

**BETWEEN STATE AND COMMUNITY:
CHALLENGES TO REDESIGNING
GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA**

by

Goran Hyden

**Distinguished Professor, Department of Political Science,
University of Florida, Gainesville**

© 2006 Goran Hyden

This paper was prepared for presentation at a Working Conference on "Designing Constitutional Arrangements for Democratic Governance in Africa: Challenges and Possibilities," held at the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, Indiana University Bloomington, March 30-31, 2006.

BETWEEN STATE AND COMMUNITY: CHALLENGES TO REDESIGNING GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

Goran Hyden*

”State” and ”community” represent contrasting perspectives and traditions in the historiography of politics and development in Africa. The former is associated with the continent’s colonial legacy, its incorporation into the the international community of sovereign nations, an acceptance of a top-down approach to development and, most recently, a failure in several countries to withstand the pressures of social forces generated by economic liberalization and globalization. The latter is linked to its precolonial past, its socially embedded forms of reciprocity, a bottom-up approach to development, and the potential for an African renaissance. In much of Africa state stands for abuse of power and dashed hopes of development. Community, on the other hand, despite the many looming clouds, stands for a brighter future.

This juxtaposition is admittedly an oversimplification of the complexity and diversity that characterizes the continent, but it captures the parameters of the discourse on African politics and development. It shows the points between which the pendulum tends to swing. The argument of this paper is that the pendular movements have typically left the middle ground unexplored. Advocates of governance reform, especially in the international finance institutions and the bilateral donor community, have tended to concentrate on government and reform of the public sector. Civil society activists have focused on community and its potential for decentralized governance and development. The real challenge, this paper argues, lies in how to connect the ”grassroots” with the ”summit”, the micro with the macro. This implies exploring the conditions that a state-centered focus of development has left behind and what development and social change has done to community. More specifically, it involves addressing the following questions: (1) what are the principal explanations of economic and political failure in the

* Distinguished Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Florida, Gainesville.

literature? (2) what do they have in common? and (3) what are potential political trajectories and constraints associated with each?

Principal Explanations

Explanations of Africa's critical predicament range from structural to institutional and human agency. I will summarize the most important such explanations that the academic and policy literature has generated in recent years. They provide a sense of how deep the problems go and how difficult it is to find workable solutions. For every promise there has been a flounder. None of the explanations discussed below has been able to hold its ground as the foundation on which to move Africa forward – politically or economically.

Structural factors

Structure here refers to the underlying socio-economic circumstances of a society. Politics is a dependent variable explained by such factors as the mode and structure of production and economic exchange relations. The literature on Africa does not consider poverty itself as a causal variable. Instead, when it comes to explaining politics and development at the national level, the most significant factors explaining what Leonard and Strauss (2003) call Africa's "stalled development" are: (a) its skewed production structure focused on "enclave" production of petroleum, minerals and other forms of revenue that do not engage citizens in contractual relations with public authority, and (b) its peripheral position in the global economy.

a) Enclave production

The political significance of enclave production is usually discussed with reference to the oil-producing countries of the Middle East. The sultans use the revenue from oil production to distribute social benefits to their subjects thereby obliterating a need for people to engage in civic action to claim their rights and leaving the kings unchallenged in power. This is an argument that much thanks to New York Times columnist, Thomas

Friedmann, has become popular in the media in the context of current U.S. policy to try to spread Western forms of democracy in the Middle East.

The argument about enclave production in Africa does not center on the perpetuation of autocracy but on its role in facilitating political rebellions in the context of weak states. Collier and Hoeffler (2001) argue that in economies dependent on the export of primary products, the possibility of commandeering these commodities for illegal taxation, or even looting, is quite strong because they have to be transported long distances. Their conclusion, therefore, is that ethnic conflict has little to do with grievance or identity. Instead, economic structures provide rebels or resistance groups with the means by which to pursue their cause. Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone are cases in point.

This point is further refined by Leonard and Strauss (2003) who suggest that it is particularly high-value products providing hard currency, such as diamonds, gold, and petroleum that become targets by groups or movements in opposition to the incumbent holders of state power. Dividing African states into four categories – those with or without an enclave economy and among those two groups states with or without conflict – the authors conclude that a country that has an important production enclave is found on average to have had 6.5 more years of civil conflict than one that does not. And, for every percentage point increase in GDP in terms of collected taxes, the number of years of civil conflict decreases by 0.7 years (Leonard and Strauss 2003:79). This is a more convincing argument about how structures influence political and developmental outcomes than the one offered by Easterly and Levine (1997), which claims, based on the outdated Ethnic Fractionalization Index, that ethno-linguistic fragmentation is significantly correlated in a negative way with a range of important development indicators.

b) Peripheral position

This is a type of explanation of Africa's woes that has been around ever since the 1970s when dependency and underdevelopment theories were popular. Rodney (1974) argued

that Europe's own development was the cause of Africa's underdevelopment. Leys (1975) accepted that being doomed to the periphery of the world capitalist system, as Kenya (his principal case study) is, leaves no room for alternative forms of economic and political development. With the virtual disappearance of a socialist alternative and the expansion of capitalism into a global hegemonic structure since the 1990s, the sense of doom of being in the periphery has, if anything, magnified. While the main culprit in the 1970s was seen to be multinational corporations (MNCs), the blame today is being laid on powerful states, notably the United States and the European Union, and their unwillingness to give up subsidies to their own farmers.

It is not clear that a possible removal – or significant reduction – of these subsidies would necessarily improve the economic and political prospects for Africa, because the region's domestic production structures remain technologically rudimentary and, in the global context, not very competitive. Africa's position of power in the global economy, therefore, remains at the low end of the ladder. Foreign direct investment, for instance, outside the mineral and petroleum sectors, is very insignificant because other countries are politically more stable and their economies are more competitive. International assistance to enhance their competitiveness – and political stability – through "good governance" programs has paid little dividend so far. Despite debt relief, African countries remain extensively dependent on foreign loans and grants. This dependence tends to have the same perverse incentives as enclave production limiting the interest of political rulers to develop a set of rights and obligations with the public. The conditions for the development of a "social contract" in African countries do not look particularly hospitable (Moore 1997).

Institutional Factors

Institutions refer to the intermediary arrangements between structure and agency. There are different interpretations of where institutions come from. Rational choice theorists argue that they are the product of autonomous actors who create them to serve specific interests or solve particular problems. Institutions, therefore, can be undone as easily as

they were set up in the first place. Sociological and historical institutionalists, on the other hand, maintain that institutions have a life of their own shaping agency through socialization over time. There are two institutional explanations that have featured in the African debate: (a) the weak state and (b) the underdeveloped civil society.

a) The weak state

The point about a weak state goes back to the argument by Huntington (1968) that without a balance between the levels of social expectations and institutional strength political order is at risk. His point is that after independence African countries found it difficult to maintain political stability and order because of a lack of significant growth in institutional capacity. The focus in his writing was on power and the importance of being able to contain and manage it. His argument remained an important ingredient in explanations of military coups in the 1970s and into the 1980s, but it has since given way to a different perspective on institutionalism that draws its inspiration from rational choice theory.

One of its main architects is Douglass North (1990) with his emphasis on how institutions shape choice and behavior. Institutions, in his view, are rule-oriented conduct, meaning that because choice is determined by rules, humans are not completely autonomous actors nor are markets a perfect reflection of such a premise. North is not a historical institutionalist, but he acknowledges that once patterns of human behavior and choice have been put in place, they are difficult to change – the problem of path dependency.

These ideas have been important in policy reforms introduced with the assistance of external agencies like the World Bank in Africa since the 1980s. The state in Africa has been dubbed "weak" because it has proved inefficient and unable to achieve official policy goals. The reform objective has been to make the public sector more efficient and reduce the opportunities for political leaders to engage in "rent-seeking" behavior aimed at perpetuating their position in power through patronage. The public service has been cut in size; implementation has been given to independent executive agencies; and, new public-private partnerships have been attempted.

It is not clear that these reform efforts in the past two decades have yielded the improvement that its architects expected. One reason is that they focused on policy reforms in a context where patronage rather than policy reigns (Bayart 1992, Hyden 2006). The political realities in Africa are such that donors providing assistance for development now focus on finding what the British DfID (Department for International Development) calls "drivers of change". Another reason is that African society remains "illegible" to policy-makers (Scott 1999). Attempts at making society more legible, for instance by enforced villagization as in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Tanzania, have failed. It is not only that society is socially segmented; the economy is fragmented into a large number of small-scale operations. Although some become successful entrepreneurs and businesspeople (MacGaffey 1987), the vast majority continue to operate in the margins of the market economy as subsistence farmers or informal sector operators. The number of actors that are uncaptured by the state in Africa has swelled with the shift to the market in the past two decades.

b) The underdeveloped civil society

There is a vibrant associational life in African society. Had Tocqueville been able to pay a visit to Africa he would no doubt have aroused by what he could see on the ground in the same way as he was when first visiting America. The problem is that political scientists have typically not showed much interest in these associations. It has been left to historians and anthropologists (e.g. Little 1965, Ranger 1983). What this literature notes is how Africans have used traditional institutions to adjust to changing social realities.

This associational life, however, does not automatically translate into a civil society as Africans have learnt in the past two decades (Lemarchand 1992). Society to be "civil" implies a set of civic norms that determines relations between state and society, government and citizen. Civil society relies on a set of universal principles that enable – and encourage – citizens to speak out and engage in discursive interaction with others, including public officials (Harbeson, Rothchild and Chazan 1996, Monga 1998).

Associations in African countries are much more "down-to-earth" focusing on concrete action in a local context and expecting, if not demanding, compliant interactive behavior aimed at strengthening loyalty. This is as true for community-based organizations as it is for non-governmental organizations, national as well as international, that focus on delivery of tangible services or goods rather than building civil society. The interest that many such organizations have in empowerment is not focused on the macro level but involves changing power relations within communities, e.g. between women and men. In short, the predominant political culture in African countries (with the possible exception of South Africa) is still subject-oriented rather than civic (Almond and Verba 1963).

Agency Factors

Human agency, as indicated above, is never really fully autonomous. Like the state action that Evans (1995) discusses, human agency is an expression of embedded autonomy. The question is what kind of context it is embedded in. The neo-institutionalist literature has operated with a model of man that resembles an actor in a developed corporate or bureaucratic society where loyalty to work is more important than loyalty to kin, where efficiency and growth matter more than distribution and equality. The literature, therefore, has operated with assumptions that are at best only marginally applicable to the African context. Two explanations have been offered in the light of this tendency in the literature: (a) bad rulers, and (b) bad policies.

a) Bad rulers

Bad rulers are not unique to Africa but judging from the literature, the continent has had a good share of them (Jackson and Rosberg 1982). The qualities that are highlighted as particularly problematic include being corrupt, acting in unpredictable manner, and ruling like an autocrat. These assessments are typically made with little or no reference to reality in which choice and behavior is embedded. For instance, what is often categorized as corrupt behavior by an outside observer is perfectly acceptable to a local one. Ambiguity rather than predictability is often a preferred strategy in Africa where keeping people guessing is a source of power. Autocratic behavior, finally, while not always

accepted, is often expected in order to get things done. In short, Africans have a much more relativist attitude toward these qualities than those who prescribe governance reforms in international agencies. This does not mean that people in these countries excuse all "bad" rulers, but it does imply that the line between "good" and "bad" is much more fluid and the markers are not as strictly enforced. The point here is that there is still a distance between the universal principles of good governance, on the one hand, and the way governance is being practised, on the other, because the context in which it is embedded creates incentives for individual leaders to act in certain ways. Patronage encourages corruption; lack of legibility in society induces unpredictable behavior; and, lack of a civic consciousness invites autocratic rule Southall and Melber 2006). It is easy to condemn such behavior but very difficult to correct it because it is deeply embedded in local institutional and structural conditions.

b) Bad policies

Bad policies are often associated with bad rulers, but not always. In fact, what has become known as bad policies today were for quite a long time embraced by the same agencies that now criticize them. Bad policies are those that perpetuate state control of the economy and create domains in which rent-seeking becomes easy. In the 1970s, no one ever questioned such policies but today they are subject to widespread criticism. The problem with this criticism is that it assumes individual rulers really set the agenda and put premium on policy. This is typically not the case. Even where a new leader comes in and acts like a "new broom" (Haggard and Kaufman 1992, Bienen and Herbst 1996), i.e. brings about reform as the case has been in countries like Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda and Uganda, the effort has not been sustained. It looks more like a political "honeymoon" phenomenon than a genuine reform act.

The problem in African countries, therefore, is not necessarily that leaders adopt bad policies but that they react against the hegemony of the international community and the agencies that set the policy agenda for Africa. Because power matters more to them than policy, they engage in action that undermines, if not sabotages, the agenda. They typically do so in a nationalist vein claiming that state sovereignty is being threatened by

the external actors. To be sure, African leaders differ in how they play this "cat-and-mouse" game with the international community. President Moi of Kenya made it into an art. Others respond on a case-by-case basis, doing so in particular if a politically sensitive nerve has been touched. The difference is that African government leaders typically operate with value neutrality in mind, i.e. an end is beyond questioning, while the international community operates with instrumental neutrality, seeing all ends in the context of particular means. Because this is a significant difference, it is no surprise that the external agencies tend to blame the African predicament on bad policies.

The Common Denominator

It is always tricky to make generalizing statements about Africa, but when looking at the continent in the perspective of other regions of the world, certain things stand out as quite pervasive. Reflecting on the explanations for Africa's predicament, one does not escape the impression that what they have in common is an explicit or implicit reference to the prevalence of informal institutions. When good governance advocates lament the weakness of the rule of law, they acknowledge the existence of informal institutions. When neo-institutionalists talk about high transaction costs, they recognize the significance of the same phenomena. When development analysts are concerned about the lack of a private property rights regime, they realize the importance of informal institutions. When I discuss the economy of affection (Hyden 1980) its essential components are informal institutions.

Informal institutions are unwritten rules of behavior and choice that stem from morality rather than law. They exist in the "gray zone" between economics and culture. Neo-institutionalism has helped draw attention to their existence, but political scientists have just begun to show interest in them (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). Adherents of rational choice treat informal institutions as problematic because the latter cannot be formalized into theory; hence their inclination to become prescriptive and advocate the dismissal of such institutions as developmental obstacles. Informal institutions, however, do not preclude a form of rationality based on self-interest. The difference is that rationality is

not bounded by formal institutional rules but by cultural norms. It is a socially embedded rationality.

Take for example the case of transaction costs. In societies where informal institutions prevail, an individual typically prefers to contact a relative or friend to help solve a problem or obtain a good rather than mobilizing a group to organize formally to do so. Similarly, free-riding is not an issue where informal institutions prevail, because there are individuals ready to act as patrons and provide goods and services to clients as a way of building a power base. The overly simple assumptions associated with a model of an autonomous actor do not apply in these circumstances.

Informal institutions then modify but do not contradict the notion of maximizing one's gains. It implies strategic choice and action. In this sense it relaxes the assumptions underlying rational choice theory. It does so by assuming that personal, face-to-face reciprocities or exchanges are sometimes preferable to reciprocity inherent in an individual's interaction with a distant actor, be that a state institution or a trading partner. The latter, which Oakerson (1988) calls the essence of rule of law – i.e. the trust a person has in the “system” – is replaced in an economy of affection by an interpersonal trust that is more immediate and exclusively reliant on unwritten “rules-in-use”.

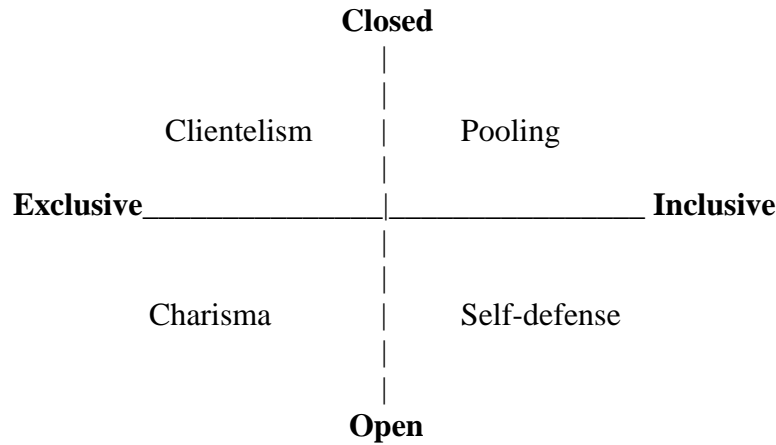
The essence of these informal institutions can be summarized in the following points: (1) actors share a common set of expectations, (2) they rely on simple forms of reciprocity, (3) rules are unwritten but understood by each actor, (4) exchanges are non-contractual and non-specified in terms of time, (5) they are being implemented confidentially and with no particular attention to detailed objectives or methods, and (6) they rely on self-enforcement in case of a breach of the perceived agreement. How informal institutions differ from formal ones is summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Comparison of formal and informal institutions.

Variable	Formal institutions	Informal institutions
Type of exchange	Impersonal	Face-to-face
Approach to rules	Rule of law	Rules in use
Character of rules	Written	Unwritten
Nature of exchange	Contractual	Non-contractual
Time schedule	Specified	Non-specified
Actor premise	Organizational goal adherence	Shared expectations
Implications of agreement	Precise compliance	Ambiguous execution
Transparency	Potentially open to scrutiny	Closed and confidential
Conflict resolution	Third party body	Self-enforcement

Informal institutions come in different shapes. They differ according to whether they are open or closed. Some interactions lead to the creation of communities or groups that carefully regulate membership, others may leave individuals much more loosely tied to each other. Similarly, some informal institutions are based on lateral as opposed to vertical ties. For instance, Elinor Ostrom (1990) shows in her discussion of the commons, how small groups like the Swiss alpine herders she cites devise a set of informal rules to ensure a satisfactory management of their common-pool resource. This is an example where lateral ties emerge; where the informal rule are formulated in language such as “equal contribution, equal share”. Informal institutions also regulate vertically arranged relations. For instance, clientelist relations are a case in point. Here the underlying rule is the understanding that the patron “buys” favors in return for the delivery of some tangible benefit to the client. The following figure provides a summary of this discussion with relevant examples:

Figure 1. Types of informal institutions in the economy of affection.



Clientelism

This is one of the most prolific informal institutions around the world. Judging from the literature, it certainly is pervasive in Third World societies, both in and outside of politics. Its underlying rule is a more or less regularized exchange of favors for benefits (services, goods). Although it is not gender-specific, it is typically associated with masculine figures of power. Rene Lemarchand (1972) rendered the first systematic account of clientelism in African politics. His treatment of this informal institution was quite appreciative: a political patron brought to the political center a large following that facilitated national integration. In retrospect, one may argue that Lemarchand’s treatment of clientelism was the informal equivalent of Lijphart’s “consociationalism”, the political order found in some multi-cultural countries in Western Europe (Lijphart 1977). Even in these European countries, the political center has been held together by a series of “deals” among representatives of cultural groups sharing state power.

Clientelism continues to be a prominent feature of national or local politics in many countries. It may be more pronounced in developing countries like Brazil, Indonesia or Nigeria, but it features also in developed societies, not the least the United States where formal loyalty to a particular party often gives way to more personal ambitions. The account of clientelism has gradually become more critical, if not negative. “Neo-patrimonialism” – the ultimate form of clientelism in politics – has become the principal

concept, for instance, in Africanist political science. The prevalence of clientelism in African politics is evidence that formal institutions are weak. The introduction of multi-party politics has only reinforced affective relations, because competition for power and resources has intensified in the new political dispensation (Bratton and van de Walle 1997). Clientelism is deemed problematic, especially in circles that are concerned with improving governance in African countries. It keeps African countries barely afloat, but it does not help them swim forward.

Pooling

This concept is sufficiently general to serve as a generic classification of all forms of cooperation in groups that are organized along voluntary and self-enforcing lines. The underlying rule, as indicated above, is the notion of equal contribution/equal share. Groups are not sanctioned by law; instead, they are constituted by adherence to this unwritten rule. Organizations vary in terms of closure but regulating membership is a key concern in all. Examples include criminal organizations like the Mafia and Chinese *tongs*, where the closure of the group is very strict. In each example, breaking the informal code may result in death. The blood oaths that members of this type of organization generally take to certify their unquestioned loyalty serve as surrogate kinship bonds that all of them swear in order to trust one another in situations in which betrayal is very tempting (Fukuyama 1995:101).

The family is the most basic social organization and it features – directly or indirectly – in many of the examples of lateral informal institutions that can be found around the world. Informal institutions in which the family is important prevail in societies where voluntary associations such as schools, clubs and professional organizations have yet to acquire influence in society. As Fukuyama (1995:62-63) also notes, cultures in which the primary avenue to sociability is family and kinship rather than secondary associations have a great deal of trouble creating large, durable economic organizations and therefore look to the state to support them (Putnam 1993).

China is a good example of where family has continued to play a very important role in economic life. Although the families in China, as Mueller et al (2002) also demonstrate, tend to be smaller but vertically strong – especially the relationship between father and son – it is a closed unit that operates to maximize its own gains in competition with other similar entities. The underlying rule of equal contribution/equal share may be modified somewhat within these families but they do provide a primary form of social security to all as long as their loyalty is not in question. The relatively exclusive nature of the Chinese family allows it to enjoy initial success in business, but limits its success once the business calls for organizational expansion. Formalization, through professionalization, is inhibited by the relative strength of the informal relations prevailing within the family.

Lateral groups bound together by affective ties often co-exist with formal structures. Studies of the Japanese conglomerates referred to as *keiretsu*, e.g. Mitsubishi, indicate that lateral informal relations are very important in the management of these multi-purpose, large-scale corporate entities (Gerlach 1992, Imai 1986). The significance of informal relations has also been demonstrated in the sociology of organization literature describing management patterns in the U.S. (e.g. Gouldner 1956 and Ouchi 1981). Much more remains to be done on the issue of how informal rules influence political life. Fenno (1976) and Gordon (2003) have discussed the importance that informal sharing of values like playing golf has for reaching consensus among members in the House Appropriations Committee of the U.S. Congress. To the extent that such behavior is regularized and takes on a self-enforcing quality, it becomes institutional.

Self-Defense

This refers to informal institutions that mobilize support against a common threat or enemy – whether real or perceived. The underlying rule here is that “you are either with me or against me”, the assumption that taking side in order to gain respect (or some other value) is inevitable. Affection is a powerful instrument to achieve this. In situations where many people are affected, it binds them together across narrower organizational or

cultural boundaries. Modern African history is full of examples of how affection has been used to generate mechanisms for self-defense.

The struggle for independence in Africa is a case in point. With the colonial power as a common enemy, Africans who had never before cooperated voluntarily joined hands calling for political emancipation. To be sure, these struggles were officially carried out under the auspices of formally registered political parties, but it was their “movement” character that infused them with the extra power to succeed. Financial resources available to the nationalist movements were quite limited. Instead, they had to rely on informal ties of reciprocity to propel them in the desirable direction. This became especially apparent in the liberation movements of southern Africa that had to survive in exile or in combat zones under conditions that inhibited the growth of formal institutions.

Informal institutions for self-defense have their own problems, because they tend to view issues in straight black-and-white terms. The now defunct Organization of African Unity is a case in point. Meetings of heads of state were always behind closed doors. This way they could avoid criticizing each other in public. As Herbst (2000) argues, this was important because they could not politically afford to show that they were accused of having weaknesses in the way they governed their respective countries. The informal character of this “club” was institutionalized and it eventually contributed to OAU’s loss of credibility. Under the reorganized African Union, African heads of state have agreed to a self-monitoring system to ensure improved governance on the continent, but it is far from clear that this formal agreement will erase the informal behavior and institutions that exist within the organization (Taylor 2005). Recent deliberations over what to do with the problematic forms of governance in Zimbabwe shows that the rule that you are either with me or against me continues to be a powerful force in deciding relations between African heads of state and the rest of the world.

The use of affection in self-defense is a more pronounced phenomenon in Africa than in Asia. A major reason is that Asian societies have been permeated by a single religion or philosophy. For example, Confucianism has defined social relations in China over two

thousand years. Even though its ethical principles have not been in the form of a national constitution, Chinese, regardless of social status, have internalized these principles (Rozman 1991). In Africa, customary norms were never universal and only confined to small-scale societies. Although similarities did exist among these societies, they were not enough to form the basis for a national constitutional and legal framework. Instead, what has held the new nation-states together is a perceived need to guard against an enemy from within or without. This is done through affective ties that are generated as complement to the formal structures in place.

Charisma

Charisma, one may argue, is the ultimate informal institution. “Charismatic”, according to Weber (1947:242) is defined as “devotion to sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him”. Although the origin of the concept is different¹, Weber applied it broadly to refer to all individual personalities endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. Such people included a great variety like heroes, saviors, prophets, shamans, and even demagogues. Weber himself is not easy to understand on the issue of what charismatic authority really is, but, in short, his treatment of the concept is meant to capture the extraordinary, e.g. revolutionary, moment in history. At the same time, he makes the point that charisma is not sustainable without routinization. In the study of law and administration, scholarship has treated the role of charisma as instrumental in transforming traditional or customary authority into a new type, in Weber’s language called “rational-legal” authority. In Africa, the story of charisma is different. It seems important especially in terms of filling the gap that exists between formal institutional structures, on the one hand, and customary and informal institutions, on the other.

Charisma, like self-defense, is potentially inclusive in that it does not specify limits for who can participate or join. The charismatic leader, however, occupies an unquestioned

¹ Weber borrowed it from the German legal historian, Rudolph Sohm, who used “charisma” to refer to the concept of sacramental grace, which underlay the law of the church prior to the twelfth century (Berman 1983:549).

position of authority. In this context, the underlying rule is “follow me and you will be blessed”. Some would call it a blind compliance, a relationship or exchange in which no questions are being asked in return for a positive sensual experience. Compliance in this scenario is not owed to enacted rules but to the persons who occupy positions of authority or who have been chosen for it by a traditional master. Galvan (2002) provides an intriguing and empirically rich case study of how this process works among the Serer in rural Senegal. Innovations or adaptations, even if they lead to “syncretic” institutions, are legitimized by disguising them as reaffirmations of the past.

Charisma blurs the line between person and rule. It springs up in different modern contexts too. For example, an element of affection is often brought into more routinized settings to make it more dynamic. A political leader, a corporation executive, or a trade union boss may use charisma to mobilize support for a new policy. Charisma is by definition temporary and informal, but it forms an important part of the institutional landscape of every society. It may help to overcome a political hurdle, to transform an organization, or help emancipate a downtrodden lot of people. Thus, the setting for charisma exists everywhere and in any time period. Yet, in a contemporary perspective with so many problems and so much uncertainty facing the continent, it is no coincidence that charisma is an especially important example of informal institutions in Africa.

Two points need to be made in concluding this section. The first is that informal institutions are ubiquitous. They exist in developed as well as developing societies. No formal set of institutions is perfect none comprehensive enough to preempt the inclination individuals have in adhering to informal rather than formal rules. This is particularly true in a period of globalization that creates competition, insecurity and a greater reluctance to accept the legitimacy of formal institutions. The second point is that informal institutions abound especially in Africa because of its rudimentary production structures and the prevalence of kinship structures. Simple face-to-face reciprocities make more sense than the form of rights and obligations that arise in bureaucratic and corporate settings. Africa differs in degree (not in kind) from other regions of the world when it comes to the role that informal institutions play in politics and development.

Potential Trajectories

Informal institutions in Africa have their origin in local community mores and practices but because of social change and growing mobility, they are no longer rooted merely in geographically specific communities. At the same time these informal institutions have not crystallized into a single set of rules on which it is possible to build formal state institutions; hence the notion that African countries are caught between state and community. Finding the right pathway to improved governance is not easy in such circumstances. I see three trajectories that compete with each other for influence over the minds of people concerned with improving governance in Africa: (a) the Western, (b) Islamic, and (c) African versions. Let me elaborate.

The Western trajectory

This trajectory is based on the premise that there is only one way to good governance and it is by accepting the basic features of a Western liberal democracy. This is of course the trajectory that African countries have been asked to adopt since the beginning of the 1990s. It involves free and fair elections, respect for rule of law, an independent judiciary, a well-functioning state machinery, and a vibrant civil society. This is a weighty agenda for a continent that has had little or no experience with this type of democracy in the past and lacks the socio-economic conditions that have underpinned its rise in Western countries.

This trajectory implies more of the same in stronger and more consistent doses. The international community places itself in a tutelary position where it tries, through the use of stick as well as carrot, to get African countries to continue down this path toward good governance. It is no coincidence that an increased percentage of donor funding these days go toward improving governance at the macro level rather than specific development projects and programs. Development performance is seen as dependent on how “good” (in liberal-democratic terms) governance is.

Many observers of the African scene tend to focus on its shortcomings: the persistence of neo-patrimonialism (Bratton and van de Walle 1997), the fragility of human rights (Howard 1993), the prevalence of corruption (Soyinka 1996), and the absence of transparency and public accountability (Taylor 2005). These are indeed serious issues but there are two problems with this tendency to close in primarily on these weaknesses. One is that these assessments overlook the underlying structural conditions in Africa and assume that democratic forms of governance can be built in just any condition despite a longstanding agreement in the academic literature dating back to Lipset's seminal piece that democracy is positively correlated with certain levels of economic and social development (Lipset 1959). The second problem is that it ignores the temporal dimension. Building democracy has always been a long and usually quite messy process. It has been characterized by both progress and setbacks over an extended period of time. There is no reason to assume that Africa will prove an exception – despite all the efforts by the international community to accelerate the process.

By acknowledging these problems in the approach of the many good governance advocates, one might argue that, Africa, after all, is not doing too badly prodding along this trajectory. Lindberg (2006), for instance, is proving that democratic consolidation is taking place through the holding of elections. Drawing on 282 competitive presidential and parliamentary elections in Africa between 1960 and 2003, he shows that countries that have held more than two such elections get increasingly used to respect not just the electoral rules but also civil liberties (as measured in the Freedom House Index). Democratically organized elections even if not perfect, help promoting democratic values. While his findings apply to the dozen or so countries that have held more than two elections, it is still an open question whether it will apply to those countries that have yet to reach that electoral threshold. The outcome of the 2005 elections in Ethiopia raises doubt about how far democratic consolidation can go along this Western trajectory.

Lindberg's study, however, like a few others, e.g. Gellar (2005) who emphasizes the growth in associational life, are interesting because they suggest that democratization along Western lines may be achieved in sequence with – perhaps – competitive elections

playing the lead role and paving the way for subsequent gains. It is certainly a worthwhile study because it calls into question that all aspects of the good governance agenda can be achieved simultaneously.

The Islamic trajectory

It is surprising how little attention is being paid in policy and academic discourse to Islamic models of social and political organization in Africa. Not only is approximately one third of the continent's population Muslim; several countries are overwhelmingly so. Furthermore, as a result of an intensified mobilization of believers, Islam has become more politicized in the past two decades. Islam, however, is not a single entity. Like other monotheistic religions it has its own sects. The most significant distinction in Africa is not between Sunnis and Shiites as in many Middle Eastern countries. It is rather between Sufism and "high" Islam. The former is a form of Islam that has been "domesticated" by local believers to reflect their own cultural norms. It is pragmatic and seen as a modification of the original theses of Islam. "High" Islam, in contrast, is associated with the puritan or orthodox principles of Islam that are upheld by religious leaders in Saudi Arabia and Iran. Unlike the Western version, which is quite standardized into a single agenda, the Islamic version is characterized by an ongoing rivalry between these two tendencies. This rivalry tends to center on two specific Islamic concepts (a) *umma*, and (b) *ijtihad*.

Umma refers to the Islamic community at large and is in an ideal world meant to encompass all Muslims. Because of internal divisions and variations in religiosity, however, the concept typically applies to smaller groups of believers. These entities are often called "brotherhoods" to indicate the strong bonds that unite members. Such brotherhoods have played a significant role in Senegalese politics by bridging ethnic identities (Cruise O'Brien 1971, Diouf 2001). Because of their Sufist orientation they have generally been able to adjust to the system of government that the French brought to its colonies. Differences among the more prominent brotherhoods have not stood in the way of political compromises. The Islamic notion of community, therefore, has been instrumental in bridging local ethnic identities with the secular state. Although Senegal

stands out as the prime case in point, the same situation has applied to other African countries where a Sufist tradition has been dominant.

This tradition, however, has been challenged in recent years by the forces of "high" Islam which tend to regard Sufists as revisionists. This has led to a stronger fundamentalist presence in African countries, as indicated, for instance, by such a trend in the Sudan under el-Turabi and manifestations of more orthodox Islamic faith in places like northern Nigeria. This is where the notion of *ijtihad* – self-reflection – comes in. While Sufism is a form of reflection of how Islamic principles apply to local conditions in Africa with a culture very different from that found among the once nomadic people in the Middle East, "high" Islam demands a more literal interpretation of the texts of the Qu'ran and its accompanying texts – *hadith*. Representatives of this more fundamentalist orientation do not see *umma* in the local context only but insist that there is a universal – or global – community to which all Muslims ideally should be part of.

The consequence is that religion has been politicized and the stakes raised. People in the West see this primarily in terms of Muslim reactions to Christian and Jewish faiths or secularism, but in Africa it is also a battle for the souls among the Muslims. Is *umma* a concept that has a higher value than the nation? Does it transcend state boundaries established by Western colonial powers? These are questions that Muslims in Africa are increasingly being asked to address – with possibly significant consequences for political stability and governance on the continent (Sanneh 1995).. Thus, even if there is no unequivocal Islamic trajectory for Africa, Islamic ideas about *umma* and *ijtihad* are part of the continent's political agenda with important implications for how people will identify themselves and reflect on their conditions.

The African trajectory

Like the Islamic trajectory, the African version is not a single or uniform construction. It does, however, represent a growing sense of the need to identify solutions to Africa's predicament that are based on indigenous values and institutions. This is a parallel to the participatory and community-based approaches to development that have become popular

in the light of previous failures by government bureaucracy to lead economic and social development. Efforts to bring about progress using a blueprint that bears little connection to the prevailing social and political realities, as indicated above, have run their course. The African governance trajectory summarizes the various responses to the disillusion with Western-sponsored, top-down initiatives to bring about democracy and development in Africa.

The most notable of these responses is the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) that was initiated by a small group of African Heads of State with Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria as the leading protagonists. Its governance agenda is not exclusively African. It is a modified version of the Western agenda, but the essence of NEPAD is to give more responsibility to African governments to initiate reform. In the governance field, its Peer Review Mechanism aimed at having a team of African observers assess a country's performance is particularly significant. It is here that the balancing act between African and Western values has become difficult. African government leaders who have subjected to this kind of peer review have generally reacted in a negative fashion (Taylor 2005). They have criticized the evaluators and they have blocked the release of their report to the public. Much of this negative reaction is a result of their own belief that they are being assessed against a set of values that are not African.

This call into question of the universality of the liberal-democratic model of democracy would have been credible if these leaders had come up with an alternative set of principles that are convincing to Africans and outside observers alike. Unfortunately, with the exception of a few initiatives, notably in Uganda and Rwanda, of developing alternative modes of governance based on a local political practice, there has been a dearth of ideas at the level of heads of state. Fresh ideas that draw on the African experience have largely come from academic sources.

Maxwell Owusu has long argued for the relevance to contemporary governance of the indigenous tradition of crowning and de-stooling chiefs in Ghana. Accountability is not

unknown in African society and such principles as those that exist among the Ashanti may be easier for other African groups to adopt than the more alien forms of democracy brought by the colonial powers. Owusu (1992) also expressed enthusiasm about the participatory form of democracy that Jerry Rawlings introduced after his second takeover of power in Ghana. As he indicates, the system of District Councils that formed part of this scheme builds on indigenous political traditions of local self-government that assume the existence of shared ethical and moral values throughout a given community. Another Ghanaian who has expressed reservations about the institutional order put in place by the colonial powers and has praised the potential of indigenous institutions is George Aiytsey (1991). To these voices should also be added that of the late Claude Ake. He believes that democracy can be recreated in the context of the continent's given realities and in political arrangements which fit the cultural context, but without sacrificing its values and inherent principles. In Africa this fit is likely to entail, among other things, a consocietal arrangement – the use of ethnic groups, nationalities and communities as the constituencies for representation. This would be a highly decentralized system of government with equal emphasis on individual and communal rights (Ake 1996).

These are also ideas that are shared by Amos Sawyer (2005) and form part of the agenda for this conference. The challenge to the African trajectory is that the constituencies that are assumed to form the particular components of a decentralized form of governance are no longer so easily identifiable. Where they remain identifiable because they are rather closed communities, they are often in conflict with neighboring groups. Finding the balance between individual and communal values and rights will not be easy. The notion of the "sovereign citizen" that Vincent Ostrom (2006) uses in his writing about federalism is an important ingredient in thinking about such a trajectory but it is also clear that how much sovereignty any individual citizen will be able to exercise in contemporary Africa is still uncertain. An alternative and equally powerful notion is that of using one's position as member of a community to escape the rights and responsibilities that follow from being civically engaged in politics.

Conclusions

The three trajectories discussed above are not mutually exclusive. They are part of a common discourse on Africa's future. They are rivaling scenarios but they are also bodies of ideas that borrow from each other. The purpose of this paper has been to highlight the constraints and opportunities associated with improving governance in Africa. While the former are overwhelming, it is important to acknowledge that many governance ideas, such as those mentioned under the Islamic and African trajectories rarely receive the attention that they deserve when it comes to where Africa may be heading. Exploring the potentials of forms and modes of governance that do not necessarily conform to the agenda of the mainstream international funding agencies is an important task.

References

- Ake, Clause 1996. *Democracy and Development in Africa*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution.
- Almond, Gabriel A. and Sidney Verba 1963. *Civic Culture*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Aiyettey, George B. N. 1991. *Indigenous African Institutions*. Ardsley-on-Hudson NY: Transnational Publishers.
- Bayart, Jean-Francois 1993. *The State in Africa*. Harlow, Essex: Longman.
- Berman, Harold J. 1983. *Law and Revolution*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bienen, Henry and Jeffrey Herbst 1996. "The Relationship between Political and Economic Reform in Africa", *Comparative Politics*, 29, 1:23-42.
- Bratton, Michael and Nicolas van de Walle 1997. *Democratic Experiments in Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler 2001. *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*. Washington DC: World Bank.
- Cruise O'Brien, Donal B. *The Mourides of Senegal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Diouf, Mamadou 2001. *Histoire du Senegal*. Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose.
- Easterly, William and Ross Levine 1997. "Africa's Growth Tragedy: Policies and Ethnic Divisions", *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112:1203-50.
- Fenno, Richard F. Jr. 1966. *The Power of the Purse*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Fukuyama, Francis 1995. *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Free Press.
- Galvan, Dennis C. 2002. *The State Must be Our Master of Fire*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gellar, Sheldon 2005. *Democracy in Senegal*. New York: Palgrave.
- Gerlach, Michael L. 1992. *Alliance Capitalism: The Social Organization of Japanese Business*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gordon, Joshua 2003. "Appropriating a Sociological Political Science: Explaining the Breakdown of the Appropriations Process in the U.S. Congress", paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, August 28-31.

- Gouldner, Alvin 1956. *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*. Glencoe IL: Free Press.
- Haggard, Stephan and Robert Kaufman 1995. *The Political Economy of Democratic Transition*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Harbeson, John, Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan (eds.) 1996. *Civil Society and the State in Africa*. Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Helmke, Gretchen and Steven Levistky 2004. "Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda", *Perspectives on Politics* 2, 4:725-40.
- Herbst, Jeffrey 2000. *States and Power in Africa*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Howard, Rhoda 1993. "Women's Rights and the Right to Development", in R. Cohen, G. Hyden and W. Nagan (eds.), *Human Rights and Governance in Africa*. Gainesville FL: University of Florida Press.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press.
- Hyden, Goran 1980. *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hyden, Goran 2006. *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Imai, Ken'ichi 1986. "The Corporate Net work in Japan", *Japanese Economic Studies* 16, 1:3-16.
- Jackson, Robert H. And Carl Rosberg 1982. *Personal Rule in Black Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lemarchand, Rene 1972. "Political Clientelism and Ethnicity in Tropical Africa: Competing Solidarities in Nation-Building", *American Political Science Review* 66, 1:91-112.
- Lemarchand, Rene 1992. "Uncivil States and Civil Societies: How Illusion Became Reality", *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, 2:177-91.
- Leonard, David K. And Scott Strauss 2003. *Africa's Stalled Development*. Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Leys, Colin 1975. *Underdevelopment in Kenya*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.

- Lijphart, Arend 1977. *Democracy in Plural Societies*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press.
- Lindberg, Staffan 2006. *Democracy and Elections in Africa*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lipset, Seymour M. 1959. "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Legitimacy", *American Political Science Review* 53, 1:69-105.
- Little, Kenneth 1965. *West African Urbanization: A Study of Voluntary Organizations in Social Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MacGaffey, Janet 1987. *Entrepreneurs and Parasites: The Struggle of Indigenous Capitalism in Zaire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Monga, Celestin 1998. *The Anthropology of Anger: Civil Society and Democracy in Africa*. Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Moore, Mick 1997. "Death without Taxes: Democracy, State Capacity and Aid Dependence in the Fourth World" in G. White and M. Robinson (eds.) *Towards a Democratic Development State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mueller, Hans Peter, Wolfgang Linder and Patrick Ziltener 2002. "Culture, Democracy and Development: Cultural and Political Foundations of Socio-Economic Development in Africa and Asia", paper presented at the Conference on Culture, Democracy and Development, Monte Verita, Locarno, Switzerland October 6-11.
- North, Douglass 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Oakerson, Ronald J. 1988. "Reciprocity: A Bottom-Up View of Political Development" in V. Ostrom, D. Feeny and H. Picht (eds.), *Rethinking Institutional Analysis and Development*. San Francisco: Institute of Contemporary Studies Press.
- Ostrom, Elinor 1990. *Governing the Commons*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ostrom, Vincent 2006. "Citizen-Sovereigns: The Source of Contestability, the Rule of Law, and the Conduct of Public Entrepreneurship", *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49, 1:13-17.
- Ouchi, William G. 1981. *Theory Z: How American Business Can Meet the Japanese Challenge*. Reading MA: Addison-Wesley.

- Owusu, Maxwell 1992. "Democracy and Africa: A View from the Village", *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, 3:369-96.
- Putnam, Robert 1993. *Making Democracy Work*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ranger, Terrence 1983. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa" in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rodney, Walter 1974. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Washington DC: Howard University Press.
- Rozman, Gilbert (ed.) 1991. *The East Asian Region: Confucian Heritage and Its Modern Adaptation*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sanneh, Lamin 1996. *Piety and Power: Muslims and Christians in West Africa*. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books.
- Sawyer, Amos 2004. *Beyond Plunder: Toward Democratic Governance in Liberia*. Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Scott, James C. 1999. *Seeing Like A State*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Southall, Roger and Henning Melber 2006. *Legacies of Power: Leadership Change and Former Presidents in African Politics*. Uppsala, Sweden: Nordic Africa Institute.
- Soyinka, Wole 1996. *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*. Aldershot UK: Ashgate.
- Taylor, Ian 2005. *NEPAD: Toward Africa's Development or Another False Start?* Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Weber, Max 1947. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: Oxford University Press.