa and found that religion is central to social, economic, political and cultural activities. At the same time, religious organisations cannot be regarded as a substitute for an effective bureaucracy.

While civil society is characterised as being independent and separate from the state, some civil society groups may willingly trade in their autonomy for material gains and political and economic power. This is essentially what happened during the *apartheid* era among several white civic groups. Kuperus (1999:651) suggests that the collaborative relationship between the Dutch Reformed Church and the *apartheid* state serves as an example of the negative implications of such a relationship, where exclusionary group interests were advanced at the expense of democracy. It has been the case that hegemonic and oppressive interests capture CSOs, including religious organisations. Struby (2018:22) explains:

The Christian church and its affiliated organizations were essential to both the establishment and destruction of Apartheid. The ideological foundation of Apartheid was established through the development of Apartheid theology and the bureaucratic paradigm provided by the Dutch Reformed Church. Simultaneously, those involved in the struggle found strength in the Christian scripture...

Erasmus (2005:142) acknowledges that religion, particularly Afrikaner civil religion, was central to the *apartheid* state's ideology that once upheld the 'iron curtain' of colour prejudice and kept millions of people from humane existence (see section 1.1). On the other hand, religion was also central to the liberation of oppressed black people. According to McGuire (1997:238), it is natural that some aspects of religion can hinder social change, while other aspects challenge the status quo and stimulate change. This thesis is cognisant of the fact that religion can also have negative implications and undermine development. However, there is also ample research to show that religion can be a vital and powerful force of positive change (De Jager & De Jager, 2019; Erasmus, 2005; Kuperus, 1999; Makoto, 2019; Ferrari, 2011; Soriano, 2013). This study seeks to understand if and how religion has impacted and continues to impact development and transformation in South Africa.

Even though the liberation movement lacked the plurality and autonomy that civil society assumed, religious institutions and leaders were key agents in the struggle against *apartheid*. They served as agents of advocacy, sourcing funding and empowering certain groups and

social movements (Makoto, 2019:70). Prior to the 1990s, however, *apartheid* leaders were reluctant to engage in direct conflict with religious organisations. One of the few unbanned liberation-oriented institutions was the South African Council of Churches¹¹ (SACC). The SACC's campaign against *apartheid* started in 1968 and it became the voice of millions of people. The SACC's contributions were undeniably fundamental to where South Africa is today. Leaders like Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naude and Frank Chikane continued to forward the SACC's critique of *apartheid*'s structures (Kuperus, 1999:656). The SACC aimed to transform *apartheid*'s political, economic and social structures and encouraged churches to withdraw from cooperation with the state in all areas where the law of the state contradicted the law of God's justice (Walshe, 1995:111-114). The SACC's actions were also directed at mobilising the resources of oppressed communities.

In the early 1990s, the SACC changed its approach from resistance to one of reconstruction, while still keeping its distance from the state. Even after the democratic elections, the SACC continued to play an active role towards democratic consolidation. While it supported the ANC-led government in its overall goals, it avoided becoming an instrument of the state in order to maintain its autonomy and legitimacy (Kuperus, 1999:657). During the post-*apartheid* era, the SACC actively monitored parliamentary legislation, influenced the formation of public policy and ensured that the norms of parliamentary democracy are upheld. The SACC criticised the government's GEAR strategy, for instance, for neglecting the needs of the poor (Kuperus, 1999:658-659). The SACC's actions have not diminished in contemporary South Africa either and the organisation still works towards "moral reconstruction in South Africa, focusing on issues of justice, reconciliation, integrity of creation and the eradication of poverty and contributing towards the empowerment of all who are spiritually, socially and economically marginalised" (SACC, 2020). The SACC serves as one example of how religious-based organisations can contribute to political development.

As mentioned in section 2.5.1 of Chapter 2, religion can also shape people's 'worldview', which ultimately determines their 'reality', attitude and behaviour (De Jager & De Jager, 2019:227; Makoto, 2019:69; McGuire, 1997:238). This, in turn, has social, economic and political consequences. Max Weber (1930), regarded as the father of modern sociology, recognised that religious ideas have ripple effects on the broader context. The political

¹¹ The SACC was one of the best-known and most influential religious associations in South Africa, representing many of the country's English-speaking churches (Kuperus, 1999:656).

culture will ultimately influence the broader societal context (De Jager & De Jager, 2019:227). Much historical and empirical evidence has been provided that highlights the importance of cultural factors in shaping the socio-economic and political outcomes of societies (De Tocqueville, 1835; Weber, 1930; Huntington, 1984; Harrison & Huntington, 2000; Bruce, 2002; 2003; Tusalem, 2009; Woodberry, 2012).

Erasmus (2005:139) explains that the overall well-being of communities depends largely on the individual contributions of the citizens living there. Since the majority of the residents in South African communities are religious, they will most likely positively impact the community in some way or another, be it physical, emotional or financial. Makoto (2019:80) further highlights the ability of religious groups to win ordinary people's trust, inspire voluntary activity, encourage caring and social services, mobilise resources, raise consciousness about community problems, empower social groups with little influence and to create hope and optimism during challenging times. Religion is thus a key source of social capital and, as Putnam (1995) argues, social capital eventually breeds success – in this case, social development. Erasmus (2005:139) highlights that neither the state, nor any other NGO in South Africa can reach and influence the public more regularly and consistently than religious-based organisations. Research has shown that religious actors serve as the only non-state conflict managers with infrastructure extending to the remotest corner of any given state (Makoto, 2019:73). Erasmus (2005:139) also points out that the infrastructure of the churches in South Africa reaches almost every corner of the country.

Kuperus (1999:661) highlights that the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996), and liberal democracy in general, is premised on values that include dignity, equality, non-racialism, justice and reconciliation. Religion plays a key role in fostering these values. Religious institutions in South Africa can help create a culture of tolerance, civility and accommodation of diversity. Religion therefore has the potential to enhance liberal democracy in South Africa. Furthermore, religion has also had an indirect influence on the development of good economic and democratic political systems. Low levels of transparency and high levels of corruption within these economic and political institutions have hindered development and social progress in South Africa. The transference of religious values to these spheres has a meaningful impact on the economic and political culture of the country and ultimately on development (Makoto, 2019:75).

Kuperus (1999:652, 657-660, 663-665) specifically examined the role that mainline Christian religious associations have played in sustaining democracy in South Africa. Like the SACC, most Christian-based organisations changed their strategies to reconstruction after the advent of democracy. While most Christian-based organisations support the government's overall efforts towards development, they can also play an important watchdog role and maintain their autonomy. Many Christian religious associations have opposed the ANC-led government when it has violated principles of democracy, and has held government accountable, for instance, when dismissing political leaders unfairly (Kuperus, 1999:658).

The ANC-led government has recognised religion's role in promoting social capital and reconciliation. However, Kuperus (1999:664) warns that there is often an underlying message in politicians' speeches, calling religious groups to support state's efforts in nation building. For example, in 1997, then President Nelson Mandela announced:

The transformation of our country requires the greatest possible cooperation between religious and political bodies, critically and wisely serving our people together. Neither political nor religious objectives can be achieved in isolation. They are held in a creative tension with common commitments. We are partners in the building of society (Mayson, 1997-8:20).

As previously noted in section 3.2.3, the state largely views civil society groups, such as religious-based CSOs, as service deliverers only. Makoto (2019:79) urges government to acknowledge the spiritual dimension of religious-based organisations and support and appreciate them for the role they play in society. In a country grappling with poverty-related problems, religious contributions are essential and should be welcomed.

Finally, while the diversity of South Africa is celebrated, it can also increase tension and conflict in society. Religious associations, however, have assisted in bridging barriers of tribe, family, nationality and race – ultimately uniting segments of society that once were disparate (McGuire, 1997:247). Religious organisations in South Africa, in essence, play a key role in the moral, socio-political and economic transformation of South Africa's society, as well as promoting sustainable development. Religious organisations are also involved with several social issues, for instance child abuse and neglect. The final section will focus on the role religious-based organisations, specifically Christian-based CSOs, play in child protection and advancing the well-being of children in South Africa.

3.5 Child Protection in Contemporary South Africa

As outlined in section 1.1 of Chapter 1, child abuse is a serious and escalating social issue, not just in South Africa, but globally. Research shows that victims of child abuse are getting younger and the severity and scope of the abuse is getting worse (September, 2006; Chames & Lomofsky, 2014; Seedat et al., 2009; Hall et al., 2018). Children experience abuse in different settings and there are several ways of entering the reporting system in South Africa, for instance through social workers, health professionals or the police, which makes it difficult to know the full extent of child abuse (Chames & Lomofsky, 2014:43; September, 2006:66). Child protection dilemmas are especially prevalent in South Africa, due to fatherlessness, poverty, inequality and violence.

‘Child protection’ refers to the prevention and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children (United Nations Children’s Fund, South Africa. 2007). It involves the provision of social services aimed at protecting children and promoting their well-being. Government, together with child protection organisations (CPOs), puts systems in place to prevent the maltreatment and abuse of children, and also to respond to child abuse incidences. The Children’s Act (No 38 of 2005) defines child abuse as “any form of harm or ill-treatment deliberately inflicted on a child” and can be physical, emotional, sexual, or refer to any form of neglect, child labour or exploitation. Child maltreatment has immediate and long-term effects and can seriously undermine the child’s development.

The South African Child Gauge¹² (Hall et al., 2018:131) provides staggering statistics, as highlighted in section 1.1 of Chapter 1: In 2017, there were 19.6 million children living in South Africa. Approximately 14% of these children are orphans who have lost either one parent or both; 21% of South African children do not live with either of their biological parents; and 0.3% live in child-only households. According to Stats SA’s 2017 Community Survey, the biological fathers of 61.8% of children (under the age of 18) were absent from the household (Eyewitness News, 2018). The National Adoption Coalition of South Africa estimated that approximately 3000 children in South Africa are abandoned each year (Holmes, 2019). An estimated 350 000 children receive foster care grants, but for the past

¹² The *South African Child Gauge* (Hall et al., 2018) is an annual publication of the Children’s Institute, University of Cape Town. It aims to report on and monitor the situation of children in South Africa, in particularly the realisation of their rights. The publication focuses on a different theme each year. The 2018 issue focused on children, families and the state.

three years, only about 1000 children were adopted each year (Holmes, 2019). The most potent source of power and protection for children is their parents. The irregular family structure and high rates of fatherlessness in South Africa therefore leave children defenceless and more susceptible to abuse and neglect (Seedat et al., 2009:1015). Religious institutions, community organisations, foster care services, adoption services, schools and NGOs are all doing their part in creating family-style environments for these neglected children. This thesis is cognisant of the fact that child abuse can and does also occur in all the settings mentioned above and that fathers can also be perpetrators.

Furthermore, poverty often leads to frustration, violence, disease, starvation and over-population, which in turn increase children's vulnerability. High levels of poverty in South Africa, therefore, significantly increase the risk of child abuse. The South African Child Gauge (Hall et al., 2018:131) indicates that 65% of children live below the "upper bound" poverty line (with a per capita income of below R1138 per month) (see section 1.1).

Child abuse and neglect require serious attention and child protection strategies should be encouraged, improved and supported. The state, civil society and local communities all need to work together to improve the well-being of South Africa's children. Most child protection organisations, however, find it difficult to be effective and maintain quality services due to financial constraints and several other challenges (Ranchod, 2007; Lehman, 2008). It is mostly the larger and well-organised formal NGOs that have access to government funding. Smaller informal NGOs, CBOs and grass-root organisations (GROs) have limited capacity to adhere to requirements of contractual work, such as submitting progress reports, and therefore do not qualify for government funding.

As Greenstein (2003) highlights, these less formal CSOs should not be marginalised since they play a vital role in democratic societies, especially in poverty alleviation. Community-based organisations can respond to issues on the ground quickly and more effectively. Government should thus acknowledge the contributions of local CSOs, including smaller CBOs and religious organisations, and work towards building their capacity and strengthening their operations.

The democratic government has shown credible commitment to protecting the human rights of children and achieving both international and national goals for children's well-being

(Human Sciences Research Council, 2009:14). Children's rights are defined internationally by the United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child, regionally by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organisation of the African Union (OAU), 1990); and nationally by the Constitution (RSA, 1996) and the Children's Act (Chames & Lomofsky, 2014:43). The Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005), as amended, serves as the key legislation relating to the care and protection of children in South Africa. Much debate has evolved around the amendments to this Act over the past two decades. The key role-player to address child protection issues is the Department of Social Development (DSD) (Human Sciences Research Council, 2009:15; September, 2006:67). Civil society organisations align their work with the DSD and are legally bound to operate within the confines of the Constitution (RSA, 1996). All CSOs in South Africa fall under the DSD's Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) umbrella, which includes CBOs, Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) and CPOs (Siziba, 2014:27-28).

While there has certainly been policy-level commitment from the democratic government to protect and promote the welfare of children, these policies have not always been successfully put into practice (Human Sciences Research Council, 2009:14). In other words, the problem is not policy formulation, but rather policy implementation. The responsibility for the implementation of these policies rests with both the state and civil society. While the Children's Act (No 38 of 2005) underlines that the state is responsible for providing social services for vulnerable children, the state is relying heavily on civil society to fulfil this task. Since the state tends to confine the role of CSOs to service-deliverers and policy implementers, most child protection services are provided by NGOs and other CSOs. A large network of religious organisations in South Africa is dedicated to the well-being and protection of children. Communities, families and individuals can also play a vital role in creating a protective and nurturing environment. Religion thus has the potential to positively impact the broader social context by cultivating certain values in the community, such as love, honesty and respect.

A protective environment can only be created for children when all role-players, including the state and non-state actors, work together in the best interest of children (Chames & Lamofsky, 2014:43).

United Nations Children's Fund has developed a framework that highlights the following eight elements of a protective environment (Human Sciences Research Council, 2009:13-14):

- i. Protective attitudes, behaviours and practices at a societal level;
- ii. Commitment from government to fulfil child protection rights and provide legal and policy frameworks;
- iii. An open and engaging environment that encourages the involvement of children and civil society in child protection issues;
- iv. The development and implementation of sufficient legislative framework to prevent child abuse;
- v. Strengthening the capacity of families and communities;
- vi. Providing children with the necessary knowledge and life skills to reduce their vulnerability;
- vii. Monitoring and reporting to facilitate evidence-based responses; and
- viii. Services for recovery from abuse and integration back into the community.

Religious institutions, such as churches and Christian-based CSOs, can play a central role in creating a protective environment and developing safety nets for children. As previously noted in section 1.1 of Chapter 1, Melton and Anderson (2008:173) recognise that some religious institutions, like the Roman Catholic Church, have been found to threaten children's safety and contribute to child abuse. A study by the Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) Research Team found that individuals working within religious institutions are generally seen as having a higher moral authority and their conduct perceived as unquestionable. The power, authority and reverence bestowed upon these individuals allow them to easily spend time alone with victims and participate in different forms of child abuse (Hurcomb et al., 2019:63). However, there is little contemporary evidence that shows that it continues to be a serious problem. According to Melton and Anderson (2008:175), "Religious faith is much more likely to serve as a foundation for the protection of children than as a source of risk".

The US Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1993) acknowledges the significance of religious organisations' contributions by citing three broad functions through which these organisations ensure children's safety: (i) by being communities of service, directly responding to the needs of children; (ii) as places of acceptance, integrating parents into communities of faith; and (iii) as moral beacons, defining the moral responsibility of the

larger community (Melton & Anderson, 2008:174-175). Religious organisations, particularly Christian-based organisations, have been among the key proponents of children's rights (Melton and Anderson, 2008:183). This is most likely because of their beliefs and what the Bible teaches about inherent human value. Children, like all human beings, are considered to be created in the image of God and should therefore be treated with the loving care and respect that is a corollary to that status (Melton & Anderson, 2008:174-175). Violating children's dignity by committing a wrong against them is also a wrong against God. Again, this thesis does not suggest that religious organisations are a panacea for deep-seated social issues. However, it seeks to understand whether religious organisations make a meaningful impact on the well-being of children and strengthen broader communities.

3.6 Concluding Remarks

Civil society is not static – it is largely influenced by the broader political context. The political transition in South Africa from an authoritarian to a democratic regime has had an undeniable impact on the role of civil society and its relationship with the state. At the same time, civil society has also played a central role in the democratic transition. This chapter has explored the evolution of state-civil society relations in South Africa by looking at four different phases: *apartheid*, the transition period, *post-apartheid* and the contemporary era. Given the fact that civil society does not always have the same function, a single homogenous set of relations between the state and civil society is argued to be unattainable. With a diverse civil society arena, it is expected that some relationships between the state and civil society will involve collaboration, while others will be characterised by contestation. Any healthy relationship will have a certain amount of disagreement that should not be negated. This plurality of relations allows for a healthy democracy.

This chapter has again argued for the applicability of the associational life approach, which includes pluralism and thus a place for religious organisations in civil society. Religious institutions have played an essential role in South Africa's democratisation, consolidation, development and social transformation, primarily by fostering certain values and influencing the broader societal context. While many religious institutions in South Africa assist government in achieving its goals, they often also play a watchdog role in keeping government accountable. Religious-based organisations have also been committed to reaching out to marginalised and vulnerable communities and engaging in social issues, such as child abuse and neglect. The final section of this chapter explored the child protection

dilemma in South Africa and to what extent CSOs, religious organisations and specifically Christian-based organisations have made a positive contribution.

Greenstein (2003:24) mentions that there is a serious lack of integration between empirical and theoretical research on civil society in South Africa. Since Greenstein made this statement in 2003, there certainly has been empirical and theoretical work undertaken on the very diverse behaviour and actions of civil society – for instance Burchardt (2013), Robins (2008) and Miraftab (2005) – but more is needed. This thesis aims to address this research gap by analysing three case studies and comparing the empirical findings from the interviews with the theoretical approaches in Chapter 2 and the context in Chapter 3. Ultimately, this study aspires to provide a better understanding of associational life in South Africa. The case studies include three Christian-based organisations working to promote child protection in South Africa. The next chapter will expand on the research design and methodology (as initially described in Chapter 1) that was adopted for this study, and also present and analyse the data that was collected through the interviews.

Chapter 4: Empirical Study of Christian-based CSOs

4.1 Introduction

Up until this point, this thesis has discussed relevant literature connected to the concept of civil society, religion and child protection. Chapter 2 explored different theoretical approaches regarding the role of civil society and its relationship with the state. There is much dispute among scholars regarding the type of relationship that should exist between the state and civil society. This contention is evident in the numerous and diverging definitions of civil society. Chapter 2 also explored the role religion can potentially play in promoting good governance, social and economic development, civic participation, social harmony and a sound civil society. Chapter 3 specifically focused on state-civil society relations in the context of South Africa and the role religious institutions play in society. Chapter 3 further discussed the child protection dilemma in the country and the contributions religious-based organisations make in eliminating child abuse and neglect.

With the conceptual, theoretical and contextual groundwork laid, Chapter 4 now turns to the primary data gathered from the key informant interviews. Firstly, this chapter will provide an overview of the research design and methodology. Next, the case studies will be introduced, which includes three Christian-based child protection organisations (CPOs): *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* (ACVV), Abba Adoptions and Connect Network. The next section will present and interpret the primary data gathered from the interviews and discuss the findings. This chapter will, in essence, provide an empirical answer to the primary research question: What are the contributions of Christian-based civil society organisations (CSOs) to Child Protection in South Africa? An analysis of the contributions of Christian-based CSOs to child protection in South Africa serves to challenge the public life approach to understanding civil society.

4.2 Overview of Research Design and Methodology

After discussing the research design and methodology in detail in section 1.6 of Chapter 1, this section merely provides a recap as well as the operationalisation, before turning to the three case studies. To understand the role that is played by Christian-based CSOs and how and where this role fits into the theoretical approaches, three organisations were interviewed. Since it was important to capture the participants' beliefs, thoughts and experiences, the

research design featured a qualitative strategy through an exploratory study. A qualitative strategy allowed for in-depth explanations that are information rich. An exploratory study provided new insights into the civil society phenomenon and clarified certain constructs and concepts around this topic, such as the dynamic of state-civil society relations in South Africa and the developmental role Christian-based organisations play in society.

This thesis made use of three case studies to answer the primary research question and the two secondary ones (see section 1.3). The case studies involved an analysis of three Christian-based CPOs in South Africa. The use of case studies made it possible to obtain detailed knowledge of the work these organisations do in child protection, the challenges they face as well as the nature of their relationship with the state. Since only three organisations were selected as case studies, this study is careful not to generalise too widely. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted over *Zoom*, a cloud-based video communications platform, due to the national lockdown as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2.1 Data analysis

In order to transform the qualitative data from the interviews into findings, as described by Patton (2002:432), the data was analysed using content analysis, also known as coding. Coding involves the labelling of selected segments of the transcripts by means of a summary term, known as a code, which expresses important qualities of a phenomenon. Coding helped to order the data, highlight segments that could be useful in answering the research questions, and in retrieving and interpreting the textual data. More specifically, the coding was deductive in nature, which means that pre-conceived codes were used. The theory in Chapter 2 helped to determine the coding scheme and structure of analysis as seen in the coding frame (see Appendix A). ATLAS.ti (version 8), a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software, was used to manage and analyse the data from the interviews. ATLAS.ti did not analyse the data, but assisted with the analysis process by making it easier to manage, code, retrieve and comment on the data. The next step was to export the codes as a report and interpret the data. The exported reports were sifted through, organised and analysed.

4.2.2 Operationalisation

To answer the research questions, four indicators were identified: i) The contributions of three Christian-based CSOs; ii) The challenges they face; iii) The public life approach; and iv) The associational life approach. This study is, in essence, identifying the contributions and challenges as well as measuring these contributions against the associational life and public life approaches. Before determining which of the theoretical approaches applies to the case studies, the approaches were unpacked. Section 1.2.3 of Chapter 1, in accordance with the theory in section 2.4 of Chapter 2, underlined the main characteristics of the two approaches.

From the research questions and abovementioned characteristics, the following summary terms have been identified, which formed the predetermined codes that were then used for the content analysis:

- 1) Contributions
- 2) Challenges
- 3) Associational Life
 - a. Distinct from states and markets
 - b. Legally-protected, non-violent, self-organising and self-reflexive
 - c. Tension
 - d. Political effects
 - e. Voluntary
 - f. Pluralistic
 - g. Fulfilment in life
 - h. Positive values
 - i. Stronger together
- 4) Public Life
 - a. Arena for deliberation
 - b. Collective vision and shared truth
 - c. Common good, public interest or consensus
 - d. Willing to change or compromise

These codes were added into ATLAS.ti and used to label selected segments of the interview transcripts that could be useful for answering the research questions. The data was then retrieved and interpreted. The next section turns to the three case studies and provides some background on each organisation, such as its vision and mission.

4.3 Case Studies

The three case studies that were selected involve Christian-based CSOs that promote child protection in South Africa. The three CPOs include ACVV, Abba Adoptions and Connect Network. Initially, the interviews were going to be conducted at their offices and for that reason their geographical location, in the Western Cape province, was taken into consideration when selecting the CSOs. However, two of the organisations – ACVV and Abba – are nationwide and have branches in other provinces too. Another reason for selecting these three is because of their vision, values and commitment to protect children. These organisations are all informed and driven by Christian values and are thus appropriate to the topic being investigated.

4.3.1 ACVV

The ACVV stands for “Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereeniging” and was formed on 1 September 1904. It was the second welfare organisation in South Africa and is therefore also the second oldest. The organisation started during the Anglo-Boer War (now referred to as the Anglo-South African War) with only four white women who wished to offer practical assistance to those affected by the Anglo-Boer War. Their aim was to supply food and care for the Boer women and children in the concentration camps in the midst of the sickness and famine. However, in 1982, 12 years before the new democratic political dispensation, the ACVV opened up to all races and their services became available to everyone. Over the years, the organisation has diversified and transformed its services from emergency relief, primary health care and educational services to comprehensive social work and child protection services for children and older persons. The ACVV now has several social work offices, child and youth care centres, as well as child protection programmes and services across the country. It is committed to working together in service of the community and nurturing, protecting and developing those in need (ACVV, 2019).

The reason for choosing ACVV is because it is one of only a few designated child protection organisations (DCPO) in South Africa, which means that it may render the full scope of child

protection services, from prevention programmes to statutory intervention, according to section 107 of the Children's Act, No. 38 of 2005. The interview was conducted with Ms Nicolette van der Walt, National Manager of Child Protection.¹³

4.3.2 Abba Adoptions

Abba Adoptions is a Specialist Adoptions and Social Services Organisation. It started with one woman who was driven by her Christian faith to counsel people on the impact of abortion. She was searching for another option to abortion and a more permanent solution for a mother who cannot care for the baby herself. She then came to the realisation that adoption is the alternative option and so Abba was 'birthed' in 1994. From humble beginnings, the past two decades have seen Abba become a national designated and accredited CPO with the mandate to facilitate both local and inter-country adoptions.

This organisation has a national footprint and operates across all the provinces in South Africa, providing a broad spectrum of services related to adoption. Abba's headoffice is located in Gauteng and its satellite office in Bellville in the Western Cape, which renders services in all parts of the Western Cape province. Furthermore, Abba forms part of the Apostolic Faith Mission's Executive Welfare Council and values Christian beliefs. The organisation focuses on strengthening, supporting and building families within an Integrated Child Protection Framework. As an organisation, it strongly believes that all children need and deserve permanent, stable family care and that adoption is often the best form of alternative care. As part of its approach to adoption, Abba underlines the importance of minimising losses for adoptive children and therefore strives towards finding suitable, permanent adoptive families for these children in South Africa (Abba, 2019).

The reason for choosing Abba Adoptions as one of my case studies is because of the serious issue of abandonment and fatherlessness that exists in South Africa. As highlighted in section 3.5 of Chapter 3, 61.8% of children grew up without their biological fathers in 2017. Furthermore, approximately 2.8 million of the 19.6 million children that were living in South Africa in 2017 were orphans who had lost either one parent or both, and approximately 60 000 lived in child-only households. Again, the most potent source of power and protection for children is their parents. The high rates of abandonment and fatherlessness thus leave children powerless and vulnerable to abuse (Seedat et al., 2009:1015). Abba Adoptions is

¹³ Consent was given by all the participants to use their names and the names of their organisation.

actively working towards finding a permanent family for every child in South Africa. The interview was conducted with both Ms Tilda Fick, Office Manager of the Western Cape Satellite office, and Ms Elna Blanche Engelbrecht, Supervisor. One interview was conducted with both participants present.

4.3.3 Connect Network

Connect Network is a CSO that provides a platform for collaborative action and network support for NGOs and churches serving women and children at risk. Its vision is to see children protected, families thriving and communities transformed. The organisation works towards improving the lives of vulnerable women and children in at least ten Western Cape communities through health, education, psycho-social and economic empowerment initiatives. This strategy is aligned with the National Development Plan (NDP) for South Africa 2030. Connect Network started in 2004 with 15 organisations. Today the network consists of almost 90 organisations, mostly located in the greater Cape Town area. There are also a few organisations, referred to as “country affiliates”, in other areas such as Pretoria, Limpopo, KwaZulu Natal and the North West province that feel disconnected locally and would like to form part of the network in the Western Cape (Connect Network: About us, 2017).

The reason for choosing Connect Network as one of my case studies is because CPOs are often isolated, under-resourced and the staff under-trained. Through its networking, collaboration and equipping efforts, Connect Network fills a significant gap and allows NGOs, churches and individuals to enhance and maximise their responses within their unique areas of child protection services. Furthermore, Connect Network is committed to Christian beliefs and provides a platform for Christian-based CSOs to collaborate and connect. The interview was conducted with Ms Dee Moskoff, founder of Connect Network. The next section will discuss the findings from the three interviews.

4.4 Interviews: Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, the primary data that was gathered from the key informant interviews is presented and analysed in terms of the summary terms (codes) that were identified and mentioned in section 4.2.2. This section highlights some of the contributions of Christian-based CSOs to child protection in South Africa, the challenges that they face in effectively achieving their objectives, as well as the characteristics of the theoretical approaches that have been highlighted in the interviews.

4.4.1 Contributions

4.4.1.1 ACVV

The ACVV is the second largest CPO (after Child Welfare) in South Africa in terms of staff and outreach, even though it only provides services in the Western Cape, Northern Cape, Eastern Cape and a small part of North West. Ms Van der Walt explained that the ACVV is a respected organisation and probably the only organisation in South Africa that has a clear policy regarding the supervision of social workers. The ACVV is sometimes invited to train other organisations, even in provinces where it does not have branches. Currently, it has 53 social work offices, four Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCC) or children's homes, two drop-in Centres and 230 children benefiting from their residential care and community programmes.

The ACVV has 280 social work staff members, which includes social workers, social auxiliary workers, child and youth care workers and also community development officers. Ms Van der Walt added that the organisation has a small workforce but a very big impact in child protection. There are 15 child protection supervisors or regional managers across the different provinces that supervise and support the branches. The ACVV has 111 branches in total across the different provinces and provides jobs for approximately 4500 people.

The ACVV renders child protection services in rural and non-rural areas. Approximately 320 000 children and families benefit from the ACVV's social work services. The larger organisation reaches about 800 000 lives a year through national projects, child protection week, its 16 days of activism initiative, group work, community projects and statutory work. According to Ms Van der Walt, the Department of Social Development (DSD) considers the ACVV's services as being of a very high quality. The ACVV is often approached by this

Department to ask for advice regarding child protection issues. Ms Van der Walt also touched on their lobbying and advocacy work and mentioned that they would sometimes go to government with lawyers, for instance when the third amendment Bill on the Children's Act was being scrutinised.

The work of the ACVV includes protection services to children, families and older persons through:

- i. Social work service;
- ii. Community development;
- iii. Child and youth care centres;
- iv. Day care facilities for children;
- v. Residential and community facilities for older persons;
- vi. Capacity building and training;
- vii. Leadership development;
- viii. Women's empowerment; and
- ix. Mentorship of CBOs.

4.4.1.2 Abba Adoptions

As a specialist adoption and social services organisation, Abba's efforts in child protection include the following activities:

- i. Raising awareness about crisis and unplanned pregnancies;
- ii. Supporting mothers and presenting them with different options, such as adoption, parenting or foster care, so that they can make an informed decision;
- iii. Capacity building and empowerment of formal systems;
- iv. Adoption training to social workers and the Department of Social Development;
- v. Adoption recruitment;
- vi. Lobbying and advocacy;
- vii. Playing an active role in the National Adoption Coalition and provincial coalitions; and
- viii. Therapeutic support to parties affected by adoption.

Abba renders child protection and specialised adoption services in six provinces in South Africa: Gauteng, North West, Limpopo, Northern Cape, Eastern Cape and the Western Cape. In 2019, 366 children in need of permanent alternative care were reached, of which 71 were

abandoned. Furthermore, 254 adoptive parents were screened and found fit and proper to adopt; 280 children became legally available for adoption and 272 children were placed with permanent families. A further 425 women were involved in option counselling, of which 230 received adoption counselling; and 334 social workers were trained. Abba's awareness programmes on adoptions, and the prevention of abandonment and unplanned crisis pregnancies reached 2643 people. Ms Fick also shared that the organisation has compiled a manual on Adoption that North-West University has included in its social work curriculum.

As an office in the Western Cape, Abba has done considerable awareness-raising to prevent abandonment and to inform biological mothers, biological families as well as adoptive parents that there is an alternative option. It has also helped desperate mothers during crisis pregnancies. As a specialised adoption organisation, Abba has provided many abandoned children with the solution of permanency – finding a permanent family. Ms Engelbrecht explained that child and youth care centres, aftercares and any form of institutional care are merely temporary solutions. She states that every child deserves to have a loving family – if not their own biological family, then another one.

Furthermore, Abba has no blanket policy, meaning that it does not accept any form of discrimination and it will not infringe directly or indirectly on any human rights prescribed by South African legislation. It will also not force its Christian values on any of its clients and the organisation treats everyone with love and respect. Ms Fick explained that as social workers, they are merely there to find the best possible family for a child. They work from the child's perspective and the child is at the centre. Due to Abba's non-discriminatory approach to child protection, the organisation is respected by government as well as by other organisations. Ms Fick stated that if anyone has adoption-related questions, they would go to Abba. Ms Engelbrecht added that the DSD, for instance, comfortably approaches Abba for advice. The DSD has also offered to provide the organisation with subsidies, funding and more social workers to increase its capacities and extend government services. As an organisation, it also partners with other organisations in the NGO sector to advocate and provide constructive input, for instance in proposed amendments to the Children's Act.

4.4.1.3 Connect Network

As mentioned in section 4.3.3, Connect Network is a network organisation consisting of 90 organisations reaching approximately 345 000 children in the Cape Town area. The organisation's goal for 2020, now extended to 2023, is to promote the safety and well-being of children and thriving families through collaboration and capacity building in at least ten Western Cape communities. Connect Network has had a significant impact on the organisations in its network, which includes improving leadership, governance, accountability, finance management, funding opportunities and helping them speak with more authority around child protection matters. It has allowed these organisations to improve the quality of their services and maximise their efforts and responses to child abuse and neglect.

Over the past 16 years, Connect Network has not only strengthened organisations in child protection, but has also facilitated them working together. As an organisation, it has worked towards building the integrity of the Christian sector and strengthening their collective voice. Connect Network has witnessed a great shift in the reputation of its affiliates. Connect Network's reputation has also improved over the years as a result of its contributions in developing robust organisations.

While the organisation mostly focuses on the Western Cape, its advocacy can be national. Whenever there is a public participation opportunity, Connect Network would go and present or participate in those debates and discussions to influence the policy. Some of the organisation's highlights include its contributions to: i) the Western Cape Commissioner for Children's Bill (2019); ii) the National Child Protection Policy (2017); iii) and the National Policy on Violence Against Women and Children (2019). The latter involved a National Consultation on the revised Programme of Action to Address Violence Against Women, Children, and LGBTIQ+ persons, hosted by the DSD National and UNICEF.

In 2017, Connect Network was a contributing partner to forming the Child Protection Collaborative (CPC), a platform that was created for smaller organisations that do not have access to writing skills, proposals and other important resources. The CPC then heard the voices of these smaller organisations and provided them with an opportunity to review and comment on policy documents. The CPC took the hand-written letters of these smaller

organisations, interpreted these and presented these to government. As an organisation, it filled a serious gap by hearing the voices of the ‘person on the street’ and giving them access to the public participation process.

4.4.2 Challenges

4.4.2.1 Misperceptions and Negative Attitudes

Ms Moskoff from Connect Network highlighted that there is often this misperception that Christian-based organisations only serve Christians. She explained that Connect Network, like most other Christian-based organisations, serves and treats everybody in the same manner. According to her, donors sometimes treat the organisation differently because it is informed by Christian values. She explained that the minute that donors hear that an organisation subscribes to one faith, most of them become reluctant to fund the organisation. Most donors want to fund entities that are ‘impartial’.

With great frustration, Ms Moskoff added that when it comes to contentious issues that might challenge Christian values, Christian-based CSOs are definitely sidelined by the stronger lobbyist groups who are pushing for certain policies to go through. She explained that it is a tough space to work in but it does not mean these Christian-value based CSOs cannot work in that space; it just means that they have to be smart in the way that they do. According to Ms Moskoff, “It takes a certain amount of skill for Christian organisations to position themselves in a secular space when it comes to things that rub against the values of Christianity”. She gave an example from five or six years ago when the network of organisations was looking at the Children’s Act amendments. They spoke out about something that went against their Christian beliefs and suggested that it gets reviewed. They were met with very harsh responses and boxed as “the Christians”. She added, however, that over time it has become increasingly more acceptable to be a Christian organisation. Ten years ago, Connect Network experienced much more hostility when entering a room. She explains that people sometimes have rather inaccurate paradigms and perceptions of Christians.

Ms Van der Walt frustratedly explained that there is still this misperception that the ACVV is a white organisation that only serves white people. This is largely because of the history of the organisation and the fact that it is an established organisation that started long before the democratic dispensation. It is also because of the name of the organisation – “Afrikaanse

Christelike Vroue Vereeniging”. According to Ms Van der Walt, many people still associate Afrikaans with *apartheid* and white people. In other words, the bad attitude and poor treatment it sometimes gets from people is more based on the language aspect than on the religious aspect. She again emphasised that the ACVV’s child protection services are available to anybody and that a large majority of its work in child protection is done in English. She carried on by saying that the ACVV has staff of all languages and races. She adds that the organisation tries to be sensitive towards people’s experiences and to rather help them understand that the ACVV does not discriminate against any race, language or religion.

She shared a story of a radio interview to which she was invited. The presenter kept asking her about the name of their organisation and what it stands for. She did not feel comfortable to tell him so she kept avoiding the question. After asking her the third time, she told him. Immediately, his attitude changed towards her in a negative way, so she decided to inaccurately translate it to “African Christian Women’s Association”. I could see the frustration and disappointment in her eyes and body language as she was telling this story. The ACVV has considered changing its name because of people’s negative attitudes towards it, but it is too complicated and costly to do that since the organisation is so large. For that reason, the organisation has decided to just go with the acronym, ACVV.

Ms Van der Walt also stated her frustration around the fact that NGOs in general are being overlooked by government, and their efforts are unappreciated and undervalued. While the ACVV would sometimes be approached by the DSD for advice, it does not always receive the recognition commensurate with its contributions to child protection. She explained that government ministers would praise their own staff and go out of their way to thank them and show their appreciation for the work they do but when it comes to NGOs, these ministers would briefly thank them in one short sentence, almost as a sidenote. This apparently happens on a national and provincial level. She mentioned that negative perceptions and attitudes from certain government officials remain a challenge.

4.4.2.2 *Insufficient Resources*

When asking Ms Van der Walt what challenges the ACVV faces, she immediately answered, without hesitation, “Resources, finances, human resources, a lack of capacity and fundraising”. She mentioned that a professor from Stellenbosch University once said, “You cannot grow roses in concrete”. She explained that it is becoming extremely challenging for

CPOs just to survive. Most CPOs are dependent on state subsidies since fundraising is not always possible, especially in smaller towns. Furthermore, the majority of CPOs cannot appoint professional fundraisers because they do not have sufficient funds to do so. Child protection organisations also have to compete with schools, churches and even the national department for funds. Another challenge for the ACVV's headoffice is the fact that it cannot raise funds in the Cape Town area because it also has a branch in Cape Town, which it cannot be in competition with. Donors remain scarce. Many companies have social responsibility capital available to donate but they would rather call the ACVV to find out about a local crèche they can support with food or goods, than donate money to the NGO.

Ms Moskoff explained, with great disappointment in her voice and on her face, that they can dream as big as they want to, but NGOs lack the capacity. The only way of increasing the capacity is paying more people but there is insufficient funding available for that. As a result, the organisation is forced to work with what it has. This is Connect Network's greatest challenge, since the potential for this network is much larger than what it is able to deliver due to constrained resources. Ms Moskoff mentioned that there would be brilliant places to start a local equivalent of Connect Network in other areas if the resources were available. Abba Adoptions also highlighted its challenge with insufficient resources. For instance, there are ten staff members at the Bellville office but only two cars for them to use.

Looking rather concerned, Ms Van der Walt also mentioned the fact that the ACVV has too few social workers. She explained that the national norm for a social worker is 1:16. In other words, the norm is one social worker to 16 clients. However, the social workers working for the ACVV sometimes have up to 300 clients. The problem is that appointing more social workers costs money, which the organisation does not have. Ms Van der Walt stated that the social workers at the ACVV work very hard and work with "the poorest of poor communities". Due to this lack of human resources, the organisation finds it difficult to be proactive in the work it does and not simply responsive. Ms Fick mentioned the fact that many CPOs have to deal with numerous aspects of child protection and therefore struggle to be focused and effective in the work they do.

Ms Van der Walt highlighted that when the Children's Act was implemented in 2010, government estimated that an additional 60 000 social workers would be needed across the country. The DSD then started providing social work students with bursaries and employing

them after their studies. The problem, however, is that there are not enough posts, leaving between 3000 and 4000 social workers unemployed. Ms Van der Walt stated that social work is no longer considered a scarce skill profession. She also complained that the social workers that work for NGOs generally work much harder than the social workers that work for the government, yet they are paid much less. The subsidies NGOs receive from the DSD for staff salaries are much less than what the DSD pays its own social workers.

4.4.2.3 Public Participation Process

The public participation process has left all three NGOs frustrated. Connect Network highlighted that the public participation process can be onerous and needs to be more robust. While NGOs are invited to comment on policy documents, they are often given very short notice before the deadline. According to Ms Moskoff, this usually happens in November when NGOs are shutting down for the year, “catching NGOs on a back foot”. If NGOs are not positioned to know this and act quickly, they miss out on the opportunity to participate. It sometimes happens that policies are pushed through without the public participating because of the short timeframes given for responses. Ms Van der Walt also complained about the short notice to comment on policy documents. The ACVV would give input into legislation but sometimes national government only communicates with NGOs after the policy decision is already made. She mentioned that the feedback and input the ACVV gives are sometimes well received by government and listened to, but other times not. Ms Van der Walt believes that the ACVV does have a voice but sometimes it is overlooked and has to “scream a little louder”.

Ms Moskoff stated that if CSOs urgently wanted to bring something to government’s attention and put it on its agenda, they could do so through the Commission of Enquiry. However, this is an onerous process that one needs to understand in order to participate in. Not all NGOs are educated about this process or have the necessary skills available to participate in the process. Smaller organisations do not always have access to writing skills, proposals and other necessary resources. In other words, many CSOs do not have access to this participation process, preventing their voices from being heard. Furthermore, NGOs that are not funded by government are often overlooked, Ms Moskoff explained. Since these organisations are not in partnership and close proximity relationally with government, they are sometimes excluded from child protection meetings. The government, thus, does not always provide CSOs with equal access to participate in public debate. Ms Moskoff further

mentioned that the national laws supersede international pressure, but international pressure informs what should be written in the law. This can be challenging when formulating policy.

4.4.2.4 Poor Leadership and Relationships

While there are platforms available for CPOs to collaborate with each other and participate in discussions, Ms Moskoff suggested that these platforms are insufficient due to poor leadership in that space. That is where the role of Connect Network comes in. As a network coordination team, it is filling that gap by pulling Christian-based CSOs together and getting them talking about child protection. Ms Moskoff also stated that there is a significant gap between government and CSOs that are not funded by government. Again, it is not clear who should be the driver of that discussion space – government or civil society?

The ACVV highlighted the importance of fostering good relationships, building trust and getting to know the people working in the child protection arena at the local and provincial level. Ms Van der Walt explained that it is vital to have a good link with someone in the DSD as well as other CPOs. She expressed how grateful she is to personally know the national director of child protection and that she can go to her with any complaints. She underlined that collaboration and communication go hand-in-hand; they cannot collaborate if they do not communicate, but again, they cannot communicate if they do not know each other. It is all about whom you know. Ms Van der Walt is of opinion that there is generally not much interaction in the welfare field, despite the platforms that they share. Ms Fick and Ms Engelbrecht from Abba Adoptions also highlighted the importance of building relationships with different stakeholders because they believe, “If you know someone and you work together, you will get somewhere”. They explained that it is an ongoing challenge because as certain positions are replaced with someone new, they have to start over by building a relationship with that person and getting to know each other.

Another frustration expressed by Ms Van der Walt is the fact that the DSD sometimes treats child protection issues as separate while they are often interconnected. The Department tends to work in ‘silos’. For instance, they want to keep the family sector and child protection sector separate. Ms Van der Walt seemed very frustrated about this since the family sector is a crucial part of child protection. The ACVV policies state that whenever there is a case of child abuse and neglect at a crèche, for example, it falls under the Child Protection portfolio and not Crèches. However, the DSD does not always see it as interlinked.

Ms Fick also raised challenges Abba faces with different government departments. Firstly, it finds the DSD approachable but having insufficient staff and social workers to provide NGOs with good quality services. Ms Fick further mentioned that the Department of Home Affairs is not nearly as approachable. Sometimes Abba would struggle with bad attitudes from this department and a lack of interest to help. For Ms Fick and Ms Engelbrecht, the priority should be the children. Their organisation cannot get children adoptable and place them with a permanent family without a birth certificate, for instance. The different government departments are not always playing their part in helping with the process of getting the child's birth registered and getting them adoptable. According to Ms Fick, there is a lack of cooperation between the different departments and also between the departments and the CPOs, which causes serious delays. It can be a tedious process, especially when having to register a child's birth when the child is already older than one year. Sometimes Abba has to remind the government officials that they are all working towards the same goal – protecting the children.

4.4.2.5 Awareness Raising Challenges

The ACVV highlighted the challenges it faces when it comes to raising awareness about the child protection dilemma. The work it does as a CPO cannot be publicised and needs to be kept confidential. Child abuse and neglect is a sensitive topic that needs to be treated with caution and respect. Informing the public on the seriousness of the child protection dilemma can, therefore, be challenging. On the one hand, children's rights need to be protected but on the other hand, the secrecy could feed the problem of child maltreatment and make it worse. It is important to create awareness and hold people accountable. Ms Van der Walt explained that the challenge is that “child abuse and neglect cannot be ‘seen’”. When it comes to rhino poaching and other environmental issues, people are more likely to give money towards these issues because of their publicity.

4.4.2.6 Social and Cultural-based Challenges

Child protection organisations, especially adoption organisations, sometimes face cultural barriers. Ms Fick mentioned that it is sometimes challenging to find an adoptive family with the same religion and culture as the adoptable child or biological mother. Social workers will always try to do cultural placements and minimise children's losses; however, it is not always possible. Last year a social worker from ACVV placed a Muslim child with a Christian family and then the Muslim Judicial Council contacted them and complained. Abba often has

to explain to adoptive parents from a different culture that there are ways of getting the child accepted into their family.

Sometimes the challenge lies with the extended families. Some cultures react worse than other cultures towards the biological mother when they find out that she is considering getting her child adopted. Another issue is that hospital nurses often judge the biological mothers for wanting to “give [her] child away”, as they refer to it, and then they would disrespect the mother and try to force her to keep the child. Another challenge that is highlighted by Abba Adoptions is the use of drugs and alcohol during pregnancy. This often results in babies being born prematurely and there are long-term effects on the child’s development. Finding adoptive families for these children can be difficult.

4.4.3 Associational Life

This sub-section will highlight the nine characteristics of the associational life approach that have been identified through the interviews. These characteristics have been outlined in sections 1.6.3.3 of Chapter 1 and 2.4 of Chapter 2.

4.4.3.1 Distinct from States and Markets

Connect Network has decided not to receive any funding from government. The reason for this is so that it can stay an independent civil society movement or organisation, distinct from the state. Ms Moskoff explained that organisations that are contracted by government actually carry out government’s work. Government funds organisations to execute their services. She made it clear that Connect Network is separate from government and wants to protect its independence. Ms Van der Walt stated that the ACVV has a public benefit mission and vision, which makes it an NPO. All profits go to the benefit of the community and those that are vulnerable. The ACVV is, therefore, also distinct from the state and markets even though it receives funding from government. Abba Adoptions works with the Western Cape government but is separate from government. All three organisations are registered NGOs working to serve the community and are not considered ‘organs’ of the state. They are not allowed to distribute profits, and must meet certain governance criteria.

4.4.3.2 Legally-protected, Non-violent, Self-organising and Self-reflexive

All three case studies are protected within a legal framework. In 1997, South Africa adopted the Non-Profit Organisations Act (No. 71 of 1997). These organisations had to register under

the NPO Act to receive registered non-profit organisation status, as well as funding from government – as is the case with ACVV and Abba Adoptions. Ms Van der Walt explained that the branches of the ACVV are all legal entities with their own NPO certificate but are affiliated to the national body, which is the ACVV national council. All three organisations portray qualities of being non-violent, self-organising and self-reflexive. Connect Network helps other NGOs to be well run, well governed and well organised. This includes training them in finance management, staff management, project planning and sustainability.

4.4.3.3 Tension

This characteristic was one of the characteristics of the associational life approach that was most frequently mentioned during the interviews (see Appendix A). All three case studies experience tension with other NGOs, churches as well as with the state institutions. Ms Moskoff explained that with the boom of NPOs in the mid-1990s, many emerged out of churches. In other words, many churches would set up a non-profit within their church structure. What used to be called their mission's work now became non-profit work. No longer were they accountable to only the elders of the church as in missions, but they were now accountable to government. This meant that they had to send in reports and have certain structures in place, which caused many unexpected and unplanned problems between the church and the NPO. This tension is still evident today. Abba Adoptions also experiences some tension with churches that do not want to allow their organisation to speak at their churches and raise awareness there – the reason for this remains unclear.

All three organisations undertake considerable lobbying and advocacy work, some more than others. In 2017, Connect Network joined a lobby group with other NGOs outside of its network to lobby the Western Cape's Commissioners Bill. This tension between the lobby group and the government allowed for accountability and action from government. Connect Network and the ACVV further mentioned the tension that occurs when they find themselves in a secular space and have to discuss issues that go against their Christian values, for instance when they were discussing the Children's Act amendments about five or six years ago (see section 4.2.2.1). Ms Van der Walt mentioned that the NGO Coalition is currently busy with a court case against the DSD for not honouring their service-level agreement. The ACVV is also a member of the National Coalition of NGOs (NACOS), which consists of approximately 30 NGOs. They act as a 'watchdog' to the national and provincial departments of social development and would question the minister about certain decisions made. Abba

Adoptions also expressed its frustration towards the Department of Home Affairs, as mentioned earlier in section 4.4.2.4, and made mention of the tension that exists in their relationship.

4.4.3.4 Political Effects

All three organisations are apolitical associations that have had political effects through their lobbying and advocacy work. For instance, as a result of the lobbying done by Connect Network, together with other NGOs, for the implementation of a Western Cape Commissioner for Children Act, the Act (the Western Cape Commissioner for Children Act, No. 2 of 2019) was passed and enacted in February 2019. Ms Moskoff pointed out that Connect Network formed part of the public participation process to make it happen. She added that the big reach it has as a network gives them some clout, as opposed to one NGO looking after six children.

After this Act was implemented, the lobby group went back to the lobbying table to hold the Western Cape government accountable to actually employ someone in this position. Connect Network invited children in the network to participate in the process as child ambassadors. As part of the network plan, child ambassadors between 11 and 16 years old are now trained in the network. Two of their highlights last year were to participate with the wider group of children to say what they would like this new Western Cape child protection commissioner to be like, for instance what qualification and persona they should have. This was presented to the Western Cape government. As a result of the lobbying process, children are now taking agency for decisions made on their behalf.

The ACVV often comments on policy documents, such as the Social Professions Bill. The inputs the organisation makes are not always taken into consideration but sometimes they are, which could have a positive impact on public policy. Abba's director actively participates in discussions on different platforms, as well as with national government and the national coalition, NACOS. Abba's headoffice also contributes to the amendments that are proposed to the Children's Act. On a national level, Abba gives input to the national DSD and the Bellville office mainly communicates with the Western Cape DSD.

4.4.3.5 Voluntary

All three organisations include voluntary or consensual membership into associations. In other words, there is no threat of possible loss of status or public rights or benefits when one decides to leave the group. All three case studies have volunteers that are helping the NGO to be more effective in its service-delivery efforts. Connect Network as an office has child ambassadors and volunteer interns. The staff component of the network, between paid and unpaid (volunteer) staff, consists of approximately 4500 workers. There is an almost 50% split in paid staff and volunteers. Ms Moskoff stated that the volunteers remain significant contributors to the workforce and have nearly doubled in numbers since 2014.

Each ACVV branch has a management committee consisting of unpaid volunteers, as well as sub-committees that manage different services, for instance crèches, old age homes or after school centres. Those board or committee members are all volunteers. About 2000-3000 volunteers in total serve on boards. The ACVV also has other volunteers that do not want to be on a board but would like to serve the community through good works. Abba also has a board of volunteers, which forms part of the national Abba board. It further has sub-committees consisting of volunteers. In Cape Town, it has about ten safe parents who are also considered as volunteers. The organisation also has Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCC) with their own volunteers caring for babies.

4.4.3.6 Pluralistic

Ms Moskoff stated that there are approximately 220 000 registered non-profit organisations in South Africa. She explained that it is quite an unregulated sector and a person can register a non-profit organisation by simply going onto a website. The idea of Connect Network is to bring organisations together that share a common vision and purpose – to protect vulnerable women and children. However, the execution of the vision looks different. Each organisation has different programmes and projects to reach this vision. When different interest groups come together to lobby against government decisions and certain policies, the diversity in the room becomes evident. Ms Moskoff specifically referred to the discussions around the Children's Act amendments about five or six years ago when there were many disagreements around contentious issues, such as corporal punishment. The Christian-based CSOs that form part of Connect Network might share a common vision but when they step into a secular space there is frequently tension when discussing issues that go against the values of

Christianity. Within that space, civil society consists of diverse forms of associational life that do not necessarily share a normative consensus or common political agenda.

4.4.3.7 Fulfilment in Life

Ms Moskoff shared that at the mid-1990s, there was a boom of NPOs starting to pop up because of the Non-Profit Organisations Act (No. 71 of 1997). So every church that was doing some mission work and every big-hearted person who wanted to open up a home for babies or a counselling centre started registering what they were doing as non-profits. Most NGOs were started by Christians or people who wanted to do good deeds. This gave them a purpose in life. Ms Moskoff further shared, “If I speak to someone who started a street children’s project or a home for vulnerable women or people coming out of prison, I see that same look in their eyes that it was a deep calling that they were called to do and that they are passionate about what they do”. These NGO directors found meaning and fulfilment in life and have also helped others do the same. Connect Network underlined that all their profits go into the benefit of the community and those that are vulnerable – to bring them hope and a future.

Ms Van der Walt’s mother has been with the ACVV for 50 years already. She is 83 years old but still serves as the chairperson of one of the boards. The ACVV has given her meaning and fulfilment in life. Her passion for children and communities is what has kept her actively involved for so many years. Ms Van der Walt has been working at the ACVV headoffice for 24 years and before that she worked as a field social worker. She has been working in child protection for 35 years already. She said that the reason she stayed in this field for so many years is because she is truly passionate about child protection and wants to ensure that the services of the ACVV are of an absolutely high quality so that it can provide children with the best service. Abba Adoptions has brought new life and meaning to thousands of abandoned babies in South Africa. The biological mothers are also important to the organisation and it would counsel these women in becoming free from guilt, shame and condemnation.

4.4.3.8 Positive Values

All three case studies are informed by Christian values. Connect Network is driven by a scripture in the Bible, in James 1 verse 27, which states, “Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for the orphans and widows in their distress and

refusing to let the world corrupt you”. The organisation translated “orphans and widows in their distress” to “women and children at risk”. Connect Network and its affiliates believe that it is their God-given assignment to care for vulnerable children and women. As a Christian-based organisation, Connect Network is committed to Christ and seeks to demonstrate biblical values in its work; it is committed to the dignity, uniqueness and worth of every individual, regarding everyone with love, compassion and respect; and it is committed to quality, accountability and best practice, which are reflected in its biblical worldview.

The ACVV does not mention its Christian values directly in its mission and vision but in its Constitution. The ACVV did not see it as necessary since its values all link with the Christian foundation. The organisation has five core values, namely:

- i. Integrity: Acting honestly and carrying through with the work undertaken;
- ii. Compassion: Nurturing, developing, protecting and caring for vulnerable people;
- iii. Excellence: Purposely working to render excellent service;
- iv. Dignity: Respecting all people; and
- v. Accountability: Acting responsibly.

The values of Abba Adoptions include loyalty, integrity, respect, transparency and accountability. The organisation’s vision is to strengthen, support and build families. All three organisations serve as a breeding ground for positive attitudes and values in South Africa, impacting and transforming communities.

4.4.3.9 Stronger Together

This characteristic of the associational life approach was mentioned the most frequently during the interviews (see Appendix A). Connect Network was born after Ms Moskoff recognised that there was a passion and purpose that needed to be connected – the protection of women and children. After spending time with directors from different NGOs, she realised that all the beneficiaries have been vulnerable women and children. They then decided to start a network, which they formalised and registered as an entity. The network started with 15 NGOs that all shared the same Christian faith and values and all worked, in some way or another, towards the protection of children. The intention was that the organisations in the network would cross-pollinate, work together, share resources and eventually advocate together on common issues. Ms Moskoff explained that it was about being “better together”

and not wanting to work in silos. They set up an organisational capacity building system with children in mind. The idea was to create a movement of people, in their case Christians, all working in the child protection environment so that they can have a joint voice in addressing public policies.

The network has lobbied together and has witnessed many successes, such as the enactment of the Western Cape Commissioner for Children Act, No. 2 of 2019. Since it has such a wide outreach as a network, it has more influence. Through networking, equipping and collaborating with affiliates and relevant stakeholders, the organisations in the network can align their efforts and set solid goals to be more effective in their work with women and children in the Western Cape. Due to their joint efforts, approximately 345 000 children in the Cape Town area are beneficiaries.

There is also a provincial and national Child Protection Forum that allows CPOs to join their efforts, and to interact and communicate with government. Ms Van der Walt further mentioned that there is a lot of communication that happens on the ground between the social workers from different organisations. She emphasised the importance of communication and working together in order to be effective in their child protection efforts. Abba has a very good relationship with other adoption organisations and CPOs in the Western Cape and highlighted how they cooperate and support one another. According to Ms Engelbrecht, they are all like one big happy family, even if they work for different organisations – they have a common purpose that brings them together.

4.4.4 Public Life

This sub-section will highlight the characteristics of the public life approach, as discussed in section 4.2.2 that have been identified through the interviews. However, in discussing these characteristics, it largely feels like pushing a square peg into a round hole – it does not fit. It does not explain the reality of civil society in South Africa. The public life approach does not allow for this kind of diversity of values. While there are elements of the public life approach evident in these CSOs, it is the very point of this research to show that this approach would likely not recognise these types of organisations. While it supposedly looks like it encourages deliberation and diversity, the public life approach eventually pushes towards conformity, which in turn may exclude religious organisations.

4.4.4.1 Arena for Deliberation

Ms Moskoff mentioned that Connect Network would sometimes participate in public debates and discussions around public policy and government decisions. Within this space, lobby groups deliberate and often get into arguments around certain issues. Ms Van der Walt from the ACVV also referred to forums that provide NGOs with opportunities to interact with each other, as well as with government. The DSD in the Western Cape, for instance, has a provincial Child Protection Forum for collaboration and deliberation (see section 4.4.3.9). There is also a national Child Protection Forum that allows CPOs to communicate and interact with government. The ACVV further belongs to NACOS, which gives approximately 30 NGOs opportunities to question the minister of Social Development about certain decisions. Abba forms part of a provincial adoption coalition, as well as a national coalition, NACSA. Apart from that, Abba also forms part of the Provincial Child Protection Forum (PCPF).

4.4.4.2 Collective Vision and Shared Truth

The public life approach views civil society as a public sphere that searches for collective visions and shared truth through dialogue and discussion. Connect Network has provided Christian-based CSOs with a space to collaborate, discuss matters around child protection and form a joint voice. These organisations have a collective vision (protecting vulnerable women and children) and share the truth of their Christian faith. As mentioned in section 4.4.3.9, Ms Moskoff stated that through networking, equipping and collaborating with affiliates and relevant stakeholders, they get to align their efforts and set collective goals to be more effective in their work with women and children in the Western Cape. While these organisations have collective visions and share the same faith, the ‘public sphere’ that they find themselves in includes, in essence, homogeneous groups and not heterogeneous groups as is the case with civil society in the larger context of South Africa.

As mentioned previously, there are also the provincial and national child protection forums that exist for organisations to form collective visions. Then there is the Western Cape Adoption Coalition, the National Adoption Coalition of South Africa (NACSA) and the Provincial Child Protection Forum (PCPF). These forums include organisations with collective visions but that do not necessarily share the same ‘truth’. Again, they would not be able to reach a shared truth with other CSOs. The question then is, do they still add value? Are they important to society?

4.4.4.3 Common Good, Public Interest or Consensus

According to the public life approach, civil society consists of groups that care about finding the common good, public interest or consensus. To reach a legitimate normative consensus, it is required that different groups have equal voice and access. In other words, the public interest suffers if only certain truths or voices are represented; alternative viewpoints are silenced by exclusion or suppression and if one set of voices is heard more loudly than others. The case studies in fact highlighted unequal access and marginalisation. Ms Moskoff explained that Connect Network and its affiliates are definitely sidelined by the stronger lobbyist groups who are pushing for certain policies to go through.

Ms Moskoff stated that the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the first legally binding international convention to affirm human rights for all children. South Africa ratified the UNCRC in June 1995. Nations that ratify this convention are bound to it by international law. Compliance to this law is monitored by the UN committee for the rights of the child composed of 18 experts. Countries are reviewed for compliancy periodically. She explained that there are some criteria in the South African/African context that are challenging for the South African government to legislate due to cultural and religious practices that are widespread and entrenched in accepted norms, for example corporal punishment as a means to discipline children. Ms Moskoff seemed frustrated by this because in the process, religious views are sidelined for the purpose of finding the middle ground.

According to Ms Moskoff, Connect Network is not silenced because of its Christian faith but it is certainly overlooked, partly because government does not fund it. There are sometimes city-wide meetings around strategies for children that Connect Network would not be invited to. In other words, CSOs that are not funded by government do not enjoy equal access in the public participation process, which causes the ‘public interest’ to suffer and consensus becomes unattainable. Ms Van der Walt commented that NGOs in general are being overlooked and undervalued by the national and provincial governments. While the three case studies, like many other NGOs, are respected because of the high-quality services they provide, they are not commended and do not receive the support commensurate with the value they add to society. Government gives a lot of attention and acknowledgment to their

own staff. Not all interest groups in civil society are, therefore, equal since NGOs are often overlooked.

4.4.4.4 Willing to Change or Compromise

The public life approach views civil society as comprising groups willing to refine their opinions and cede some territory to others. Ms Moskoff stated in the interview that certain donors treat Connect Network and its affiliates differently because they are informed by Christian values. The minute some donors hear that an organisation has Christian values or subscribe to one faith, they are reluctant to fund them because they only want to fund entities that are impartial. On the other hand, there is a Christian-donor community that only wants to fund those with a Christian vision. Ms Moskoff explained that because Connect Network sits “toggled between the two all the time”, it sometimes feels the need to repackage its story to match the donor. However, this is not possible without compromising, which it is not willing to do. In other words, sometimes Christian-based organisations might feel pressured to compromise but are not prepared to.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented and analysed the primary data collected from the key informant interviews with three Christian-based CPOs, namely ACVV, Abba Adoptions and Connect Network. The data was presented in terms of the summary terms or codes identified, which involved the contributions of Christian-based CSOs in child protection, the challenges they face in effectively achieving their objectives, and the different characteristics of the associational life and public life approaches that were highlighted in the interviews.

Due to the underlying Christian values of these CSOs, they would not be recognised by the public life approach because they can never have that ‘shared truth’. Although they make a valuable contribution to society, the public life approach is exclusionary in essence. It pretends to be something it is not – it pretends to recognise diversity but it still expects organisations will and should conform. Christian-based organisations make significant contributions but if the public life approach becomes the more accepted approach towards civil society, we are going to lose out on these types of organisations and the very important roles that they do fulfil in South African society. The plurality and diversity of organisations should thus be embraced.

After presenting and analysing the primary data from the case studies, the next and final chapter, Chapter 5, provides a reflection and overview of the study's main findings and contributions. This chapter will discuss some of the challenges encountered while conducting this study, as well as provide suggestions for further research.

Chapter 5: Study Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

In the introductory chapter of this thesis, Chapter 1, the research problem was explained in terms of certain approaches to understanding civil society, such as the public life approach, not recognising the need for multiple interests to be represented. The public life approach instead requires groups to find a shared ‘truth’. As a result, many religious groups, including Christian-based organisations, are inadvertently ‘disqualified’ from participating. While these religious-based organisations can play a vital developmental role in democratic societies, their contributions are often under-researched and undervalued. An analysis of the contributions of Christian-based civil society organisations (CSOs) to child protection in South Africa, as discussed in Chapter 4, thus served to challenge the public life approach to civil society.

This concluding chapter aims to draw it all together and view the primary data against the theoretical backdrop of the secondary data. Conclusions will be drawn about civil society’s relationship with the state and the contributions of Christian-based CSOs to child protection in South Africa, the challenges they face and how their contributions are explained (or not) by the associational life and public life theoretical approaches. The primary research question and two research sub-questions will thus be discussed. The main findings and contributions of the study will be highlighted, followed by an overview of challenges encountered in this study and suggestions for future research.

5.2 Study Overview

Chapter 2 formed the theoretical and conceptual chapter and explored existing literature regarding the development and role of civil society as well as its relationship with the state. This chapter highlighted the contention that exists around this topic and the different understandings and roles of civil society. Two prominent theoretical approaches in civil society theory have been identified, namely the associational life approach and the public life approach, as discussed by Michael Edwards (2004) in his book, *Civil Society*. While the first approach recognises plurality and diversity, the latter approach understands civil society as conformity-building and a willingness to compromise for the sake of finding a shared truth. As a result, the public life approach tends to disqualify groups unwilling to conform to this

shared truth. This chapter highlighted that religion is a personal belief or truth that shapes people's social reality and influences their behaviour and actions; they are not likely to compromise on this truth and should not have to feel pressured to do so. This chapter argued that religious pluralism is wholesome and allows for a healthy civil society and democracy. The associational life approach was thus deemed better suited to explain and understand pluralistic societies, such as South Africa.

Chapter 3 formed the contextual chapter and focused on civil society in South Africa and its plurality of relations with the state. This chapter further explored the role religious-based CSOs play in contemporary South Africa and, more specifically, the role these organisations play in protecting society's most vulnerable group of people, namely children. This chapter finally underlined the serious social problem of child abuse and neglect in South Africa and to what extent Christian-based organisations have contributed toward alleviating this problem.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, formed the empirical chapter and discussed the case studies, which included three Christian-based organisations: ACVV, Abba Adoptions and Connect Network. The primary data that was gathered from the key informant interviews was presented and analysed. The content was discussed in terms of the contributions of Christian-based CSOs to child protection in South Africa, the challenges they face in effectively achieving their objectives, and what their contributions mean in terms of the two theoretical approaches.

5.3 Discussion

In this section, the content from the interviews will be reviewed against the theoretical backdrop of the secondary data. First, the findings regarding the relationship between the state and CSOs will be highlighted. Thereafter, the answers to the primary research question as well as the research sub-questions will be unpacked.

5.3.1 State-Civil Society Relations

The literature in Chapters 2 and 3 has highlighted that civil society is not static and is moulded by the political transition of a country. In other words, it changes and adapts to the broader political context in which it finds itself. As an established organisation that started in 1904, the ACVV has existed throughout South Africa's political transition. It too has changed

and adapted to the political context of the country. The organisation started as a white organisation, serving Afrikaans white women and children in the British concentration camps during the Anglo Boer War (referred to now as the Anglo-SA war). As the country moved into the liberalisation period and racial discrimination became more unacceptable, the objectives of the organisation also shifted. In the 1980s, the ACVV opened up to all races and its services diversified.

Literature has also highlighted the contention that exists among scholars around state-civil society relations. While some scholars view civil society as a counteractive force to the centralising tendencies of the state and thus argue for an adversarial relationship, other scholars promote the idea of partnerships and a more collaborative relationship (De Jager, 2006:106). An adversarial relationship means that civil society acts as a ‘watchdog’ over the state and ensures legitimacy, accountability and transparency, which allow for good governance. The collaborative role civil society plays refers to a partnership relationship with the state where they work together to address social needs.

However, this thesis has argued that civil society does not always have the same function in society and therefore a single homogenous set of relations between the state and civil society is argued to be unattainable and unrealistic. Any healthy relationship will have a certain amount of disagreement that should not be negated. This plurality of relations allows for a vibrant and sound civil society and, ultimately, a healthy democracy. It is only natural for some state-civil society relations to be adversarial and others more collaborative. While many religious institutions in South Africa support government in fulfilling their goals, they sometimes also play a watchdog role in keeping government accountable.

This plurality of relations became evident through the case studies. Connect Network has more of an adversarial relationship with the state, since it is not funded or contracted by government and does considerable advocacy and lobbying work. The ACVV mostly has a partnership relationship with the state since it receives state subsidies and is expected, in turn, to deliver services. The organisation is required to send in quarterly progress reports on their achievements and services delivered. However, it can also play a watchdog role and hold government accountable. Abba has both a partnership and adversarial relationship with the state. As a designated child protection organisation (CPO), it needs to submit four progress reports after each quarter of a financial year to government and give feedback after services

because it is funded by the state. However, Abba too does advocacy and lobbying work. The lines are, therefore, not as rigid as some scholars suggest and most CSOs have a plurality of relations with the state.

In section 3.5 of Chapter 3, it was highlighted that the South African state, under the leadership of the ANC, tends to confine the role of CSOs to service-deliverers and policy implementers and relies heavily on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide social services to vulnerable children. The ACVV explained that most CPOs are dependent on state funding and that it is becoming increasingly challenging to even survive without government's financial support. Government pays their salaries and, in return, they are expected to implement legislation and deliver extended services for government. The Department of Social Development (DSD) has, for instance, approached Abba Adoptions and offered to provide them with subsidies, funding and more social workers to increase their capacity and extend their services. The key findings from the empirical research served to confirm the plurality of state-civil society relations that exist in reality.

5.3.2 Discussing the Contributions of Christian-based CSOs

To recap, the primary research question of this study is: What are the contributions of Christian-based CSOs to child protection in South Africa? This sub-section looks at some of the contributions that have been highlighted in the literature in Chapters 2 and 3 and then discusses these in light of the findings from the interviews in Chapter 4.

Section 3.4 of Chapter 3 highlighted that neither the state, nor any other NGO in South Africa, can reach and influence the public more regularly and consistently than religious-based organisations (Erasmus, 2005:139). Makoto (2019:73) mentioned that religious actors serve as non-state conflict managers with infrastructure extending to the remotest corner of any given state. The primary data highlighted that Christian-based organisations mostly render services in rural and non-rural areas. Approximately 320 000 children and families benefit from the ACVV's social work services and the larger organisation reaches about 800 000 lives a year. Connect Network consists of a network of organisations reaching about 345 000 children in the Cape Town area alone. As highlighted in section 3.5 of Chapter 3, approximately 3000 children in South Africa are abandoned each year of which about 1000 gets adopted, according to the National Adoption Coalition of South Africa (Holmes, 2019). Abba Adoptions was responsible for placing 272 of these children with permanent families in

2019. This is about one quarter of all adoptions in South Africa. Thus, a key contribution of these CSOs is their *reach*.

All three organisations have further contributed to strengthening other CPOs, providing training and advice to ultimately improve the quality of the latter's services and maximise their efforts and responses to child abuse and neglect. Connect Network, in particular, has had a significant impact on building the capacity of the organisations in its network and getting them to work together. Chapter 3 further underlined that CPOs find it difficult to be effective and maintain quality services. However, all three case studies have indicated that they are committed to quality, accountability and best practice. Their services are of a high standard and for that reason they are well respected and well received by government and other CPOs. A second key contribution identified has been to *support, improve and build the capacity* of the child protection environment.

According to Melton and Anderson (2008:183), religious organisations, particularly Christian-value based organisations, have been among the key proponents of children's rights. Chapter 2 has further highlighted that CSOs, including religious organisations, can play an important watchdog role. Kuperus (1999:658) highlighted that many religious organisations have opposed the ANC-led government when it has violated principles of democracy, and have held government accountable. The interviews have shown that Christian-based CSOs would sometimes go to government with lawyers as the ACVV did when the third amendment Bill on the Children's Act was being scrutinised. The organisations from the case studies all participate in lobbying and advocacy to influence policy and protect children's rights. They sometimes partner with other NGOs to provide constructive input to policy documents and amendments. A third contribution has thus been to *further children's rights* through lobbying and advocacy.

As mentioned in both Chapters 2 and 3, religion is considered a carrier of positive values (De Jager and De Jager, 2019:226; Ferrari, 2011:34). Section 2.5.1 has highlighted that religion can shape people's worldview and determine their 'reality', attitude and behaviour (De Jager & De Jager, 2019:227; Makoto, 2019:69; McGuire, 1997:238). Putnam (2000:67) has also stressed that religious ideals are powerful sources of commitment and motivation. It is largely individuals' commitment to God that makes them behave in a responsible and committed way (Ferrari, 2011:31). The primary data from the interviews supports these arguments and

shows that those who work in Christian-based CSOs generally believe that it is their God-given assignment to care for vulnerable children and women. Connect Network, for instance, seeks to demonstrate biblical values in its work and it is committed to the dignity, uniqueness and worth of every individual, regarding everyone with love, compassion and respect, which is reflected in the organisation's biblical worldview. Every organisation that joins Connect Network has to subscribe to these values and the basic tenants of the Christian faith, as outlined in the organisation's constitution.

Makoto (2019:80) further highlighted the ability of religious groups to win ordinary people's trust, inspire voluntary activity, encourage caring and social services, mobilise resources, raise consciousness about community problems, empower social groups with little influence and create hope and optimism during challenging times. McGuire (1997:247) has also argued that religious associations have assisted in bridging barriers of tribe, family, nationality and race – ultimately connecting segments of society that once were disparate. The primary data supports these statements as all three case studies are dedicated to the practices mentioned above. These organisations treat everyone with respect regardless of their race, religion, sexuality, culture and class; they encourage voluntary activity, provide social services to vulnerable women and children, raise funds for and awareness about child protection, empower communities and smaller CBOs, and provide counselling and therapeutic support. These Christian-based CSOs have also contributed to bridging barriers and uniting certain segments of society through their various child protection services and initiatives. The literature in sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.5 of Chapter 2 has shown that social connectedness is essential for a sound civil society and healthy democracy (Putnam, 2000; Edwards, 2004; McGuire, 1997).

Putnam (1995) has argued that associations breed social capital, and that social capital breeds success – in this case, social development. In essence, associations or CSOs can produce the 'norms' of the good society. Chapter 2 has shown that religion is a key source of social capital and that religious groups potentially play a central role in the development of norms in society. The literature has, in essence, indicated that religious organisations help foster positive civic virtues, and serve as a powerful force for positive change in South Africa (De Jager & De Jager, 2019; Erasmus, 2005; Kuperus, 1999; Makoto, 2019; Ferrari, 2011; Soriano, 2013; Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006). The values espoused by the organisations in the three case studies include integrity, compassion, excellence, dignity, accountability, loyalty,

respect and transparency. Christian-based CSOs can thus serve as a breeding ground for positive attitudes and values in South Africa, impacting and transforming communities and, in turn, the lives of children. The fourth contribution includes the role Christian-based CSOs play as *carriers of values* conducive to building social capital.

Furthermore, Max Weber (1930) recognised that religious ideas have ripple effects on the broader context of society. The work of all three Christian-based organisations has had social, economic and political effects. Ms Moskoff from Connect Network explained that child protection affects the economic activity of the home, education, psycho-social issues and many other aspects of society. Erasmus (2005:139) also explained that the overall wellbeing of communities depends largely on the individual contributions of the citizens living there. By instilling and fostering positive values into communities and having a large footprint in society, these Christian-based CSOs, therefore, contribute to the attitude and behaviour of individuals and, in turn, the overall wellbeing of their communities. Ms Moskoff stated in the interview, “If you look at how well a society is doing, you just have to look at the children”. In other words, by contributing towards the safety, health and wellbeing of children, these CPOs also *contribute towards the wellbeing of society* – a fifth, and essential contribution.

Furthermore, Chapter 3 highlighted the issue of fatherlessness in South Africa. According to Stats SA’s 2017 Community Survey, the biological fathers of 61.8% of children under the age of 18 were absent from the household (Eyewitness News, 2018). In 2018, 43% of all children in South Africa – 8.5 million children – lived with their mothers but not with their fathers. The irregular structure of the country’s families and high rates of fatherlessness leave children powerless (Seedat et al., 2009:1015). By no means does this imply that children are guaranteed to be safe and protected when they have fathers as some fathers are abusive. Fatherlessness does, however, leave children more vulnerable to different forms of abuse. The literature in section 3.5 of Chapter 3 has shown that a large network of religious organisations in South Africa play a central part in creating protective and nurturing environments and developing safety nets for neglected children (Chames & Lamofsky, 2014:43; Human Sciences Research Council, 2009:13-14; Melton and Anderson, 2008). The three case studies certainly contribute to creating family-style environments by improving the environment of a child’s own biological family or helping the child find a permanent family where they are cared for and protected. The sixth contribution identified has been to form a *social support network* in a very broken society.

5.3.3 Discussing the Two Approaches to Civil Society

This section seeks to answer the first research sub-question: What does the role that Christian-based CSOs play in child protection mean in terms of the associational life and public life theoretical approaches to civil society? This section again considers the associational life approach that recognises the importance of a pluralist and dynamic civil society by reflecting on the primary data gathered from the three case studies as well as the secondary data from Chapters 2 and 3.

The primary and secondary data has shown that Christian-based CSOs play a significant role in protecting and nurturing children, strengthening communities, promoting social development and ensuring a healthy democracy. Their contributions include statutory work, counselling, empowerment, raising awareness, training, capacity-building, networking, adoption, lobbying and advocacy work. Most Christian-based CSOs share the same biblical worldview, values and ‘truth’ of their faith. However, as soon as these groups enter a secular space, there is tension and disagreement. The primary data has indicated that these religious-based organisations are often overpowered and sidelined by stronger lobbyist groups pushing for certain policies to be passed. Christian-based CSOs sometimes feel pressured to compromise on the truth of their faith. Some donors also treat them differently because these organisations are informed by Christian values.

As previously noted, the public life approach recognises civil society as having the responsibility to find a shared truth while the associational life approach acknowledges pluralism. This thesis has argued that ‘truth’ cannot always be shared – especially not in diverse and pluralist societies. ‘Truth’ means different things to different groups and while democratic *values* can be shared, *truth* cannot. The public life approach thus arguably conflates truth with values. The primary and secondary data have highlighted that religious groups can play a key role in fostering positive values in societies and practically impacting communities and the broader social context. As underlined in section 2.5.5 of Chapter 2, if individuals have to give up, compromise or marginalise the truth of their faith when participating in open debate, their right to religious freedom is infringed upon. As argued in the previous chapters, pluralism, especially in democratic settings, should be embraced because there is life and vibrancy in this pluralism – in the differences and disagreement.

South Africa consists of a rich diversity of races, cultures and languages. A democratic government should thus celebrate and protect the plurality of civil society. The primary data again affirms the associational life approach as it acknowledges civil society's diversity. This approach, in essence, recognises that religious-based organisations can actively participate in civil society and have their voices heard without being sidelined. The interviews have highlighted all the characteristics of the associational life approach, which describes civil society as: i) distinct from states and markets; ii) legally-protected, non-violent, self-organising and self-reflexive; iii) in tension with each other as well as with state institutions; iv) apolitical with political effects; v) having voluntary or consensual membership; vi) pluralistic; vii) helping people find fulfilment in life; viii) a breeding ground for positive values; ix) and stronger when linked together.

Two characteristics of the public life approach have been identified in the interviews, namely: i) it is an arena for deliberation where different interest groups get to debate and discuss certain issues; and ii) it is a public sphere that searches for collective visions and shared truth through dialogue and discussion. However, a collective vision was only found when CPOs gathered and collaborated in a space with the same goal in mind – protecting children and promoting their wellbeing. A shared truth is unlikely to be found if they do not subscribe to the same faith. A shared truth was evident, however, when Christian-based CSOs gathered and agreed on the same basic tenants of the Christian faith. As mentioned in the previous section, every organisation that joins Connect Network has to subscribe to the values of the organisation and the basic principles of Christianity regardless of denomination. Therefore, it might be possible to find a collective vision or shared truth when homogeneous groups assemble but it is more unlikely when a diverse or heterogeneous group of CSOs enter the same room. The public life approach, therefore, does not adequately understand or explain the role of civil society in a pluralistic, democratic society.

5.3.4 Discussing the Challenges faced by CSOs

This section discusses the second research sub-question: What are the challenges that these religious-based CSOs face in fulfilling their contributions? This section will, in essence, highlight some of the key challenges that were mentioned in section 4.5.1.2 of Chapter 4 and view these against the secondary data from the theoretical and contextual chapters.

Chames and Lamofsky (2014:43) have argued that a protective environment can only be created for children when all role-players, including the state and non-state actors, work together in the best interest of children. From the case studies, one can see that the different state departments do not always cooperate with the NGOs. For instance, some departments, such as the Department of Home Affairs, do not always play their part in the process of getting the child's birth registered and getting them adoptable. This sometimes causes serious delays and ultimately affects the child. The state, civil society and local communities, therefore, all need to work together to improve the well-being of South Africa's children. The primary data shows a need for stronger leadership to drive collaboration initiatives between CPOs as well as between CPOs and the state. Insufficient leadership has been a serious gap in the child protection field. The first key challenge is identified as a *lack of cooperation and poor leadership*.

The literature has further highlighted that CPOs experience challenges in receiving funding from donors and government (Ranchod, 2007; Lehman, 2008; Edwards, 2004). It is mostly the larger and well-organised formal NGOs that have access to government funding. Smaller informal NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs) and grass-root organisations (GROs) may have limited capacity to adhere to the requirements of contractual work and therefore may not qualify for government funding (see section 3.5). Ms Van der Walt from the ACVV mentioned that it is becoming extremely challenging for CPOs to survive without state subsidies since raising funds and finding donors can be difficult. Key challenge two includes a *resource problem*, particularly funding.

The primary data also indicated that CBOs do not always have the necessary skills and resources to access the public participation process and are therefore excluded. In 2017, Connect Network was a contributing partner to forming the Child Protection Collaborative (CPC), a platform that was created specifically to hear the voices of these smaller CBOs, document their inputs and present these to government. As Greenstein (2003) has highlighted, smaller CBOs should not be marginalised since they play a vital role in democratic societies, especially in poverty alleviation and responding to issues on the ground. Government should thus acknowledge the contributions of smaller CBOs and help to build their capacity, strengthen their operations and provide them with equal access into the public participation process.

The primary data has also highlighted that CSOs that are not funded by government are sometimes overlooked and excluded from public debates because they are not considered as ‘partners’ of government. In other words, government funding provides CSOs with more public participation opportunities. However, with government funding comes a partnership and dependency relationship. So if NGOs want an equal ‘voice’ and equal access into the public participation process, they basically need to give up their independence. The general trend in South Africa, in essence, is that CSOs cannot enjoy funding from government, independence and an equal voice simultaneously. This raises serious concerns. As mentioned in section 3.3 of Chapter 3, CSOs must be independent, capacitated, resourced and legitimate to be truly effective (Mafunisa, 2004:496). The third challenge CSOs face involves *unequal access into the public participation process* and *protecting their independence*.

As mentioned in the previous section, the primary data highlighted the challenge Christian-based CSOs face in receiving funding because they subscribe to one faith. Donors are sometimes reluctant to fund religious-based organisations. Makoto (2019:79) urged government to acknowledge the spiritual dimension of religious-based CSOs and support and appreciate them for the role they play in society. Challenge four thus includes *misperceptions and negative attitudes*. Other challenges mentioned in section 4.4.2 of Chapter 4 are awareness raising challenges and social and cultural-based challenges.

5.4 Key Findings and Contributions

Since there is limited integration between empirical and theoretical research on civil society in South Africa, this thesis has aimed to address this gap by analysing three case studies of religious-based CSOs and comparing the empirical findings with the theoretical findings, as explored above in section 5.3. The theoretical as well as the empirical contributions of Christian-based CSOs to child protection have been highlighted, adding to existing literature on associational life in South Africa. Not only do these groups play a central role in promoting the protection and wellbeing of children, they also play a key role in promoting democracy and holding the government accountable. The contributions of Christian-based CSOs include the large footprint they have in South Africa and their wide reach that extends to the remotest corner of the country, advocacy and lobbying work in protecting children’s rights, fostering positive values and stimulating positive change, creating protective and nurturing environments and empowering communities.

This research has furthermore found that some challenges Christian-based CSOs face include a lack of cooperation and poor leadership, insufficient resources, accessing the public participation process, protecting their independence, dealing with misperceptions and negative attitudes, raising awareness, as well as social and cultural-based challenges. It has become apparent that some religious-based CSOs feel overlooked and marginalised because of their religious beliefs. In general, they are undervalued and they do not receive the recognition and support commensurate with their contribution to society.

This thesis has further discussed the relationship that civil society has with the state and has argued for pluralistic and diverse relations as opposed to a single homogenous set of relations. With a diverse civil society arena, as is the case in South Africa, it is only natural that some relationships between the state and civil society involve collaboration and others contestation. Any healthy relationship will have a certain amount of disagreement that should not be negated.

This thesis has, in essence, added to civil society theory and has unpacked different viewpoints regarding the role civil society is expected to play and the reality of the multiplicity of roles that it does and can fulfil. Ultimately, the findings from this study are more commensurate with the associational life theoretical approach discussed by Edwards (2004) in *Civil Society*. The results have highlighted the necessity of pluralism not only in South Africa, but also in any democratic state. After delving deeper into the theoretical approaches, this thesis hopes to expose doctrine or models that imitate ‘truth’ and challenge policy makers who have an “ideological axe to grind”, as noted by Edwards (2004:5). In light of the contributions these Christian-based CSOs make, it is of concern if the public life approach becomes the more accepted approach towards understanding civil society. Not only will society lose out on the important roles religious-based organisations fulfil, but there could also be negative implications for the democratic health of the country.

5.5 Challenges that were Encountered

Initially, three Christian-based organisations were identified as case studies. However, one of these organisations could not be reached and the other organisation only allowed PhD students to interview them and use their organisation as part of their research. Therefore, two new organisations had to be selected. Fortunately, the two new organisations turned out to be better options since they are larger and their contributions easier to measure.

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the South African government announced a 21-day national lockdown starting on the 26th of March 2020, which was then further extended. As a result, the interviews could not be conducted in person. However, this challenge was overcome by using a cloud-based video communications platform, *Zoom*. This platform still allowed for ‘face-to-face’ interviews through video technology. A benefit of *Zoom* was that it could take a video recording, which helped with the transcribing and analysing of the data. Fortunately, all the participants had access to the Internet and *Zoom*. However, two of the participants had an unstable Internet connection, which caused some disruptions during the interview. Furthermore, due to the national lockdown, the university library was also closed. As a result, some library resources could not be accessed. Fortunately, by this stage the theoretical and contextual chapters had already been written. Most additional sources and books could be accessed online.

5.6 Avenues for Future Research

At the end of a study it becomes possible to review the research and identify possible new questions that this study has brought to the forefront that would make a useful contribution to existing knowledge. Some suggestions for future research include the following:

- i. The contributions of other religious-based organisations to child protection in South Africa, other than Christian-based organisations, could be investigated. This would consider the role other religions play in the country’s democratic development;
- ii. The nature of the relationship between the church and Christian-based NGOs and the challenges they face in working together, how their roles intersect and how they diverge;
- iii. The role Christian-based institutions played during apartheid. The *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* supported the apartheid regime and fulfilled a collaborative role, while others, such as Beyers Naude’s Christian Institute and the South African Council of Churches, fulfilled an opposing or adversarial role. The factors contributing to these different approaches could be explored;
- iv. The independent history of ‘white churches’ and ‘black churches’ in South Africa and the roles they played in the democratic transition; and
- v. Building on the theoretical works of democratic consolidation and the necessary condition of a democratic political culture, the values and attitudes that religiously-based CPOs imbue into society, and whether they contribute to democratic consolidation, could also be investigated.

5.7 Concluding Remarks

South Africa is considered a religious nation – a nation in which different religions coexist. Religion has been conceptualised as a deep individual or collective commitment that shapes communities. It is something that human beings owe devotion to and that carries considerable moral weight. It refers to a personal belief or truth that shapes people's social reality and influences their behaviour and actions. In a pluralistic society like South Africa, 'truth' thus means different things to different people. To expect a 'shared truth' is, therefore, to silence contending voices and religious-based CSOs. This thesis has argued that a certain amount of contention and diversity is healthy and should not be negated. There is life and vibrancy in the disagreement and pluralism.

If we understand civil society as diverse, with a plurality of relationships with the state, then there is space for religious-based CSOs. This further supports the validity of the associational life approach in understanding civil society. Just because Christian-based CSOs do not necessarily share the same 'truth' as the rest of civil society, it does not mean that they do not add value. This thesis has highlighted the positive contributions they make to child protection and the vital developmental role they play. However, if the public life approach becomes the more accepted approach to civil society, South Africa may lose out on these types of organisations and the important roles that they fulfil. If they are excluded from civil society and their contributions overlooked, not only would the children suffer, but also the overall health and wellbeing of the nation.

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Appendix A: Coding Frame

Code (frequency)	Definition	Key Example
Contributions (19)	Positive roles Christian-based CSOs play in child protection in South Africa	“Our network consists of almost 90 organisations, reaching about 345 000 children in the Cape Town area”
Challenges (40)	Barriers Christian-based CSOs face in effectively achieving their objectives	“When it comes to contentious issues that can be controversial around Christian values, then you are definitely sidelined by the stronger lobbyist groups who are pushing for certain policies to go through”
Associational Life:		
Distinct from states and markets (3)	‘Part’ of society but separate from the state and market; members include any non-state and non-market institutions or any association and network between the family and the state	“We have a public benefit mission and vision and therefore we are an NPO. All the profits must go into the benefit of the community and those that are vulnerable”
Legally-protected, non-violent, self-organising and self-reflexive (5)	Civil society groups that are protected within a legal framework or the law; not showing aggressive and violent behaviour and are independent of government in how they run their organisation	“Everything we do in that system is focused on running well-run organisations that are sustainable [...] NGOs that are well run, well governed, can manage its (<i>sic</i>) finances, can project-plan, can look after its staff”
Tension (11)	Associations that are permanently in tension with each other as well as with the state institutions that enable their activities	“A group of NGOs actually lobbied from 2017 for that to happen – to hold local government accountable for implementing a Western Cape Commissioner for Children Act”
Political effects (4)	Apolitical associations that can effect political affairs and public policy through lobbying and advocacy	“The Western Cape Commissioner for Children’s Act, No. 2 of 2019 was enacted in February 2019 and we were part of the public participation process”
Voluntary (8)	Consensual membership into associations: There is no threat of possible loss of status or public rights or benefits when one decides to leave the group	“The staff component of the network, between paid and unpaid (volunteer) staff, consists of about 4500 workers. There is an almost 50% split in paid staff <i>versus</i> volunteers but volunteers remain significant contributors to the workforce and have nearly doubled in numbers since 2014”
Pluralistic (5)	Civil society consists of diverse forms of associational life that do not necessarily share a normative consensus or common political agenda	“There are 220 000 registered non-profits; it might be more”

Code (frequency)	Definition	Key Example
Fulfilment in life (9)	Associations that help find more meaning and satisfaction in life	“We were all a bunch of big-hearted Christians who wanted to something good”
Positive values (7)	A breeding ground for positive attitudes and values, such as cooperation, commitment, trust, personal responsibility and tolerance	“Our values include loyalty, integrity, respect, transparency and accountability”
Stronger together (17)	Strengthened when associations are linked together in ways that support collective goals and cross-society coalitions	“Once you have this movement of people, in our case Christians working in the child protection environment, we can now have a joint voice at public policy”
Public Life:		
Arena for deliberation (7)	A space in which civil society groups gather to have discussions around certain issues	“So wherever there is a public participation opportunity, we would go and present or participate in those debates and discussions to influence the policy”
Collective vision and shared truth (5)	A public sphere that searches for collective visions and shared truth through dialogue and discussion – leaving no space for groups that are unwilling to conform to a shared truth	“Through networking, equipping, and collaborating with affiliates and relevant stakeholders, we can align our efforts and set solid goals to be more effective in our work with women and children of the Western Cape [...] Our job is to connect Christian-based CSOs”
Common good, public interest or consensus (4)	Groups that care about finding the common good, public interest or consensus. To reach a legitimate normative consensus, it is required that different groups have equal voice and access. In other words, the public interest suffers if only certain truths or voices are represented, alternative viewpoints are silenced by exclusion or suppression, or if one set of voices is heard more loudly than others	“When it comes to contentious issues that can be controversial around Christian values, then you are definitely sidelined by the stronger lobbyist groups who are pushing for certain policies to go through”
Willing to change or compromise (0)	Groups of people that are willing to change their minds and perspectives, refine their opinions and cede some territory to others; a space in which participants agree to cooperate and find a peaceful resolution of their differences	“So we sit toggled between the two all the time and then you feel you have to repackage your story to match the donor, which is difficult without compromising”

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

Welcome (participant name). Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and agreeing to participate in my research study. Thank you also signing for the consent form that outlined, among other things, the purpose of this study. I would like to remind you also of your rights to privacy and confidentiality. Would you prefer to keep your name and/or the name of your organisation anonymous? Or would you give me permission to use it in my thesis? Lastly, would you give me permission to take a voice and video recording of our meeting? Do you have any questions you would like to ask me before we start?

TOPIC 1: THE CSOs' VALUES

- Their story/ origin
- Vision/ mission
- Which values inform/drive their vision

Questions:

Q1: Tell me about your organisation – when and how it started; the vision/ mission, etc.

Q2: Which values or beliefs inform the vision?

TOPIC 2: THE ROLE THEY PLAY IN CHILD PROTECTION (CONTRIBUTIONS)

- Goals/ objectives
- Contributions
- Successes/ achievements (statistics/ data)
- Voluntary involvement

Questions:

Q3: What are the goals or objectives of this organisation? (If different from vision and values)

Q4: To what extent and how would you say your organisation has contributed to child protection in South Africa?

Q5: Do you perhaps have any statistics or data that you could share regarding your successes and the work you have done as an organisation?

Q6: Approximately how many people do you have that work voluntarily? And how many are paid?

TOPIC 3: THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER ACTORS

- State-society relations (adversarial or/and collaborative?)
- Dialogue and discussion (platforms available)
- Society-society relations (link/ network with other child protection organisations)
- ‘Bonding, bridging, linking’ (Edwards, 2004:33)

Questions:

Q7: What interactions do you have with government?

Q8: Would you say that there are sufficient platforms available for your organisation to participate in discussions with government as well as with other organisations?

Q9: How would you describe your connections/ relationship with other child protection organisations or similar organisations?

TOPIC 4: THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE

- Barriers/ challenges
- Religious freedom
- Well represented and voiced OR overlooked and silenced?

Questions:

Q10: What are the main barriers/ challenges preventing your organisation from effectively achieving your objectives?

Q11: Do you feel that you are treated differently because your organisation is informed by Christian values? If so, how?

Q12: Would you say that your organisation is well represented and has a voice? Or would you say that your organisation is sometimes overlooked and your voice silenced?

That concludes this interview. Thank you again for your time. Once I am done typing out the chapter of my thesis in which I mention your organisation, I will send you a copy of it so that you can double-check your responses before I submit it for examination.