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Accountability, Collective Action, and the Self: An Application of Political and Sociological Theory to Questions of African Governance

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Introduction

Accountability is an oft-mentioned but seldom explicated idea.¹ Unlike democracy, an essentially contested concept, everybody seems to know what accountability is. It is just that we do not always know how to bring it about. Our political institutions almost always seem to fall short of it, even though nearly everyone agrees that it is an ideal towards which we should strive. This article argues that accountability is not so straightforward a matter. There are two lacunae in respect of its common usage. First, the predicate 'accountable' is typically taken to apply to institutions or persons who 'give an account of themselves', or are 'answerable' for their conduct. Political systems in which such account-giving is the norm are deemed to be accountable. This procedural notion of accountability, I argue, divests the concept of much of its undoubted normative force. Accountability, I suggest instead, refers to a dynamic and symbiotic relationship bearing certain sorts of effects; the effects, which concern a certain *quality* of governance, are as important to our idea of accountability as are the procedures.

Once our attention is directed to certain sorts of relationships that issue in particular kinds of effect, our gaze falls upon not just the procedures that incorporate the relation, but also on the capacities of the various parties to it. To put it another way, accountability depends not just on certain sorts of institutions, but on certain sorts of actors. In particular, I shall argue, it demands subjects (people or selves) with specific capacities for collective action. In this respect, the study of political administration suffers from a kind of myopia, as do some of the cruder offerings of normative political theory. Studies of accountability require a methodology equipped to analyse the social totality in its entirety.

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The first part of this article explicates the idea of accountability and links democratic accountability to collective action, and to a certain sort of subject or self. The second part applies these insights to Africa, a continent for which the idea of accountability is now critical to the structuring of its international relations with the West.

Defining Accountability

The Oxford English Dictionary defines accountability as, 'liable to be called to account, or to answer for responsibilities and conduct; answerable, responsible.' We might ask: answerable or responsible to whom? Well, in the first place, each of us is accountable to ourselves: we answer to ourselves - ego to superego, if you like - for our own behaviour (Day & Klein, 1987). Outside of this *intra-personal* accounting, each of us is also normally involved in some form of *interpersonal* accountability: believers to deities, politicians to publics, junior to senior officials, companies to shareholders, and so on. Answerability implies the ability to give answers that will be understood; in this respect every relation of accountability entails a shared language or grammar of accounting. In the study of governance and public administration, Rhodes identified three types of relevant accountability: legal accountability, managerial accountability, and political accountability. Political accountability, we are told, outshines the other terms in this trinity:

"... managerial and legal forms of accountability [cannot] be viewed as satisfactory substitutes [to political accountability]. The tenets of liberal democracy give political accountability pride of place; it is not just a mechanism but *the* mechanism. Managerial and legal accountability are supplements to, not substitutes for, political accountability" (Rhodes, 1988).

In liberal democratic theory, political accountability implies that public officials are accountable to the *demos*. Financial, managerial and legal accountability render visible the way in which public resources are used, identify those who are answerable for decisions regarding their use, and empower a system of force with which to hold them responsible. The mechanisms act as important props to popular rule. The first two have an informational import, consonant with liberal democracy's presumption that citizens make informed choices. The third insures that individuals are held responsible by means of an impersonal system of rules - the institutional embodiment of the supra-personal will of the people.

Democratic governments must be accountable governments, and accountable governments are of necessity responsible; that is to say, they can be sanctioned. But is it a *sufficient* condition of accountable government that public officials be responsible? I suggest that it is not, and will briefly offer two hypothetical examples.

In the first instance, imagine a government that is elected in free and fair elections on the basis of a particular manifesto. On assuming power, it fails completely to live up to its promises. There may be a number of explanations for this: factors within its control, such as sloth or incompetence; or factors outside its control, for example a rapidly deteriorating international economic environment; or it could be that its election manifesto promises were simply unrealistic in the first place. At the next election, the electorate takes its revenge, and votes the government out of office. Unfortunately the subsequent regime fares little better. The government is now composed of a group of glory seekers, opportunistic men and women who have no real vision for the country, and want only to enjoy a brief place in the sun. After their term of office is up, they are duly voted out. A different political party is elected in its place. This one is composed of gold diggers. After a year in office the auditor general reveals flagrant abuse of public office. Some members of the government are arrested and charged, others are impeached. Facing a constitutional crisis, the Head of State dissolves Parliament. Another political party is elected, this one composed of men and women who promise to rule in the interests of the majority of the people, and to implement an ambitious programme of social service expenditure. Unfortunately, the campaign of this party was bankrolled by a wealthy business elite with no interest in funding such popular policies. The living conditions of the people remain deplorable, and at the next election, the public manifests its displeasure. The government is held responsible, and turned out of office.

Since the governments in this example have been held responsible, it seems natural to say that they were accountable governments, and that the political system is characterised by accountability. However, it would seem counterintuitive to flatter any of these regimes with the adjective accountable, since all of them were unresponsive to the preferences of the publics by which they were elected. They were responsible, since all paid the price of defeat at the polls, but they were not responsive. Responsibility did not seem

to make government any better. And isn't the idea of accountability in liberal cultures so charged with a positive normative value that it is exceedingly difficult to think of accountable government as being indifferent government? Pace Rhodes, political accountability is not a mechanism, not even *the* mechanism, it is an approbation applied to certain sorts of mechanisms that eventuates in certain sorts of political relations. In fact, the hypothetical example offered above, is not a huge exaggeration of the state of affairs in several African countries. Governments that on paper and at the polls are responsible, seem for a variety of reasons to be unable to respond to their public's wishes. An even more common situation is that governments are responsible on paper, but manipulate the rules of the political and legal system so as to ensure that they are never found responsible in practice. This is a much more simple case of *de jure* accountability, and *de facto* impunity.

It is for these reasons that 'responsiveness' should be the key to our understanding of accountability: it is a necessary condition. It is not, however, a sufficient condition of accountability, as the following second hypothetical example aims to show.

Imagine the case of a dictator with few ideas about how to govern her state. She writes down a few whimsical policies on pieces of paper and throws them in a hat. She then decides to solicit the views of the public, writes down the policy ideas, and throws them into the hat also. She does not consult the public out of a sense of benevolence or duty, but out of caprice. She promises to herself that the first five policies plucked out of the hat will be enacted. By coincidence, the policies picked all happen to be suggestions of the public, and she duly enacts them. In this way, her policies are an outcome of the preferences of the public. The government's actions are perfectly conditioned by public demand. It seems then that in this example, the government is responsive to its public. But we would hardly want to call it accountable, since that responsiveness is randomly determined. In a different random policy-picking session, it is conceivable that all the policies picked from the hat would have been made by the leader. Alternatively, the dictator might have had no ideas at all about what to enact that day, and therefore consult with the public. On another occasion she might have dispensed with public views altogether. This case makes clear that a government that is responsive on a whim cannot be called

accountable, precisely because it is not responsible. Accountability implies a symbiotic relationship between responsibility and responsiveness. Leaders are responsive because they are responsible. That is, they act in accordance with the wishes of the public because if they don't, they can expect to be sanctioned: psychologically, materially or electorally. It is not enough to adumbrate clear roles, responsibilities and capacities. Jones puts it well:

"There is also conferred some discretion and the liability to account for the performance of the duty, which should induce the person or institution to act with concern for the consequences of the decisions made and, in so deciding, to act in conformity with the wishes and needs of those who conferred the authority and receive the account" (cited in Rhodes, 1988).

Our idea of political accountability, then, inhabits a conceptual space in which governmental responsiveness is an effect of responsibility. Whenever an action of the government is performed in response to public demand and for fear of sanction, then that act has been *conditioned* by popular preferences. Conceptually, we can conceive of accountable government as a spectrum bounded by two poles. At the perfectly accountable pole of the spectrum, every action of the government is conditioned by the preferences of the public; at the perfectly unaccountable end, none of its actions is.

Jones's quotation makes the point that accountable action conforms to the wishes and needs of those who conferred the authority. In a liberal democracy, the ultimate conferral of authority comes from the electorate itself. Public servants are responsive to accounting mechanisms such as a financial audit and managerial control since they are politically responsible to politicians who in turn are accountable to the *demos*. Managerial and legal accountability should not be mistaken for political accountability. If public servants shape themselves to the demands of an audit, when the audit itself is against the wishes or beyond the comprehension of the public, then the managerial tail is wagging the political dog. Or if legal and managerial norms and mechanisms are flouted, because public servants realise that the public lacks the effective capacity to turn them out of office, a relation of accountability cannot be claimed.

And finally, if the public successfully holds its public servants responsible but they consistently fail to respond, as in the example outlined above, accountability seems an inadequate political description.

Considerations such as the above should direct our attention not just to the institutions of government - the relays of accountability - but to the public's capacity to make those institutions work in a way consonant with their wishes. In order for this to occur, it seems obvious that people must have not just the freedom but also the *ability* to communicate their preferences, meaningfully, to government. The preferences generated ought also to be 'majority' preferences, not elite or minority ones.² In liberal democracies, the principle accounting mechanism is electoral democracy itself. Unfortunately, the relationship of elections to democracy is notoriously complicated, not least by electoral and party systems, and by the fact that the electoral mechanism is intermittent, and arguably transient (the influence of the public upon governments in between elections is extremely difficult to ascertain). To fall into the fallacy of electoralism is to be fooled into thinking that elections on their own are a good indicator of accountability and that government is not to some extent captured on a day to day level by a minority of powerful interests and groups. In view of these criticisms, it seems sensible to suggest that a condition of democratic accountability is that a majority of ordinary citizens be empowered to communicate their preferences on a regular basis to government. Key vehicles for the communication of public opinion in Western democracies are opinion polls and the media. But sceptics of democracy have long been critical of the association of media organs with elite interests, which may serve to 'construct' public opinion in ways that do not conform to actual preferences. Given these concerns, it seems reasonable to suggest that in order to make their views count, citizens must be prepared: that is, they must have the desire and ability to act collectively in communication of their preferences, and in defence of their interests.

Accountability and the Problem of Collective Action

To understand the pre-conditions for political accountability we need, as the last section argued, to understand the determinants of collective action. The theoretical discussion of collective action, in turn, demands a discussion of social identity. *Sustained* collective action, that is, action that is something other than isolated outbursts of quasi-collective rage - such as are to be found for example in

riots - requires the presence of collective *identities*. In order to commit for prolonged periods to action on behalf of a collectivity, collective actors must identify with its goals and intentions (Dean, 1997). The key to the puzzle of political accountability, by this line of reasoning, is to be found in a comprehension of collective identity.

What is the nature of collective identity? For example, what makes a person think of him/herself as a Tanzanian, a Maasai, a Muslim, or a peasant? And what makes her/him act in accordance with these identities? Space prohibits an extended discussion, so let us instead outline two models of collective identity formation: the first we can call psycho-sociological; the second, economic. Following a psycho-sociological line of reasoning, we can say that an individual will commit to action in pursuit of some collective cause *y* on behalf of group or collective *x*, if s/he identifies with *x*. Identification in this case implies that the identity of *x* has been *introjected* into the individual to the extent that membership and participation in the goals of the collective is a constitutive part of the individual's selfhood, and, in consequence, of his/her goals. Identification is so complete that the individual does not distinguish his/her objectives from those of the group. Provided that group norms of decision-making have been adhered to - and even in some cases where they have not - the individual, in this scenario, will commit to action on behalf of the collective without weighing up the costs and benefits to him/herself.

Such strong identifications are most likely to obtain in close-knit communities. In a seminal study, Craig Calhoun (1982) identified such communities - united by 'dense and multiplex bonds' - in Lancashire towns of the early nineteenth century. These artisan towns were often scenes of vigorous resistance to industrial capitalism; much more so, in fact, than were large cities or the surrounding countryside. Individuals, he argues, were impelled to action in defence of their community's way of life. In fact, the very idea of an individual is in some respects misleading here, in that it implies that the individual is in some sense prior to and separate from the collective, and is able to consider him/herself as such. In 'traditional' societies, people show little sign of thinking about themselves in this way. They are members of extended families, or ethnic groups, or religious communities, and they do not imagine themselves to be anything else. In classical social theory, communities of this type have often been referred to as *gemeinschaft*, 'traditional', cemented by 'mechanical solidarity'. They are placed in contradistinction to *gesellschaft*, that is 'modern' societies, held

together by 'organic' solidarity (Lerner, 1964; Giddens, 1971; Bendix, 1973; Durkheim, 1984). Calhoun's study notwithstanding, such communities are typically figured as bucolic; they have moral economies rather than capitalist economies, and today they are found mostly in the 'developing' world.

The existence of such societies raises interesting problems for the practice of political accountability. According to our argument, political accountability requires that a majority of people are effective in communicating their preferences, views, or interests to the government; that they have the ability to sanction the government; and that because of this ability, the government attunes its actions to the wishes of the people. Insofar as communities of the sort identified above give rise to vigorous collective actors, we may assume that a necessary condition for political accountability has been fulfilled. But sufficient conditions are a long way from being satisfied. To give just one example, albeit a critical one: if the collective actors so mobilised lack the cognitive prerequisites to a minimal understanding of the machinery of government, it will be easy for members of that government to mislead and hoodwink them. As Schumpeter (1976) comments,

"... electorates and parliaments must be on an intellectual and moral level high enough to be proof against the offerings of the crook or the crank, or else men who are neither will be driven into the ways of both."

Important to liberal models of democracy is the idea that individuals make informed and rational decisions about their government. This would seem to preclude the types of decision-making that exist in some 'traditional' societies, where collective decisions may be made on the basis not of reflection, but on the basis of injunctions by elders, by leaders of royal status, by spirit-mediums, and so on (Lemarchand, 1992). Actors in collectivities, if they are to make accountability meaningful, so our typical liberal would argue, must evince a degree of criticality and rationality.

In societies where people are much more disposed to think of themselves as 'individuals'; economics and a language of 'interest' seems a more appropriate idiom for explaining collective action than affective impulsion. If we follow an economic line of reasoning, we can say that all identities reduce, ultimately, to interests. For an individual to commit to action on behalf of some collective cause,

s/he must identify him or herself as having a set of interests that can be realised through it. I identify with *x*, and share in collective identity *x*, insofar as my interests are identical to those of *x*, and can be realised through participation in *x*. For if one does not identify one's interests with *x*, and interests are the springs of action, one will not act in concert with *x*. The problem with conceiving of human motivation in this way is that it becomes difficult to see how any large scale collective action ever gets undertaken at all.

Following the work of Mancur Olson, we can see that rational, utilitarian, self-maximising individuals experience problems in the exercise of collective action (Olson, 1965; Gilbert, 1992). According to Olson, self-maximising individuals will always be tempted to free-ride on the collective actions of others. The reasoning is as follows: if the influence of my participation in a collective action is insufficient of and by itself to change the outcome of an action, why should I bother to attend political meetings, go on a demonstration, go on strike, or lobby my MP? I can stay at home, and not incur any of the risks or discomforts of such action, safe in the knowledge that other people will attend and achieve my goals for me. The obvious counter-argument, 'But what if everyone stayed at home?' is disarmed by the retort, 'If everyone stays at home, then I will incur all the risks and discomforts of action alone, and will not achieve my goals anyway'. On a cost-benefit analysis, everyone will always stay at home.

In such conditions, argued Olson, the collective actors most likely to emerge are those which are so small that an individual can see that his participation has a definite impact on outcomes, or actors in which the collective can itself reward or sanction its individual members, rewarding them if they participate, sanctioning them if they do not. The latter case is likely to be facilitated by geographical proximity to the centres of power, by leaders with organisational skills, and so on. The theory has been used to explain, for example, the way in which economic policy making in the developing world has been 'captured' by narrow, unrepresentative urban interests which have acted against the interests of a mass of small and dispersed rural farmers (Olson, 1982). This theory clearly has implications for the possibility of popular accountability in societies characterised by high levels of individuality and rational economic calculation. In the first place, it seems clear that minorities are

more likely to be able to organise to communicate their preferences to the government than majorities. This is especially the case if individual members of these groups can each wield a determinable influence over the collective outcome. Secondly, even in cases where quite large scale collective actors emerge, they tend to be bureaucratically organised. Bureaucracy is a form of top-down, elite-centred accountability. The displacement of pluralist models of interest group activity by corporatist and elite-centred models in the 1970s reflected a basic disquiet over the limits of accountability in actually existing democratic systems. Fears about the representativeness of mass organisations to their memberships were part and parcel of this disquiet (Olsen & Marger, 1993).

The idea that societies are characterised by self-maximising individualism has of course come under scholarly fire. In a calculating world, what one counts as a cost or a benefit is contingent on one's positioning in some prior evaluative matrix (Gilbert, 1992). Homo-economicus, far from being our species' norm, is in fact a cultural oddity. Moreover, it is not so clear that this totalling up of the costs of action actually goes on in everyday life. Some people feel compelled to act in defence of ideas they believe in or groups with which they identify. In this respect, a language of psycho-sociological impulsion, as introduced in our discussion of primordial communities, is more appropriate. But it is not entirely satisfactory. Both the idea of the unitary self-authoring utilitarian agent and the unreflective, mechanical dupe of communal tradition, have suffered sustained assault in recent years at the hands of post-structural, post-colonial, and post-modern theorists.

A strategy in the post-modern attack has been the deconstruction of the dichotomy between 'modern' societies (stereotypically characterised by capitalism, individualism, instrumental rationality, and flux) and 'traditional societies' (figured as pre-capitalist, communitarian, substantively rational - if rational at all - and static). Africa, for instance, is commonly presented in modernising narratives as a quintessentially backward continent, a backwater marginalised from major developments in world history, vegetating in the teeth of time.³ Critics of such narratives represent Africa in the context of its long encounter with the world economy. They point to a trade with Indo-China that goes back more than a millennium, together with the Atlantic trade in slaves that pre-dated, and even provided the conditions for capitalist revolution in Europe.

It is re-figured as a continent that has long been criss-crossed by internal trade and massive migrations of people; in which strangers are typically welcomed into communities, whose members are, and always have been routinely engaged in an ongoing dialogue with a fluid and highly unpredictable world of spirits. Meanwhile, the areas of 'enchantment' or 'irrationality' that exist in Western society, together with its myths and 'traditions' - real or invented - are foregrounded, as is the two-way cultural and economic traffic between the West and the rest (Piot, 1999). The alternative picture these theorists present is of a world composed of flows, or in one particularly celebrated text, of rhizomes, not structures. Framed in this way, distinctions between the inside and the outside of the global economy, between subject and object, and even between people and things; collapse under the weight of their own contradictions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Hardt & Negri, 2001). In this world, the self is strung out among social relations, parcelled between a pandemonium of subject positions (Werbner & Ranger, 1996; Mbembe, 2001).

While we should be cautious of some of the excesses of post-modern theory - its celebration of the protean and ludic self, for instance - the arguments in favour of a non-unitary self, constituted in social relations (of work, community, friends, family and fantasy) are compelling. Acceptance of the idea that selves are loose coalitions of identities and drives has an important bearing on our discussion of accountability. If political accountability depends upon sustained collective action that in turn depends upon strong collective identities, we may reason that, other things being equal, a society in which subjects are fragmented will have difficulties in holding its leaders to account. This is because subjects that experience multiple identities (including collective identities) will find it difficult to commit to any particular collective identity for any prolonged period of time. They will be too busy nurturing a multiplicity of identities, each of which requires a commitment of time. Thus, strong collective actors will tend not to form. But, an objector might argue, can we not imagine a situation in which subjects have a kind of portfolio of identities within which they allocate their commitment to individual identities as and when needs must? A subject may be capable of committing not just to a single collective actor, but to several. This is indeed conceivable, but whether or not such a situation is compatible with a strongly accountable society depends

upon the competition such personal portfolios confront. For instance, if there are people in this society with narrower identity portfolios, one might expect that these people will be more successful in mobilising collectively to capture the ear of government. Since they experience less fragmentation, they have less difficulty organising. Alternatively, fragmented subjects may confront equally fragmented subjects, who have greater resources than they do; subjects who can pay professional lobbyists, for instance, to represent their interests to the government. Other subjects may be small in number but disproportionately influential because they occupy strategic positions in the society - company directors would be an example.

The fact of fragmentation notwithstanding, it is certainly the case that for most people some of their identities are more important to them than others. Most people have a few core identities - the organising themes in their personal narratives - around which identities or interests of lesser importance are arrayed. From time to time one of these core identities, or conceivably one of the lesser ones - commitment to one's family, to one's work, to a political idea - may rise to prominence, elbowing aside the other identities that compete for attention, and inducing vigorous action, including political action, of an individual or collective nature. Western societies after all are still witness to phenomena such as strikes, social movements, religious revivals and fanatical attachment to sports. And in the non-West, social movements, ethnic struggles, civil warfare and social revolution, for reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper, are far from uncommon.

The fact that collective action occurs, however, is not in itself an indication that fragmented selves can hold governments strongly to account. Because, unless such action is sustained on a day to day basis, unless continuous pressure is applied, policy making is always liable to fall back into the hands of government officials, privileged interest groups, and political parties. In addition, the fact that millions of people in Western society join political parties and remain loyal to them throughout their lives does not indicate that people are committed collective actors. Membership of political parties is an identity that is mobilised situationally, for most people, during elections or party campaigns. The day-to-day running of parties is left to elected leaders and professional bureaucrats. Nobody who witnessed the charade of 'consultation' between the

leaders of Tony Blair's New Labour and its members over the issue of 'modernisation', for instance, can be in any doubt that accountability in that instance was staged. Professionals - be they bureaucrats, politicians, or lobbyists - dominated the modern polity. They fill the space vacated by the critically rational self-authoring subject beloved of liberal ideology. They are able to do so because political activity for them is their core identity; it is their job. 'Ordinary' citizens have little opportunity or capacity to influence the affairs of government. Western democracies, when measured against an ideal, are not strongly accountable. It is very possible that accountability itself is something that people gladly trade for increased incomes, leisure time, consumer choice, and so on. This need not necessarily disturb liberals; but the fact that in a context of imperfect accountability people have not been given much of a choice in the matter, should.

These imperfections of accountability become more poignant when we consider the relation of the West to the rest. Over the past ten years Western leaders have erected a new discursive divide between the 'democratic' West and the 'undemocratic' or imperfectly democratic developing world. This division continues to legitimise Western interference in third world countries, with the ostensible aim of improving democracy and accountability (Abrahamsen, 2000). A critic might argue that the West should get its own house in order before it interferes in other societies; but that is not the aim of the present article. Rather, in the sections that follow, I argue that the attempt to improve accountability and democracy in Africa suffers from similar, if not more severe, problems to the ones experienced in the West.

Accountability, Governance and Africa

For more than a decade, 'good governance', or the 'governance agenda' has been the dominant rhetorical and operational matrix within which the West has ordered its international relations with Africa. Governance connotes a panoply of programmes designed to transform Africa's patrimonial regimes, with their fuzzy distinctions between the public and the private, into market economies with liberal-democratic polities and legal-rational bureaucracies. It is presumed that Africa can only develop by means of the market; the market needs an enabling state; the populace, meanwhile, will be sympathetic to these institutions because their objective economic

interests depend upon them. Thus, the role of the demos is to use the democratic mechanism to police the state and, *inter alia*, enable the market.

The governance formula is the product of an academic analysis which argued that economic policy-making in Africa had been captured by a minority urban coalition comprising politicians, bureaucrats, industrial workers, and large farmers. With the apparent aim of promoting industrialisation - but with the actual effect of sustaining a parasitic renting class - this coalition turned the terms of trade against peasant agriculture. Peasants, who lacked an effective voice in the political system, exercised their exit option by withdrawing from state-controlled markets, such that over time African governments came to experience massive macroeconomic imbalances that rendered the entire import-substitution-industrialisation project unfeasible (World Bank, 1981). In short, an insufficiency in political participation was argued to be the root cause of inefficiency in the economy. The solution, inscribed in numerous Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), was to unleash the market in the economy in general and in peasant agriculture in particular. The subsequently disappointing results of SAPs were attributed not to their theoretical naiveté, but to their inadequate implementation by unrepresentative governments, which, it was argued, were domestically unpopular and mired in corruption. The proposed solution was to liberalise politics at the same time as liberalising economies in order that SAPs should gain popular backing (as well as that a host of 'African evils', such as ethnic conflict, human rights abuses, patriarchy and so on, should be eliminated) (World Bank, 1989; Moore, 1993).

Since 1989, the call to democracy in most donor documentation has tended to overshadow the drive to liberalise markets. It is as though democracy is the *sine qua non* for a good society - something upon which all reasonable people can agree - while technical experts just happen to advise that market-based economic solutions are more efficient than state-based ones. While most left wing critics of governance have been sceptical of the democratic components of the agenda, regarding them as a mode of ideological mystification, the soft-sell of neo-liberal economics, I propose to take seriously, for the moment, the idea that governance proponents have a genuine interest in democracy. If popular, market-based solutions are really

to be the result of popularly accountable government; if democracy really is to drive a development process that is popular and equitable, what must be done?

Williams and Young (1994) have argued, against the grain of much of the critical literature and advanced that governance must be taken seriously as a transformatory project designed to create 'liberal selves' in Africa. One of the aims of this article is not only to take this insight seriously, but to argue that a strong reading of governance requires the creation of a very particular sort of liberal self. Williams and Young argue that liberal ideology secretes a substantive conception of the 'good', namely autonomy, and that liberal institutional arrangements only result in liberal outcomes when animated by liberal 'subjects'. For example, liberal democratic arrangements will only end in actions acceptable to liberals if the people who practice them are culturally liberal. If they are possessed by ethnic hatred or religious intolerance, for instance, democratic arrangements may issue in oppressive outcomes. What donors are really interested in instantiating in Africa are societies governed by freedom, reason and equality, in which choice is largely cashed out in the market. In consequence, subjects must be levered out of their primordial communities in which they typically stagnate under the sway of tradition, hierarchy, patriarchy, pre-capitalist economy, and other kinds of 'cruel and unusual' practices. Africans must be reconfigured as rights-bearing, gender-sensitive, politically tolerant, and commodity-consuming individuals. The vehicles in which Africans will be transported from the traditional to the modern world, they argue, are NGOs, which typically promote cultures of democracy and equality through their participatory project methodologies, and which embrace market-oriented solutions and consumption-based lifestyles (Landell-Mills, 1992).

A clear problem with the argument of Williams and Young is that it seems to take seriously the idea that Africans inhabit 'traditional' communities. While it may be permissible - and in some circumstances useful - to use the terms 'traditional' and 'modern' as ideal types enclosing a spectrum of degrees of 'modernity', evidence points to the existence in Africa, as in the West, of 'hybrid' selves. In particular, African societies - as have often been said - are characterised by 'mixed' or 'articulated' modes of production, with a capitalist sphere and a pre-capitalist sphere (Van Binsbergen

& Geschiere, 1985). In addition, Africans are subject to the influence of both 'traditional' and 'world' religions, with contradictions between them not uncommon. Syncretic relations of production such as this can be expected to produce hybrid selves. The task then for governance is not to fashion a liberal citizen out of a uni-dimensional subject of communal tradition, but out of a jostling array of fragments - some of which may already be liberal. A second problem is that Williams and Young take a weak reading of governance: they see it as a kind of three-legged stool in which democracy, market and bureaucracy stand or fall together. But the normative force of the governance agenda rests on its privileging of the democratic moment. Market economy and bureaucracy will be calibrated to popular needs *because* their day-to-day operation is subject to the scrutiny of the democratic will of the populace.

If liberal, market development is to be an outcome of genuine popular accountability, a number of things must happen. To begin with, the fragmentation of selves will need to be reduced. Fragmentation impedes sustained collective action, and leaves policy in the hands of professional bureaucrats, politicians, and other elites. The fact that policy was the monopoly of these groups is precisely the reason that has been offered for Africa's developmental disaster, and the very phenomenon that governance was ostensibly designed to address. It is an interesting paradox of governance that while attempting to promote political accountability, it is at the same time promoting the cultural and economic globalisation of African economies and societies. Such trends are likely to lead to more, not less fragmentation, as Africans become subject to an increasingly cosmopolitan menu of lifestyle 'choices' or interpellations. Strong degrees of political accountability, if my argument is correct, will be accordingly difficult to attain.

Second, in order for governance to achieve its aims, subjects must be individualised, to the extent that they find the market economy congenial, and also to the extent that they can critically query the decisions of their political leaders. But it is essential that they not be individualised too much. They must be comfortable with the market, but they must not always think in terms of relative costs and benefits. If they do, they will be plagued by Olsonian free-rider problems, which will make collective action and hence political accountability, as discussed above, extremely difficult to achieve. In other words, they must have enough of a collective or communal

identity to eschew their individual utilitarian calculus in favour of the affective pull of the group; but not so much that it clouds their political judgement. The requirement that subjects routinely exercise their individual critical faculties is important to the idea that citizens in a liberal polity make informed choices. It is also the case that those choices should be rational, based upon not just correct information but also on sound reasoning. Divination, for instance, which currently influences a not insignificant amount of political decision-making in Africa, ought not to be allowed (Ellis & ter Haar, 1998).

By now it should be obvious that if we take the claims of governance seriously - that is, that sound development policy should issue from a politically empowered population - then donors are aiming at the creation of a self with quite extraordinary capacities. Such a subject must embody a delicate combination of individualism and communalism, and it must also be critical, and rational. Only a citizen of this kind will be equipped with the desire and ability to engage in the types of collective action that could make the idea of popular accountability an actuality, instead of an ideological screen that obscures the reality of elite rule.

It is debatable whether such a subject, a cornerstone of liberal ideology, has ever existed historically. Evidence for its appearance relates to a privileged moment in early modern European history when a rising bourgeoisie was successful in wresting powers from an absolutist monarchy. Jurgen Habermas (1992), in his celebrated *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has identified the sociological conditions that gave rise to this class, and their subsequent demise. A discussion of those conditions is beyond the scope of this paper, but suffice it to say that such conditions do not currently prevail in Europe, nor in Africa, and that the current process of globalisation makes their recrudescence ever more unlikely. The upshot of this argument is that the contemporary character of liberal capitalism stands as a massive impediment to the type of political subject, and the type of political society, ostensibly aspired to by governance.

Conclusions

To recapitulate, and taking the argument in reverse order, this article has put forward the thesis that there is a link between social relations, social identity, capacities for collective action, and political accountability. Contemporary social relations, in both Europe and Africa, lead to the fragmentation of identities, and this tends to

attenuate the possibility of political accountability. With regard to Africa, we can draw the inference that the economic and political components of governance are incompatible. Two insights can be drawn from this. One is that, the science of public administration needs to be more attuned to the sociological dimensions of societies in which its objects of study are to be found. That is to say, no amount of institutional improvement is going to lead to a meaningful democracy as long as ordinary people lack the collective capacity to make their views known to the government. Alternatively, proponents of governance need to be more honest about the exact place of democracy in their agenda. If the aim of creating a citizenry with strong capacities for collective action is over-ambitious, if accountability is in reality designed to hinge on legal, financial and managerial mechanisms, then the democracy that is being introduced is of an elite, not a popular variety.

Notes

1. Rod Rhodes (1997), for instance, in a book with 'accountability' in its subtitle, sees fit to provide only a typology of accountability, not a definition. Neither, in an otherwise scintillating article, does John Lonsdale (1986).
2. There are a couple of problems with this, namely that a key characteristic of liberal democracies is that they protect minority rights, and also majority 'preferences' may be unwittingly shaped by minority or elite interests. Both these points relate to the fact that 'the people' is divisible, a fact that causes some problems for any index of accountability. These problems will be bracketed here.
3. To borrow Marx's (1973) description of the Manchu dynasty in China.

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East African Community: the Challenges Ahead

*Mohabe Nyirabu**

Introduction

"Doors of opportunity have been opened. The movement of people across our national borders to facilitate increased trade is now possible. But it is one thing to open a door; it is another to get people to walk through it."

President Daniel Toroitich arap Moi of Kenya

"If indeed some kind of devil was responsible for the break up of the (defunct) East African Community, by these signatures we are sending the devil back to hell."

President Benjamin William Mkapa of Tanzania

"The Treaty that we have just signed should serve the interests of our people. We must therefore ensure the peoples full involvement and create the necessary environment for them to conduct their business."

President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of Uganda¹

The lure of a regional approach to economic development has been strong in Africa, even before the formation of the Organization of African Unity in 1963. Since then numerous regional organisations have seen the light of day. One lesson that can be drawn from past experiences is that although a great number of these regional organisations have been long sustained, they have not been successful in making progress towards the larger goal of African cooperation and integration. The economic crisis facing Africa explains the increasing voices for regional integration as one way out of the mess of underdevelopment. This was especially evident

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