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Democracy, De-agrarianisation and the African Self

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Dr. Tim Kelsall visited the Centre of African Studies on 8 November 2002 where he as part of his ongoing research on Tanzania gave a seminar on *"Rituals of Verification: Crime, Corruption and Accountability in Northern Tanzania"*. In this *Occasional Paper* he presents more principal aspects from his main field of research: politics of governance, development and democratisation in Africa.

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Abstract

THIS ARTICLE DISCUSSES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AFRICAN SOCIAL FORMATIONS, THE KINDS OF SELVES TO WHICH THEY GIVE RISE, AND THE SUB-CONTINENT'S CHARACTERISTIC FORMS OF POLITICS. IT BEGINS BY SKETCHING A THEORY OF SELF-FORMATION; NEXT IT STATES A HYPOTHESIS ON COLLECTIVE ACTION AND THE NATURE OF THE SELF; THEN IT PROVIDES AN INTERPRETATION OF AFRICAN HISTORY SEEN THROUGH THIS LENS. IT ARGUES THAT BECAUSE OF THE NATURE OF ITS SOCIAL FORMATION AND THE FLUID, FRAGMENTED SELVES TO WHICH IT GIVES RISE, AFRICANS HAVE BEEN MORE DISPOSED TO EVADE INSTITUTIONAL POWER THAN TO CONFRONT IT. THE FRAGMENTATION OF AFRICAN SELVES HAS BEEN ACCELERATING RECENTLY, IT CLAIMS, IN A CONTEXT OF DE-AGRARIANISATION. THIS PROCESS MAKES THE *INSTITUTIONALISATION* OF POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY EVEN HARDER TO ACHIEVE. THE PAPER THEN REVIEWS LIBERAL, SOCIALIST AND POST-MODERN PARADIGMS ON THE AFRICAN 'CRISIS', SUGGESTING THAT THE PERSPECTIVE PRESENTED HERE ADDS AN ADDITIONAL ANGLE TO THEIR ANALYSES. IT CONCLUDES WITH SOME BROAD AND TENTATIVE SUGGESTIONS FOR POLICY REFORM.

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When, in a celebrated speech to the Labour Party Conference in 2001, the British Prime Minister Tony Blair referred to Africa as a 'scar on the conscience of the world', many listeners were shocked and appalled.[1] Among the offended were Africanist scholars, distressed at the way in which his patronising rhetoric re-inscribed an image of Africa as a kind of mutated tissue, a place that is morally disturbing, the dark side of an otherwise integrated globe. Yet the fact that the continent is experiencing problems of a particularly grave sort cannot be denied. Figures paint a depressing picture: a region of over 600 million people, Sub-Saharan Africa has a GDP scarcely larger than that of Belgium; Africa is the epicentre of the AIDS pandemic; it is the world's most famine prone region; one out of five Africans lives in a country experiencing serious conflict; it has, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the world's worst war; in Rwanda it has experienced the worst genocide of the last half of the twentieth century; it holds the world's largest number of refugees – Africa certainly languishes in a pit of unparalleled statistical despair (Prunier 1995; Reyntjens 1998, 2001; WorldBank 2000).

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[1] 'Blair's Global Vision'
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/uk_politics/2001/conferences_2001/labour/1575135.stm

In recent years, it has become fashionable to identify *politics* – inadequacies of governance, democracy and accountability - as the story behind depressing statistics such as these (Bratton and Hyden 1992; Bratton and Van de Walle 1997; Diamond 1988; Moore 1993; WorldBank 1989). Adding weight to this analysis, the continent was swept by a wave of political protest in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In many cases this led to democratisation, which triggered significant optimism in certain circles, as some of Africa's most notorious dictators were electorally removed. Since then, however, some of the dictators have returned, some of the new faces have proven to be as corrupt and authoritarian as the old, and some states, as pessimists predicted, have succumbed to increased ethnic violence and civil war (Bratton and Van de Walle 1997; Diamond and Plattner 1999; Southall 2001; Wiseman 1999).[2] Thabo Mbeki's much touted *African Renaissance*, issuing, paradoxically, from a country where sex and death are more closely linked than any other in the world, appears to be stillborn.[3] Meanwhile, NEPAD, the latest grand initiative to come down from on high seems already to be fatally flawed (Taylor 2002; Olukoshi 2002).

The view from below by contrast shows the emergence of a variety of new social movements often organised around issues of ethnic morality, resource accountability and community protection. Evidence suggests, however, that these movements rarely brook political malfeasance for long. They are easily co-opted and perverted – sometimes eventuating in political thuggery of an extremely brutal kind (Anderson 2002; Gore and Pratten 2003; Kagwanja 2003; Taylor 2002). Thus, while the resilience and resourcefulness of Africans in dealing daily with depredations most people in the west could scarcely imagine, is something to admire, the prospects for the majority of such people remain dim, if not deplorably bleak.

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[2] As of December 2002, the countries which have so far been able to support some kind of democratic transition, no matter how flawed, appear to be Mali, Mozambique, Tanzania, Ghana, South Africa, Namibia, Sao Tome, Benin, Mauritania, Gabon and Cameroon; while countries in which constitutional governance, in conditions of democratisation, has collapsed, include, arguably, both Congos, Angola, Central African Republic, Niger, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, and Sierra Leone. Countries whose political fortunes appear to have declined under conditions of new or invigorated democracy include, Kenya, Malawi, Lesotho, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Nigeria is worryingly unstable under democratic conditions but was so shockingly governed in the last regime of military rule, that this should not necessarily be seen as a decline. Countries where the transition was more or less a complete sham include Togo, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Guinea, and Equatorial Guinea. Then there are odd cases such as Ethiopia and Eritrea (one with a confederal constitution, the other a new state, both recently at war with one another); Uganda, that has a 'no-party' democracy; Sudan, with elections in the North but embroiled in a long civil war with the south; Chad and Somalia, without meaningful states; Botswana and Mauritius, long-standing democracies, and Senegal, liberalised before the most recent wave. Then there is Gambia, democratic before the popular wave but succumbing to a coup in 1992 (disputed elections have since been held). None of this is to imply that in multi-party democracies people's quality of life is particularly good, nor that in the countries where constitutional governance has collapsed, people's suffering can be solely explained by their 'failed democratic experiment'.

[3] This was a point made by Deborah Posel in a paper entitled, 'South Africa's crisis of sex post-1994: reflections on the transition from apartheid', African Studies Association of the United Kingdom, Biennial Conference 9-11 September 2002.

Three broad schools of thought have emerged to explain the African crisis and to identify possible paths of escape. The aim, of all these commentators, is to point to ways in which African polities could be made more accountable. Liberals focus on making the state leaner and more efficient, at the same time as engineering cultural change. Socialists argue for the unleashing of popular struggles from below, as well as calling for a fairer international economic order and a reinvigorated developmental state. Post-modernists, insofar as they suggest a solution, aver that Africa's polities need to be more thoroughly oriented to indigenous concerns.

Beyond these differences, however, there are common themes. In this article I want to focus on a preoccupation with two phenomena: the first is with the apparent lack of 'institutionalisation' of African societies - especially, but not exclusively, institutions of a recognisably Western type. Larry Diamond, for instance, states that 'the single most important and urgent factor in the consolidation of democracy is not civil society but political institutionalisation' (Diamond 1994: 15). Herskovits prize-winner Mahmood Mamdani seems obsessed, especially by Marxian standards, with the state's institutional form (Mamdani 1996). Adebayo Olukoshi, also, demands, 'far-reaching constitutional reforms' (Olukoshi 1998: 34). Gavin Williams claims that African development will not make headway without 'stable political order…within countries and across regions' (Williams 2002: 11) Chabal and Daloz analyse a historical trajectory in which 'there is no incentive to work for a more institutionalised ordering of society', and which leads, developmentally speaking, to nowhere (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 162).

Also noticeable is that there has been a bewildering amount of talk of the 'self'. How do Africans think? How do they behave? What explains why they do what they do? Social science, not just of an Africanist variety, is sustained by these kinds of questions, whether explicitly, by focusing on the self, or implicitly - by looking, for instance, at structures or institutions or culture. Liberal Africanists, for their part, tend to be self-effacing in their analyses. It has been left to non-liberals to suggest that transforming selves lies, in fact, at the heart of their agenda (Young 1995; Williams 1993, 2000; Williams and Young 1994). This can be compared to an earlier liberal agenda – modernisation theory, in which the self was central to analysis. (See for example Almond and Coleman 1960; Almond and Verba 1989; Inkeles and Smith 1974; Lerner 1964; Pye 1962).[4] Similarly, socialists tend to be mute on the issue. They prefer to talk about transforming 'consciousness'. The reasons are probably twofold. Talk of transforming selves situates both liberals and Marxists in a

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[4] In contemporary, 'neo-modernisation' theory, the self, perhaps because it is a touchy subject, performs a vanishing act.

genealogy of heteronomous transformation that dates from colonial rule; an association each would be anxious to eschew. Secondly, it is characteristic of liberals and certain Marxists to consider human nature as something foundational rather than constructed. Therefore changing culture or radicalising consciousness is not really about transforming selves, it is about helping people realise their innate potential. Indeed, any focus on the self or personality is mistrusted as, 'no more than unscientific stereotyping, usually with malevolent intent and effect' (Lassiter 2001: 2).

Post-modernists are happier to talk about the self and subjectivity.[5] Mbembe for instance has spoken of a hybrid and fragmented self in Africa (Mbembe 1992, Mbembe and Roitman 1995). The Comaroffs have talked, in effect, of a 'dual' or contradictory colonial subject, at once liberal, at once tribal (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 62 *et passim*). A group of anthropologists centred on the University of Manchester have dedicated three edited volumes to issues of subjectivity, identity and the self (Werbner and Ranger 1996; Werbner 1998, 2002). Bayart has spoken of *historical institutions of subjectivization* that produce six, overlapping *social types* with correspondent 'formalities of action' (Bayart 2000: 246-264). Chabal warns that, 'there is a danger that the use of the ready-made Western liberal concept of the individual which is implicit in liberal democratic theory will obscure the understanding of the complexity of the individual who lives in contemporary Africa' (Chabal 1992: 30). And Chabal and Daloz claim that, 'African societies are self-evidently not mass societies composed of discrete individuals detached from their communal environment' (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 19). Rather, Africans 'operate simultaneously on…different, and largely discrete, registers' (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 146). The latter's work is the most ambitious to date in its attempt to explore the significance of such multiplicity for political action, accountability and legitimacy (Chabal 1992; Chabal and Daloz 1999).

What I want to contribute in this paper is a clearer picture, though admittedly still a sketch, of how to understand the self. The aim is to make the way in which the self can be understood explicit, since in the post-modernist literature to date, this is rarely spelled out. This approach will then be used to generate some hypotheses regarding the relation between the structure of production in Africa, and its characteristic forms of politics. The exercise is undertaken in the spirit of a 'nomad of the intellect, in search of a new paradigm' (Lonsdale 1981: 206). Unsurprisingly, as 21st century pastoralists are likely to testify, virgin territory is difficult to find. The claims for this thesis must necessarily be modest. The analysis I have made does not displace pre-existing paradigms, it merely adds to them. But it does, I think, add two distinct things: firstly, a theoretical argument, drawn from historical sociology, stating that sustained collective action demands a certain stability in individual and collective social

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[5] Note that some of the scholars grouped under this heading would doubtless recoil from the name.

identities; secondly, an argument about collective action and what is arguably an epochal change in Africa – the erosion of peasant identities and their replacement by 'multiple livelihoods'. Scholars have yet to make these links explicit, I maintain, but doing so might provoke thought, and might help, optimistically, to point a direction out of Africa's aporia.

The paper proceeds as follows: I begin by sketching the way in which the self is constructed in social relations; then I state a hypothesis about the relationship between the structure of production, self formation and collective action; next I provide an interpretation of African political history, viewed through this lens; after that I discuss the three prevailing paradigmatic interpretations of the African crisis, attempting to show that the perspective outlined here provides an angle on each; and finally I use the insights generated by this approach to suggest, tentatively, some broad directions for policy in Africa.

Sketching the Self[6]

In the disciplines of sociology, psychology and psychoanalysis, interactionist theories of the self are now common (Benhabib 1992; Burkitt 1991; Henriques et al. 1998; Mead 1934; Melucci 1996; Urwin 1998). They proceed on the assumption that the initial experience of human infants is one of fragmented sense impressions, inability clearly to distinguish themselves from the environment, and anxiety. In the view of the aforementioned disciplines, this situation is remedied through precipitation into language. Infants learn to communicate their needs to others by using linguistic and gestural signs. In the course of doing so, they are 'thrown into' self-reflection as they consider how to elicit desired responses from others. In short, by recognising that they are objects to others, infants gradually become reflexive subjects – they become conscious of them*selves*.[7]

Social theorists have also recognised that languages are created in communities and upon entering language one not only becomes a subject – able to act in the world – but one becomes subject *to* the norms, rules and roles, or, to say essentially the same thing, to the *practice* of that community (Foucault 1982; Bourdieu 1977). This broadens the focus from the self to the practice of society; to understand the former we must know the latter. Many theorists agree that all communities spend much of their time trying to reproduce

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[6] For an early review of the literature on the African self, see (Riesman 1986)
[7] The fountainhead of most of this work is (Mead 1934). Lacanian theories posit a more traumatic rupture at the point of entry into language (preceded by a narcissistic mirror-phase) which sunders the subject into conscious and unconscious planes. Nevertheless, the basic mechanism, anxiety, controlled through entry into language, and the control over the social environment that brings, is the same (Lacan 1999; Urwin 1998).

themselves, broadly defined (Burkitt 1991).[8] In connection with this, they have developed certain modes for the production and appropriation of the means of subsistence and any surplus produced. These form a deep structure to society to which institutions and individuals are constrained, in broad terms, to comply (Kaviraj 1989). To give a stylised example, in a society where the forces of production are based on hoe agriculture, it is very unlikely that institutions for the study of nuclear physics will arise.[9] To give another example, in a society in which the relations of production are capitalist, and laws of the market apply, factory owners cannot afford to be of the altruistic kind (Kaviraj 1989).

Insofar as the deep structure is reproduced, it is because pressures are applied upon subjects to conform to it. In the initial example I gave above, these pressures can be of a fairly unmediated economic kind. But more usually subjects are disposed to conform, as in the second example, by social institutions. The latter apply pressure on individuals to behave in certain ways. These pressures can be of a coercive, persuasive or interpellative kind (Althusser 1990; Kaviraj 1989). They provide for individuals a finite number of permissible identities and modes of behaviour – a range of 'subject positions' with which they can conform (Henriques et al. 1998; Urwin 1998). Insofar as these subject positions are calibrated to the 'deep structure', society reproduces itself. To the degree that they are not matched – and social institutions and the kinds of power they exercise can have a tremendous variety, and can work at cross purposes – then the structure of society can change, because people need not be disposed to comply. Moreover although the number of subject positions is limited, producing identifiable social types, they are combined in individuals in variable combination, imparting uniqueness to each.

To put things another way, subjects come into being through language, and that language is rendered meaningful against a field of practice. That field of practice is generated by institutions, which are enframed by the general relations of power characteristic of a particular mode of production, and animated by the particular forms, the micro-physics of power, produced by the discursive practices of any social formation. The implication being that relations of production do not exert a direct influence on consciousness and the constitution of the subject, they are refracted through culturally-historically specific systems of practice and signs (See Burkitt 1992: 129).

What we can take from this is the rather familiar idea that there must be some interdependence, some degree of fit, between the economic structure of society, its social institutions, and the consciousness that composes it. I am with Marx when he says, 'The

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[8] Note, this is not to say that culture *follows* economy. See (Sahlins 1976)
[9] Though with the boundaries between societies blurring, such things are no longer unimaginable.

human essence is no abstraction in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations' (Marx 1977). With this definition, we begin to lose sight of the distinction between self and society. Such a separation might best be regarded not as something which is ontologically given, but as part of the way in which the West has come to think about itself, with a reciprocal material effect (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). Augustine Shutte argues that in African thought, by contrast:

> the sharp distinction between self and world, a self that controls and changes the world and is in some sense "above" it, this distinction so characteristic of European philosophy, disappears. Self and world are united and intermingle in a web of reciprocal relations (Cited in Lassiter 2001: 5. For an extended modern ethnography based on a similar theme, see Piot 1999).

Societies are composed of selves, and selves are made up from society. We might imagine, for heuristic purposes, that the self is like a complex braid, which winds together economic, institutional and ideational components (cf Schatzberg 1988 who uses the metaphor of a 'triple helix' to explain ethnicity, class and state to great effect). Sometimes its strands are tightly bound together, and at other times they unravel – the braid's texture changes - but rarely do they become completely separated and frayed. When they do so, the self is, figuratively speaking, in threads. There is thus a relationship between production, institutions, and ideas, which are all tied together in and through the self. There is also a relationship between the self, organisation, and collective action.

Struggling Selves

According to Eric Hobsbawm:

> "The poor," or indeed any subaltern group, become a subject rather than an object of history only through formalized collectivities, however structured. Everybody always has families, social relations, attitudes towards sexuality, childhood and death, all the other things that keep social historians usefully employed. But, until the past two centuries, as traditional historiography shows, "the poor" could be neglected most of the time by their "betters," and therefore remain largely invisible to them, precisely because their impact on events was occasional, scattered, and impermanent. If this has not been so since the end of the eighteenth century, it is because they have become an institutionally organized force. Even the most dictatorial regimes today learn sooner or later what ancient rulers knew, how to make concessions to

unorganized and spontaneous pressure from the masses, if necessary underlining their authority by face-saving punishment for the "agitators." It is organized popular action they seek to prevent (Cited in (Calhoun 1982: 67).

When one examines the history of popular struggles in Africa, it is difficult to be sanguine about their results. The nationalist campaigns, the liberation wars, the waves of democratisation, the grassroots social movements, even the anti-apartheid struggle – all of them have seemed to go awry. There are few cases in which political accountability, or human welfare, has been unequivocally improved.[10] That is not to say that people want their colonial, dictatorial or racist masters back; it just means that things have not got appreciably better.[11] A key reason for this, I want to suggest, is that African social formations produce subjects who experience great difficulty in acting collectively to hold leaders to account. Political organisation has been weak. A simple formula, distilled from a variety of works on collective action (Calhoun 1982; Dean 1997; Dean 1998; Melucci 1996, 1996a; Olson 1965, 1982; Tarrow 1998), and whose abstractions do not do too much violence, I hope, to the quotidian triumphs and defeats of the historical record, might shed light on this:

1. Political accountability of anything other than an ephemeral type depends upon the ability of actors to make leaders responsive by collectively impressing their views upon them, and, if necessary, holding them responsible for not responding.

2. Committed collective action, by which I mean the ability to act together with others on a regular basis, for a common purpose, over a matter of weeks or months or years, requires strong and stable collective identities.

3. An individual has a strong collective identity when he or she regards his or her interests (broadly conceived) as intimately linked to that of a group. Such identities may be encouraged by psycho-emotional means (such as occur in the family, or extended family) or organisational means (for example, by systematically applying costs and benefits, including of a psychological nature, to non-co-operating and co-operating individuals), or by ideological means (that is, individuals are encouraged, by means of theory or prophecy, to believe in a common destiny or identity). The strongest collective actors will enjoy an admixture of these means of solidarity. Collective action is easily discouraged if any or all of these factors is missing.

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[10] The democratic transition in South Africa, though problematic, Rawlings's coup in Ghana, much criticised, Museveni's victory in Uganda, now going awry, and Zenawi's in Ethiopia, similarly imperilled, seem nevertheless the most promising examples.
[11] Of course there is no meta-historical reason to think that they should do.

4. Identities, as I discussed in an earlier section of this paper, exist in intimate relation to the relations of production characteristic of a given social formation.

5. If a social formation is such that individuals must parcel out their time and ambition between different types of activity, their social identities will be fragmented.

6. People with fragmented social identities are unlikely to have strong collective identities.

7. The forms of collective action that emerge in such societies are liable to be either extremely small scale, or sporadic, or highly bureaucratic, or elite dominated.[12]

A very easy and obvious objection to this formula is that political struggle, collective action and social movements do not simply appear, rabbit-like, from a social formation's conjuror's hat. Social movements are processual things: they start small, and, with favourable conditions, grow. It is impossible, then, to rule out the emergence of strong collective actors simply on account of a synchronic reading of extant social relations. Granted. However, it is also clear that only the most naively determined voluntarist would want to argue against the idea that some social formations are more likely to enable or constrain the emergence and consolidation of collective actors than are others. We might live in a post-modern world, but there is a shape to its contingency, and while trying to steer a treacherous course between the 'inane fantasies of Afro-optimism' and the 'dubious condescension of Afro-pessimism' (Bayart 2000: 267; compare Comaroff and Comaroff 1999), between, that is, celebration and despair, we should not let the exigencies of political correctness blind us to being critically real.

If this line of reasoning is correct, we can argue that the African crisis, at the root of which lies a crisis of accountability, can be explained by the character of Africa's social formation and the types of collective action to which it gives rise, with the self forming the hinge between the two. I provide now an interpretation of African history in an attempt to bear this out.

Production, Persons and Politics in Africa

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[12] As Lonsdale pithily observes, 'Powerful groups are those which are more cohesive than others, more self-conscious. Social consciousness is shaped mostly by one's work, (Lonsdale 1981) 161. In Africa, perhaps even more than elsewhere, the powerful groups are precisely those whose work *is* politics. See also (Lonsdale 1986) 131 for an observation that the poor often harness their fortunes to alternative competing elites, instead of rebelling on their own. 'History is mostly about people being oppressed without revolting' (Lonsdale 1986) 150 – it is not only in Africa that people rarely rebel.

Historians seem to be agreed that pre-colonial Africa was marked in most places by an abundance of land (Berry 2002; Iliffe 1995). Most of its societies were agrarian ones, in which the vast majority of individuals farmed, and in which many additionally undertook other occupational tasks. Populations also tended to be quite mobile. Africa was a continent of both small and large migrations. Stated in its barest political-ecological form, rainfall and labour were the scarce factors of production, and communities with abundant rain, welcomed, at least temporarily, migrants from less fortunate areas. As rainfall patterns shifted the imperatives of migration evolved. Other population movements were more violent, but this appears to have been the exception rather than the rule. The overall picture, then, is one of flux. By contemporary standards, it was perhaps in most places a gentle undulation, but things and people were protean all the same. Iliffe, for instance, writes that 'Pre-colonial Africans had possessed several social identities. They might belong to lineages, clans, villages, towns, chiefdoms, language groups, states, and almost any combination of these…identities shaded into one another…it was an immensely complex social order' (Iliffe 1995: 231). And Lonsdale, writing on the subject of ethnicity, remarks that pre-colonial tribes, and selves, I infer, were 'formed and re-formed by fission and fusion, like slivers of glass in a kaleidoscope' (Lonsdale 1994: 137).

Africa's pre-colonial social formation was home to a variety of political forms. Most societies were acephalous, or governed by chiefs, who were quintessentially big men, or big fish in small ponds, 'most Africans did not actually live in states until colonial rule fastened Leviathan's yoke upon them' (Lonsdale 1981: 139). Taking Jan Vansina's study of Equatorial Africa as a model, it seems that such societies were characterised by a dual institutional ethic of egalitarianism and hierarchy which existed in permanent tension and formed the axes around which political life revolved (Vansina 1990). African chiefs were typically 'big-men' who could protect their followers from outside attack, who could augment their wealth and number through success in battle, and who could ensure health, fertility and subsistence through privileged access to the spirit world (Feierman 1990; Gulbrandsen 1995; Isaacman 1993; Lonsdale 1986; Mamdani 1996; Koponen 1988; Vansina 1990). However, if they failed to create rain, to protect against disease or to redistribute the wealth they had accrued, they were vulnerable to overthrow, or, more usually, desertion: 'the economics of emigration were not too daunting' (Lonsdale 1986: 146). Abundance of land meant that African social formations were fairly open, as were the social identities, or selves to which they gave rise (Isaacman 1993; Lonsdale 1986; Vansina 1990). They were not, in most cases, fixed in a rigid economic and ideological frame. They were fluid, and could move around, adapting themselves to new social groups and leaders. Because of this, rulers had to be responsive to their clients, otherwise they risked finding themselves with no-one to rule.

Africa was of course also home to kingdoms and empires, organisations more recognisable to us as states. The ruling classes of these political formations sustained themselves by securing the surplus production of farmers via extra-economic means.[13] Their strategies ranged from slave-taking to punitive raiding, or, more normally, to claiming extraordinary supernatural powers. In the greatest African states, such as Asante and Buganda, the ruling class became hegemonic by manipulation of exceptionally powerful ideological structurations and political rewards (McCaskie 1995; Lonsdale 1981: 178). Across the continent, government, though it made use of coercion, appears to have taken a consensual form.

The European pre-colonial encounter – beginning with Portugese trade in East and West Africa in the 15th century, encompassing the Dutch penetration of South Africa in the 17th, the height of the Atlantic Slave Trade between 1750 and 1850, and reaching its climax in East and Central Africa in the 19th, altered this state of affairs (For a summary, see Freund 1984: 39-58). In the beginning, access to external sources of firearms and trade tended to transform relatively consensual patron-client relationships into more coercive patrimonial affairs (Iliffe 1979: 62). In this period, African 'warlords' were at their *apogee*.[14] In East Africa, it was a period of famine, war, pestilence and millennial movements. In our metaphor, African selves began seriously to fray.

Colonial rule, after the First World War, stabilised things, at least to a degree. It built a system of administration that rested, either explicitly (as in most British possessions) or implicitly (as in the territories governed by France) on the power of native chiefs. Colonial administrators thought of African tribes as things that were, or at least ought to be, more stable: internally homogenous, united by kinship and tradition, subservient to a political chief. As Iliffe says, 'Europeans believed Africans belonged to tribes; Africans built tribes to belong to' (Iliffe 1979: 324).

From an economic point of view, colonial Africa's rural history can be told, on one telling, as the story of the emergence of peasant societies (Iliffe 1979: 273-317; see also Iliffe 1995). Millions of producers, most of whom had produced little for the African market and nothing for the international market, became drawn into a web of monetised economic relations that spanned the world. Although there were definite variations between countries, between

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[13] An exception was pre-colonial Rwanda and Burundi. Simplifying greatly a disputed historical record, heavy population pressure was associated with a political system in which agriculturalists became economically dependent upon cattle owning pastoralists for milk and manure. This economic dependence was cemented by a dominant ideology which stressed the divine right of certain cattle owning lineages. In the twentieth century, the identities of the two groups became ossified as 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' respectively. See (Lemarchand 1999, 1994; Mamdani 1996).

regions, even within villages, a popular pattern was for agricultural production to be undertaken by household heads directing family labour on communally held land, producing partly for consumption, partly for exchange. Farmers would produce crops such as cotton or coffee or cocoa for export, and staples such as yams, maize, cassava, sorghum or plantain for food.[15]

Peasant economies are hybrid economies. They are governed in part by the logic of the capitalist market in which they exchange and in part by a 'moral' economy of affective relations in which they produce and consume (Scott 1976; Spear 1997; Hyden 1980). These logical contradictions result in an ongoing dynamic of debate, struggle and change. If my account of socialisation above is correct, they ought also to give rise to hybrid selves, characterised by internal contradiction and strife, as individuals attempt to manage the competing demands of market and community. This kind of contradiction in Africa has frequently been overlayed by another one: between world and 'traditional' religions. The result, in most places, has been syncretism, and an ongoing engagement between the old and the new (Ranger 1986).

Even South Africa, the most industrialised of African countries, has witnessed a less complete proletarianisation than has the west. The official policy of *apartheid* was designed, though it did not always succeed, to keep workers dependent on tiny plots of land in native reserves or 'homelands' (Freund 1984, 1988). Workers had one foot in the 'modern' economy, one in the 'traditional sphere'. In most other parts of Africa, paid labour was something that most people did only for brief periods, often with the intention of investing in agricultural land. 'Most African farm labourers were not proletarians but, like cocoa workers, were migrants with land rights at home' (Iliffe 1995: 218). Permanent workers existed, but in global terms, they were comparatively few. Seldom did they develop strong labour movements of a European kind (cf Cooper 1996). Commentators spoke about an 'articulated' mode of production (Geschiere and Raatgever 1985; see also the Special Issue of *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 19, 1 1985). Again, according to my theoretical sketch, this results in a figure of the subject riven by an internal contradiction.

The legal inscription of tribes in colonial Africa fixed, to some extent, the colonial subject. Chiefs' powers were augmented from outside. They became as accountable to their colonial masters as they were to their own populations. Migration as a mode of political action,

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[14] Though the most successful, in the words of John Iliffe, controlled both guns and rain (Iliffe 1979: 53, 62)

[15] Note that peasant societies were the more prosperous ones. Other people migrated, often for hundreds of miles – from Rwanda to Buganda, from Togo to Ghana, from central to Northern Tanzania - to work on peasant farms.

together with shifting between different ethnic identities was, in many areas, reduced. But colonial rule could not eradicate flux (See Berry 1993; Berry 2002 who argues that the codification of customary law actually institutionalised it). As outlined above, it encouraged, economically, capitalist relations and amplified, spiritually, world religions. Colonial societies were suffused with conflict, though it was rare for this to take an open form. According to Iliffe, rural Africa's 'most vigorous political body' was the Kikuyu Central Association'; it had just six to seven hundred active members (Iliffe 1995: 232). The continued unfixity and hybridity of the African subject, even if only of a relative type, made direct confrontation, perhaps, very difficult to organise. Passive resistance, however, was common. In the words of Allen Isaacman,

> The literature on colonial Africa suggests that peasant-organized social movements occurred primarily under two conditions: where hidden forms of protest no longer proved possible, and where colonial capitalist practices threatened peasant autonomy in unprecedented ways (Isaacman 1993: 254).

In the years following the Second World War, in the context of a 'second colonial occupation' these two conditions were increasingly met:

> Colonial governments had an alternative, either to dragoon battalions of peasant labourers in soil conservation works, or, like pre-revolutionary Russia, to wager on the strong, encouraging rural class formation to take its course in a capitalist transition…Charactersitically, they did both, and in the contradictions of policy lay the frustrations of Africans (Lonsdale 1981: 194).

Peasants and workers, with their backs against the wall, and with the encouragement of nationalist intellectuals, defied colonial rule in a more organized way than had been seen for decades (Gibbon 2001). In other words, the post-colonial conjuncture caused a crystallization of peasant and racial-national identities on a scale such as had not been seen before. Peasants resisted, actively, in defence of their economic interests, their general way of life, and, in places, in support of an imagined Africanised rule.

In most colonies after Independence, however, politically active populations were easily disorganised and representative government replaced by military or one-party rule (although the latter, as in Kenya and Tanzania, sometimes contained a competitive dimension). This has not stopped struggle, which has been fuelled by the failures of the post-colonial state to meet the economic expectations of its subjects. Belief in injustice might arise via perceptions of ethnic favouritism, or unacceptable corruption, or paying poor prices for peasant crops, or

imposing upon them unworkable development schemes. But it is only rarely that peasant or popular opposition to the post-Independence state has been organised and direct. In countries where populations have had a strong sense of ethnic identity and grievance, and where they live next to a border - such as in Biafra, Eritrea, and Sudan – attempts have been made to secede from unrepresentative states; this has resulted in war, sometimes of a very protracted sort. In rare cases, ethnic groups, or the residents of aggrieved geographical areas, have fought, persistently, for increased autonomy within a re-imagined national sphere.[16] More usual have been sporadic incidences of unrest and relatively disorganised ethnic violence, providing the justification for military coups and further ethnic reprisals. With a modernizing ideology that represented people as citizens but a politics that frequently engaged with them as ethnic subjects, underpinned by hybrid peasant economies and syncretic world religions, post-colonial Africa seems disposed to the creation of bifurcated persons with uncertain and shifting internal boundaries. It seems unsurprising, therefore, that the history of political action on the continent has see-sawed between popular struggles for democracy and ethnic strife, with the two frequently combining in complex and unstable ways.

These two forms of struggle, ethnic and democratic, represent, we can say, the two most common idioms of action in which confrontation occurs. But confrontation is conjunctural, it does not happen all the time. This is because there has remained a great deal of 'play' in the African subject, such that opposition has not been the norm. Take for instance, the fact that peasants have frequently chosen, or been able, to opt out of peasant identities because of state maladministration of agricultural markets (Williams 1985; Hyden 1980; Kasfir 1986). Evasion and migration are part of the African political tradition. Again, this is reflective of the fluid nature of African identity. Were identities unitary, or fixed, Africans under threat would have to confront their oppressors, rather than moving around. Africans, however, are disposed to shift: occupationally, by moving from state-taxed agriculture to other pursuits; geographically, by becoming refugees, or internally displaced persons; politically, though shifting allegiance to different patrons; and strategically, through dissimulation, or passive resistance (Bayart 2000).

> Given the forms taken by economic relations and the circulation of commodities and means of livelihood, and given also the way economic relations were articulated in the system of social stratification, political struggles would, at times, take on highly original forms – flight, evasion, dissimulation, subterfuge, derision, a whole range of forms of indiscipline and disobedience (Mbembe 2001: 51).

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[16] Buganda (1980-1985) offers the best example. For a discussion of its limitations, see (Englebert 2002).

We are now on the cusp of another epochal change. If the twentieth century produced societies and subjects that were bifurcated, the twenty-first century is scene to a much more pronounced state of fragmentation. Research suggests that the 'peasantry', as described above, is rapidly disappearing (Bryceson and Jamal 1997; Bryceson 2002; Larsson 2001; Seppälä 1998).

> After a century of colonial and post-colonial peasant formation, depeasantization has now begun, representing a specific form of de-agrarianization in which peasantries lose their economic capacity and social coherence, and shrink in demographic size (Bryceson 2002: 4; see also Bryceson 2002).

From place to place the causes vary, but common factors include long-term demographic change, the collapse in the value of export crops, and the omnipresent allure of the town.

Peasant economies are becoming increasingly diversified, with a large percentage of farmers shifting out of traditional export crops and into other cash crops such as vegetables. Alternatively, they may shift into other artisanal activities such as fishing, or charcoal making, or brick manufacture, or quarrying; or they may become increasingly involved in petty trade; or spend extended periods working the informal economy in town. Or they may do all of these activities, in different years, or even within the same year. 'Most of the opportunities are highly opportunistic in nature, involving quick responses to market demand and supply' (Bryceson 2002: 9). Others are moving to urban areas on a semi-permanent basis, but, given the collapse in African manufacturing, few are workers with nothing to lose but their chains.[17]

In terms of our theory, multiple, diversified livelihoods such as this should issue in even more complex, fragmented selves, which the present discussion has already identified as a signature of African societies. Bryceson provides support for this when she observes, 'There is a feeling that the productive environment has fundamentally altered and that there is no turning back. Old and new ways are combined in unpredictable and discordant harmonies' (Bryceson 2002: 26). This results, arguably, not just in a hybrid self, but in one so strung out in the play of social relations that its centre threatens not to hold (Mbembe and Roitman 1995). Note that similar states of acute fragmentation have been recognised for post-modern Europe and America. Some commentators have celebrated this phenomenon, as the subject becomes too slippery for a totalitarian state to hold (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Others have lamented the deleterious effect on political commitment (Dean 1998).

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[17] Although see (Bryceson 2002) 11-12 for claims of land consolidation and landlessness.

Let us focus on the 'political' dimension of this mobility: clientelism. African political structures are sometimes depicted as pyramidal networks of patronage that reach from the apex of the state to its base. Or, more realistically, as a number of pyramids each with an ethnic 'Big Man' at its summit. Competition for control of the state between the ethnic followers of each Big Man is often used to explain the violence and instability of Africa's 'tribal' politics. Bayart, for instance, has argued that, 'at bottom, the actors organise themselves in factions in order to win or conserve power at the various echelons of the social pyramid' (Bayart 1993: 211). At the same time 'networks are also stretched along a vertical axis within the framework of an unequal exchange of goods and services – they integrate the lowest of the low with the highest of the high' (Ibid. 218). Chabal and Daloz argue that, 'In the end, there is an interlocking neo-patrimonial logic between the deep ambitions of the political elites and the well-grounded expectations of their clients' (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 162).

I have two things to say to this. To begin with, there are different types of political patron. On the one hand there are those who assiduously nurture a political clientele; on the other, there are those that engage with the masses only sporadically, for instance, by showering money on voters at election time. Secondly, it might be the case that de-agrarianisation, this epochal change, is encouraging the replacement of the former type of patron with the latter. In a context of de-agrarianisation, peasants have multiple livelihoods and diverse and diffuse links to a multiplicity of potential patrons. It would be no surprise if their political allegiances were, in consequence, shifting and fickle. They are 'subjunctive' subjects, always looking to keep options alive (Reynolds Whyte 2002). This unpredictability makes the competition for their support more desperate. With clienteles never a safe bet, the energy of the political class is dissipated in fighting one another, and acquiring the rents that make possible ever more conspicuous displays of electoral largesse. The pressure to move from moral ethnicity to political tribalism is becoming more extreme. The amounts of patronage increase, but its quality, arguably, declines.

With political allegiance so difficult to secure, states remain illegitimate; misrule, and economic crisis, are the norm. With the government unable to perform basic functions, such as maintaining law and order, local people often begin to organise themselves. The outcome is vigilante groups cemented by re-imagined ethnic traditions – often heavily spiced with cultural borrowings from the West. Some of these groups succeed initially in enforcing a kind of justice which, though rough, is regarded locally as legitimate. However, they seem to be rapidly co-opted by established aspirants to political power. They are easily fragmented, disorganized, and re-oriented to political or criminal violence in service of the elite (Anderson

2002; Gore and Pratten 2003; Kagwanja 2003; Taylor 2002). It is easy for politicians to do this, I want to argue, for two main reasons. To begin with, resources in Africa, thanks often to the largesse of donors or foreign capital, remain concentrated in central institutions, or, more commonly nowadays, in the hands of a criminalised shadow-state elite (Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1999; Reno 2000). The wealth of the elite and the poverty of the masses means that people are easily bought. But at the same time it is easy for elites to dislodge individuals from their collective purpose, because their identities – their senses of self – are fragmented and weak.

In the most tragic cases the sinking of the post-colonial state has left a swirling vortex of spiritual and institutional anarchy in which damaged and fragmented selves harness a frightening ideational bricolage to a political economy of predatory war (Ellis 1999; other examples are given by some of the more gruesome uses of the occult, see for example Sanders 2001). For some of the victims and participants, the solution to such horrors is equally imaginatively extreme, as individuals knit themselves together through fantastical and violent millennial movements (Behrand 1999).

I turn now to review the literature on the African crisis, with a view to showing what bringing the self back in to focus allows us to see.

Perspectives on the African Crisis

The liberal view

The liberal analysis of the African crisis, which is shared by the World Bank, IMF and major bilateral donors (including Britain), is that Africa's economic demise in the late 1970s was the result of an over-interventionist economic role for the state (World Bank 1981, 1989). That intervention was politically driven, and, to date, attempts to reform the state have foundered on the same political concerns. Economic and political transformation, viz. liberalisation, are therefore symbiotically linked. There are two or three versions of this argument.

The first, and probably most influential, is associated with the work of Robert Bates. Bates argued that African economic policy was characterised by an 'urban bias' (Bates 1981). Governments typically interfered with the price mechanism in order to transfer resources out of agriculture and into industry, the intention being to fund industrialisation. Some of the common features of this interference were under-priced crops, overpriced exchange rates, over-protected industry and over-priced manufactured goods. In the long run such

phenomena created disincentives to agricultural production, eroding the foundation upon which industrial growth was supposed to be built. This economically 'self-defeating' policy syndrome was sustained, however, by a political coalition of urban interests and large farmers. 'The pattern of price interventions…represents the terms of a political pact among organized political interests, the costs of which are transferred to unorganized interests who are excluded from the price-setting coalition' (Bates 1988: 357). Cheap food prices kept urban workers docile, import-, exchange-restrictions and the like created lucrative sources of economic rent for bureaucrats, and rural development projects allowed politicians to patronise politically influential large farmers in the countryside:

> 'by conferring selective benefits in the market for farm inputs while imposing collective deprivations in the markets for products, governments secure the deference of a privileged few to programs that are harmful to the interests of most producers' (Bates 1988: 354).

This coalition was able to dominate policymaking because small farmers were numerous and dispersed throughout the countryside. They therefore had difficulty organising collectively in defence of their interests. 'public officials are frequently less concerned with using public resources in a way that is economically efficient than they are with using them in a way that is politically expedient' (Bates 1988: 352). The assumption, in the work of Bates, is that the rural masses had an interest in economic reform but, because of a collective action problem, no means to voice it. The imperative was therefore to find an institutional mechanism through which they could have their interests heard. 'Clearly' he opines, 'were competitive elections contested by rival parties in Africa, agricultural policy could not be so strongly biased against rural dwellers' (Bates 1988: 350). The problem with this analysis is twofold. To begin with, it posits a unitary, rational, utility-maximising self, when in my view Africans, like selves elsewhere, are complexly fragmented, often emotional, with desires not reducible to a totting up of utils. Then, partly in consequence, it commits the 'fallacy of electoralism' by stating that a single institutional reform will have welfare raising effects. But Africa needs more than elections, to make democracy work.

The next position is associated with Larry Diamond. Diamond argues that in Africa the state is the primary arena of personal economic accumulation and class formation (Diamond 1988). Because of this, competition for the state is exceptionally high.

> The swollen nature of the African state has had diffuse and profound consequences for democracy. In particular, by making the state the primary arena of class formation

and state control the primary means for the accumulation of personal wealth, it has put too much at stake in the competition for power (Diamond 1988: 21).

In the struggle to get elected, politicians typically resort to ethnic or communal appeals, generating significant levels of violence. Formal political institutions are overwhelmed and 'primordialism' becomes the norm. For example, in Nigeria's First Republic, 'the struggle for power was a desperate, zero-sum affair, in which parties and candidates were willing to go to any lengths of demagogy, tribalism, chicanery, violence, and fraud in order to triumph' (Diamond 1988: 5). Once elected, politicians are determined to protect their privileged access to economic rents and consequently turn to authoritarian forms of rule. They become kleptocratic, not democratic. The solution, then, is to divest the state of much of its economic responsibility, lowering the stakes of political competition and making institutionalised politics, in particular democracy, possible.

In order to consolidate liberal politics, citizens need to be made 'civil' through civic education and by experiencing democracy in practice, for instance in neo-Tocquevillian grassroots NGOs (Shils 1992; Diamond 1994). The latter, according to Goran Hyden, can be used to inject liberal social capital into Africa (Hyden 1983, 1997).

This type of theorising builds on an approach that places hopes for democracy in 'civil society'. According to Chazan, 'Voluntary associations provide small-scale settings for meaningful political participation in a context frequently devoid of possibilities for popular political participation on the state level' (Chazan 1982: 173). In respect of Ghana, she speaks of, 'A deeply ingrained indigenous culture of consultation, autonomy, participation, and supervision of authority' (Chazan 1988: 121). Optimistically, these associations might form the foundation for a reinvigorated liberal democracy on the continent (Ibid. See also Bratton and Rothchild 1992). Diamond himself argues that, 'A rich and vibrant associational life has developed in many African countries independent of the state, and this pluralism in civil society has been one of the most significant forces for democracy' (Diamond 1988: 23 ff). Suggesting, in a view shared by Chazan, that, 'Politically, the growth of non-formal modes of economic exchange and production joins with the growth of voluntary associations to provide 'alternative loci of power, authority and legitimacy' (Diamond 1988: 26; for an incisive critique of this line of reasoning, see Bangura and Gibbon 1993).

Liberal writers tend to regard the interventionist state as an inherently corrupt and incapable instrument of economic development. They apply a number of pejorative adjectives to it: 'swollen', 'rent-seeking', 'kleptocratic', 'neo-patrimonial', or 'prebendal' (Diamond 1987, 1988; Joseph 1987; Sandbrook 1985). They desire a slimmed-down, enabling state. By reducing

its role, liberals hope to make the state less susceptible to furious electoral competition, 'primordialism' or 'incivility'; by exposing Africans to liberal NGOs, they hope to change them into 'citizens' who want the right kinds of thing; finally, by making the state accountable to 'civil' society, its capacity, they contend, can be improved (WorldBank 1989, 1997, 2000). Initiatives based on this analysis, which are operationalised under the umbrella of the Governance Agenda, have been described by Williams and Young as a project of cultural transformation designed to create 'liberal selves' (Williams and Young 1994).

What does a focus on production, collective action and self reveal about this analysis? Astute liberals have long regarded the self as a problem. In order for democracy to function in its classical sense, or even for it to survive in a procedural sense, certain things must change. Ordinary people, in their infinite variety, must be re-constructed as individualistic, civil, critical, rational citizens. Ambitiously, the entire population will be re-fashioned in this mould. The tools with which to do this are the market, the media and NGOs.

Very broadly, the market, in early modern Europe, backed by the force of the state, eroded communal forms of property and individualised, over a period of centuries, the people whose land was enclosed (Becker 1994; Poggi 1978; Wood 1991). In Africa meanwhile, the market, unaided, is having hard work wresting property from a variety of forms of communal control (Berry 1985; Downs and Reyna 1988; Guyer 1997; but see Berry 2002). Capitalist relations continue to intertwine with, instead of overwhelming, pre-capitalist ones. This is partly because Africa lacks significant domestic funds for investment, and partly because foreign investors are deterred by the kinds of instability investment is intended to reduce. It is also because Africa lacks a state class with the determination and strategic vision to force through capitalist relations in a way that has occurred in other parts of the world, a point to which I shall return. Capitalism on the continent takes an indexically 'African' form.

Is it possible that people will be more thoroughly westernised by the media? It is clear that western images, that are beamed via satellite or imported on cassette with ever greater frequency into Africa, have an effect.

> Thanks to national and international television, a young person in the heart of an African village, who has never been to the capital or the nearest village, is more likely to know the streets of Paris, London or New York (Nyamnjoh and Page 2002: 628).

The effect however, seems to be to induce a desire to migrate to Paris, not, as in the fallen dreams of nationalist leaders, a fantasy of building *Parisienne* Africa. Sembene is more critical, 'Films and television programmes dominate our cinema screens and our living

rooms. They crush and they erase all memories of the past, they atrophy and they uproot the vague impulses toward social change' (Haynes 2002: 647). This is a little overdone – there is evidence that Africans actively appropriate media images, just as they have appropriated other outputs from the West over the years. But it must be stressed that such borrowings are not always benign. Hollywood action films, for example, appear to have informed the repertoires of violence in Sierra Leone (Richards 1996).

NGOs are the third string to the liberals' bow. The problem is that they receive relatively few resources – though the amount is increasing – and their actions are poorly coordinated and controlled. Currently, they are vulnerable to capture by the very patrimonial logics they are intended to transform (Cameron 2001; Igoe 1999; Kelsall 2001; Charlton and May 1995; Manji and O'Coill 2002). Moreover, the work of 'civil society' NGOs is concentrated at an ideational level. There seems little appreciation of the fact that economic relations, in particular multiple livelihoods, may also have to be transformed.

In short, reconstructing people as liberals will require an enormous effort focused on material relations, social institutions, and the way people imagine themselves. This is a tall order, given the paucity of resources available for the task. Targeting these efforts specifically on an African elite might be more practicable. (Indeed, the alleged elite focus of governance is a part of the Marxist critique). Currently African elites seem not to have that curious combination of liberal sensibility and strategic ruthlessness by which early modern european statesmen were buoyed. A good reason for this, is that African leaders have not had to think seriously about developing their societies, since they have been able to live lavishly, if rather precariously, from aid flows; reaping the rewards of juridical state sovereignty, in other words (Clapham 1996). Donors, for their part, are often reluctant really to force African leaders to be liberals, especially when other things – such as the underlying rate of inflation – appear to be doing fine.

Socialism[18]

Marxist critiques of the 1970s shared many features of the type of analysis made by Diamond. They argued that the state was a vehicle of class formation, and that violent struggles between political fractions, united by ethnic, religious or regional clienteles was class struggle in an African form (For an exemplary analysis see Saul 1976). But, in a context of neo-liberal hegemony, Marxists now have another agenda, 'what radical Africanists now need are, precisely, novel ways to think about – to theorize – both the

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[18] The most significant socialist scholars writing on Africa today are arguably to be found at Dakar's CODESRIA institute, and writing in the *Review of African Political Economy*.

present workings of the global capitalist system (in Africa and beyond) and the likely sites and agencies of possible resistance to it' (Saul and Leys 1998: 268). In practice, this has led to nothing less than an ideological rehabilitation in the role of the state: 'I would say that the African state, for all its record of abuse, remains a potential line of defence for Africans against the depredations of the world economic and political system' (Leys 1994: 46).

This position has been most enthusiastically carried forward by Adebayo Olukoshi, Executive Secretary for CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa), who has called for 'the rebirth of an African developmental state' (Olukoshi 1998, 2002). The argument is as follows: in spite of an unfortunate lurch into political authoritarianism in the 1960s, African economies, characterised by extensive state intervention, performed tolerably well:

> 'when the average growth rates recorded by African countries over the period from the 1960s to the early 1970s are compared with those that were experienced during the structural adjustment years…the immediate post-independence years, for all their shortcomings, would seem to have been golden years of some sort' (Olukoshi 2002: 15).

It was not until the oil shocks of the 1970s and the world recession that they entered a crisis. On this interpretation, the causes of economic decline were largely external. Crisis was compounded by structural adjustment in the 1980s, which further undermined the state's capacity either to stimulate economic growth or to secure political legitimacy. Faced with increased social unrest African governments became increasingly authoritarian, compounding economic decline. It was this full-blown crisis that resulted in the fall of several regimes and the movements for multi-party democracy in the 1990s. Unfortunately, a constraining international economic environment has meant that even democratic regimes have failed to recover political legitimacy, unable, as they are, to fulfil an implicit social democratic contract with their electors. In addition, voters have been denied genuine choice because ruling parties have used the state to undermine genuine opposition politics and electoral competition. Popular frustration has flowed instead into ethnic politics, religious revivalism and civil strife: 'Against the background of the mass sense of alienation which is evident in many African countries, communalist, religious, ethnic and regionalist identities have mushroomed' (Olukoshi 1998: 28).

According to this analysis, if democracy in Africa is to be consolidated, a number of things must happen. First, political reform must be underpinned by economic growth. This requires the promotion of a new developmental state model: 'African countries need to move rapidly

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toward a new 'social contract' within the framework of a developmental democracy which…will also restore a long-term developmental perspective to the state' (Ibid. 34). In the view of Saul and Sandbrook, this needs to be complemented by new economic arrangements at global level (Sandbrook 2000; Saul 1997). Second, the state must be decentralized, 'preceded by a systematic effort at democratising power by disciplining it to the popular prescriptions specified by the populace' (Olukoshi 1998: 34).

A collection associated with the Review of African Political Economy, also welcomes liberal democracy as a step in the direction of meaningful change (Daniel, Southall, and Szeftel 1999). In general, however, Marxists' support for multi-partyism comes heavily qualified. Liberals, argue radical scholars, desire a kind of democracy that is merely procedural, polyarchic, or of a 'low intensity' kind. Of this they tend to be dismissive. There appear to be three, interconnected reasons for their scepticism. Firstly, democracy in its representative, as opposed to its direct form, is thought liable to manipulation by social elites (Saul 1997: 342). Secondly, the decisions that really affect people's lives are taken in the economic, not the political sphere. If democracy does not extend to the farm and workplace, it can be of only limited significance, 'As historical experience demonstrates, democracy is compatible with misery and inequality in the social realm and with oppression in factories, schools, prison and families' (Przeworski 1991, cited in Saul, 1997: 344). Third, democracy exerts a mystifying effect on the masses, providing them with an illusion of choice and securing their support for a capitalist economic system in which they are deprived of real power. Writes Saul, 'from such a perspective, "democracy" is valued more as a plausible narcotic than as the route to any kind of genuine popular empowerment' (Saul 1997: 346). In its African incarnation, multi-party democracy is understood as part of the soft-sell of structural adjustment policies.

When it comes to envisaging what a 'genuine' or 'popular' democratisation would look like, however, socialists are vague.[19] Allen implies that it may come in the form of a 'radical wave of innovation…from within civil society' though in a subsequent comment he pours scorn on the latter concept, now discovered to be irredeemably infected by neo-liberal ideology (Allen 1995: 319; Allen 1997). Mamdani, also on the Left, argues for a simultaneous democratisation of urban and rural areas – by which he seems simply to mean that politics at the centre should be plural while locally it should be popular; since Africa, to date, has yet to witness the pair combined (Mamdani 1996).

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[19] A point made by Sandbrook, who appears to be with the liberals when it comes to Africa's domestic agenda, and with the socialists in the global sphere. (Sandbrook 2000: 6)

It is not difficult to point to the limitations of the liberal agenda in Africa and examples of struggle and resistance to it, and Marxists frequently do. It is also depressingly easy, in this author's opinion, to point out that almost every so called 'progressive' movement sooner, rather than later, either fizzles out, is squashed, or mutates into a neo-patrimonial form. In a context of multiple livelihoods and multiple identifications it would be a surprise if people were constructed in a thoroughly 'leftist' mode. Most people are combined of complex and contradictory combinations of 'progressive' and 'reactionary' identities, they have instincts that are both egalitarian *and* hierarchical, and the character of their actions – including that of their leaders - is usually too inconsistent to consolidate any kind of revolutionary move.[20] As Chabal and Daloz notice, 'Ideological conviction is easily swayed by access to the means of power' (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 33). It is all very well celebrating popular struggles, but the masses will need a great deal of consciousness raising before they act consistently in a Marxist mode. Though many Africans, especially intellectuals, have struggled and some have died for abstract causes, heterodoxy not orthodoxy is the rule.

A reinvigorated developmental state, such as Olukoshi would like to see, suffers from similar objections. People in Africa want, by and large, to be wealthy, but I am less sure that they want to be 'developed'. Developmental states, moreover, are political tools, and in the past they have been strenuously fought for. Marxists have yet to arrive at an idea of the institutional forms under which a consensus on the role of the state could be found, and which would transcend the multitude of struggles, reflective of a fragmented social formation, to which a centralised state gives rise. This is particularly true of Mamdani, who fails to give any convincing reasons why the innumerable ethnic, regional, gendered and class identities that have been bequeathed by history, wouldn't, if unleashed by a 'thoroughgoing' democratisation, engulf the political sphere in a variety of potentially retrograde or uncivil forms.[21] It is worth opining as an aside – since it is extremely unclear what Mamdani expects to happen – that a kind of anarchy which overwhelms the state and then begins anew – 'a terrible beauty being born', in the words of one observer - as has arguably happened in Somaliland, undoubtedly has its attractions (for a philosophical discussion of such revolutionary periods, moments, arguably, of pure subjectivity, see Zizek 1999). But it is an extremely high-risk strategy to pursue: 'It is…unwise to repose uncritical faith in the anger of the people' as Lonsdale, sagely, has advised (Lonsdale 1986: 157).

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[20] Interestingly, evidence of a link between multiple identities and uncoordinated collective action leading to poor accountability and development, has also been found in India: (Lanjouw and Stern 1998)

[21] For similar kinds of observation made in respect of governance, see (Fatton Jr. 1995; Lemarchand 1992).

Post-Modernists

Post-modern scholars of Africa are a more eclectic school than either of the previous two. Nevertheless they can be grouped together because their interpretations of the African crisis are arguably variations on a single theme, namely, the idea that Africa is a continent governed by developmentally and democratically dysfunctional cultural logics (Among the key works in this school are Bayart 1993; Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1999; Chabal 1992; Chabal and Daloz 1999; Mbembe 2001; Olivier de Sardan 1999; Schatzberg 2002).[22] Few of these scholars are idealists or culturalists in a crude sense (most owe as large a debt to Marx as they do, for instance, to neo-Weberian or post-structuralist thought). They tend to see ideational and material factors as inextricably intertwined. Neither do they regard culture as something that is static and immutable. They prefer instead to see it as an aspect of historical social formations that changes only in the *longue durée* (Bayart 1993; Chabal 1992; Schatzberg 2002; *.* The current African crisis can be explained because the imported state is a simulacrum, because it is a rejected transplant, or because 'in the weak institutionalization of political practices' there is 'profit to be found' (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 13). Put simply, crisis is a result of a lack of fit between imported political institutions, ideas of development, and extant ideas of person, economy and state.[23]

Post-modernists tend to agree that economically, African societies are governed by a logic of distribution rather than accumulation; and of consumption – frequently conspicuous – rather than of investment. Politically, Africans are inclined not to think of themselves as individuals sharing a nation state, but as members of distinct – albeit invented - communal groups, often in competition to dominate the state. State and society are not treated as functionally differentiated social realms; rather, in belief and in action they are interpenetrated by personal, familial, factional and fraternal networks, sometimes described as 'rhizomes' (Bayart 1993: 220; Chabal 1992; Chabal and Daloz 1999: 17 ff).[24] Another distinctive feature of the post-modern approach is to stress the fact that in Africa, the instruments of political action may be more openly enchanted than in the West. Actors tend to make frequent recourse to the occult, a reflection of the widespread belief in connections between a visible and invisible world (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Ellis 1999; Ellis and ter Haar 1998;

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[22] They are also, I think, sceptical of the metanarratives of modernisation and liberation, which continue to inform much writing in the liberal and socialist traditions.

[23] This is not the position of Bayart, who is at pains to stress that 'external' institutions have been appropriated by Africa in a process of 'long osmosis'. Rather, it is the logic of extraversion itself that, at least until the present day, has been dysfunctional in a developmental as well as democratic sense: (Bayart 2000), 237, and also that , '[democracy] this foreign import has become an integral part of sub-Saharan political cultures' (Bayart 1986) 110.

[24] Of course this is also true in the West, as some of the literature on Governance and networks implies. See (Deleuze and Guattari 1988; Rhodes 1997). However, it has long been part of the mythology of the West to present state and society as separate spheres, and the success of this mythology until recently had, from the point of view of economic growth, beneficial effects.

Geschiere 1997, 1998; Ashforth 1998, 1998; Chabal and Daloz 1999; Schatzberg 2002; Moore and Sanders 2001). This is rarely given due weight by liberals or Marxists, who, rather like the young Julius Nyerere, '[speak] of indigenous religions with an embarrassed smile' (Iliffe 1979: 550). Post-modernists deploy a variety of tropes to connote these phenomena: Chabal speaks frequently of 'neo-patrimonialism'; Bayart speaks of 'belly politics', Berman of 'Big-Manism', de Sardan of a 'moral economy of corruption', Schatzberg of a 'moral matrix' of 'father, family and food'; Lonsdale, meanwhile, speaks of 'moral ethnicity' and of 'political tribalism' - its destructive other side (Bayart 1993; Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1999; Berman 1998; Chabal and Daloz 1999; Lonsdale 1994; Schatzberg 2002; Olivier de Sardan 1999).

In the view of post-modernists the interventionist post-colonial state was never very efficient, since that was not its *raison d'etre*: 'it has never been in the interest of African political elites to work for the proper institutionalization of the state apparatus' (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 14). When the international economic climate deteriorated, population soared, and aid flows began to decline, these inefficiencies became manifest and many countries entered an economic and political crisis. That crisis persists, and currently African societies are in a state of upheaval as people attempt to secure resources for themselves and their extended families in different ways, none of which are terribly conducive to 'development'. Chabal and Daloz have spoken of the 're-traditionalization' of African societies and the 'instrumentalisation of disorder'. Meanwhile Bayart *et al* have pointed to the 'criminalization' of the state, as the fortunes of political leaders and followers become ever more closely linked to activities such as smuggling, drug-trafficking, and slaving (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1999; Bayart 2000).

The post-modern literature tends to be decidedly less normative than liberal or Marxist writing. Despite their Marxist roots, scholars prefer to limit themselves to trying to understand or merely to describe what is going on in Africa, instead of attempting to change it.[25] 'We do not present solutions to the problems of Africa, merely a diagnosis of its predicament', Chabal and Daloz, for instance, clinically state (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 163). Bayart, in his dazzling analysis of Africa's extraverted role in the word, seems fatalistic, though not deterministic, about the historical route that Africa will take (Bayart 2000: 267). However, insofar as there is an identifiable policy position, it seems to be that neither liberal democracy nor the prescriptions of Marxist intellectuals can be relied upon to work. Chabal

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[25] Contrast this with the auto-description of the Review of African Political Economy: 'We have always aimed to distance ourselves from those academic journals which implicitly claim 'objectivity' and thereby are unable to take a definite political stance on any issues. These have included transnational corporations (TNCs) and class struggle, peasant struggle and social welfare, attacking Structural

and Daloz aver that, 'low politics has been endowed with unwarranted militant or even subversive potential' and go on to say that, 'there are virtually no examples of social or political relations devoid of clientelistic calculations or considerations of identity' (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 29, 30). Instead, African political institutions need to be tailored more closely to popular African aspirations (Geschiere 1997; Chabal 2002). John Lonsdale, in a similar tune, has suggested that the 'moral ethnicities' of local communal groups need to be re-imagined on a national plane (Lonsdale 1992, 1994). But it is not easy to envisage quite what any of these new indigenous institutions would look like (Kelsall 2003).

I believe that the analysis unfolded in this article reveals two key points for consideration: First, Africa, as the postmodernists are in fact aware, has been penetrated by modernity, and its 're-traditions' are modern ones. It is probably unfeasible to turn the clock back. Second, multiple livelihoods and multiple identities have resulted in such a cacophony of ideas about power (even if the underlying matrix is the same), that it is difficult, at present, to imagine how such ideas could be institutionalised. The problem is that 'the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic' (Mbembe 2001: 102. African societies remain comparatively anarchic. This is part of what makes the continent such a fascinating place (especially to study!). It is refreshing that Africa is one of the few places where the 'net of discipline' has been too full of holes to capture and constrain its subjects; to render them docile, that is to say, for state surveillance and for industrial capitalism (de Certeau 1984; Foucault 1977).[26] But freedom has its costs, and Africa's instability is arguably one.

Pulling the self together

My argument ought, perhaps, to be rehearsed. What I have tried to argue is that selves are constructed in social relations, with key subject positions being given by the different moments of a social formation. Where the social formation is multiply fragmented, in economic, institutional and ideational terms, this is liable to be associated with a multiply fragmented subject. Multiply fragmented subjects are liable to experience difficulty in acting collectively, and therefore in institutionalising forms of political accountability, democracy included. A survey of African history suggests that African subjects have always been fairly fluid, with accountability largely being guaranteed by exiting or opting out of established institutions of power. The colonial period tended to force Africans into a bifurcated mould, part tribal part civil, and at its most constraining this generated some vigorous collective action; but these identities never set solid, and passive resistance continued to be the norm. In the post colonial period evasion, rather than institutionalisation or confrontation, has

Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and criticising Governance and corruption' http://www.roape.org/explain.html.

continued to dominate, and in the current context of de-agrarianisation, subjects appear more fragmented than ever. The institutionalisation of political accountability appears, in these conditions, a distant dream.

Also, if the account I have provided above is correct, African selves, in many places, are more abraded than ever. Formal political institutions do not wind tightly around people's material realities or moral ideas. The result is states, and consequently economies, that don't function well. In these circumstances, too many lives unravel. One possible solution, I want to argue, is to limit fragmentation, slow the pace of change. There are a number of ways in which this might occur. Some of them involve insulating Africa from the more destabilising effects of the global economy. For example, new international agreements, even legislation, might be made to shield Africa from some of the worst forms of 'culture dumping'. Second, similar measures might be introduced to penalise, in the west, companies suspected of involvement in environmentally ruinous and socially destabilising natural resource exploitation, of which the recent case of Congo is only the most extreme example. Campaigns such as the recent one surrounding 'conflict diamonds', are a step in the right direction.

Next, while donors have a right and, some might say, a duty to ensure that aid monies are accountably used, the idea that the best system to achieve this must be some variant of liberal democracy ought to be abandoned. Currently liberal analyses pay lip-service to 'each country's distinctive cultural traditions' (Diamond 1988: 29) but tend in practice to offer blueprint solutions. As Williams and Young descry, 'There is then on the one hand an aspiration to build on the indigenous, and on the other a recognition that the indigenous may be an obstacle' (Williams and Young 1994: 96). There needs to be an effort to think practically about how African ideas about power and legitimacy can be institutionalised in the formal political system. African intellectuals ought to lead the way here. Unfortunately, many political scientists in Africa are currently almost solely preoccupied with writing reports for donors (who can pay much more than African universities) on the subject of NGOs, civil society and multi-party democracy. Creative thought is consequently paralysed.

In addition to this, people in some countries could benefit from a strengthening of the role of the state. This implies that it receive the resources to augment its welfare functions. The problem, if this money comes in the form of aid, is that in current conditions, more money tends to result in more corruption and destabilising competition for spoils. There are no easy answers to this. It might be that donors simply have to be more strict in how they dispense their money and fund their programmes. An expanded role and increased surveillance by the

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[26] Clearly South Africa went furthest in this direction.

west is liable to provoke perfectly reasonable charges of neo-colonialism and imperialism. It is difficult to get around this conundrum, but since one implication of what I am suggesting is that donors work within Africa in much closer partnership with the state, thought might be given to finding means of making donors, as well as African politicians, more accountable to African publics.[27]

A further point: it is quite conceivable, as certain authors have recently suggested, that the configuration of some societies is such that they are unlikely, in the foreseeable future, to support a successful central state (Clapham 2000; Englebert 2000). It may be that non-state solutions are more appropriate here. Where aid and the state seem incapable of improving welfare, there is also a strong case for encouraging increased migration. Remittances are already a major source of income in Africa and migration, whether domestic or international, temporary or permanent, is such a common feature of many African lives, that it might be described almost as a cultural norm (Rimmer 2003). Western countries are undergoing a demographic crisis and immigration will doubtless have to increase in future years. Mass immigration brings its political difficulties and because of this, the current policy is one of containing Africa, while subjecting it to external agendas of change (Hoogvelt 1997: 162-181). A new balance needs, surely, to be found: as part of this, Western politicians need to think creatively about how best to manage increased levels of immigration and cultural plurality.

It might be that some combination of all these strategies would best help Africa – less exposure to economic instability, more assistance for development, more sensitivity to indigenous norms, more immigration. Even suggesting these things puts one in the position of a paternalist, which is an uncomfortable one in which to be (in spite of the commonality, in Africa, of patriarchal norms). It should be stressed that many Africans struggle along in spite of the difficult economic and political conditions in which they live, they make innovative attempts to weave old and new ways of living together (see for example the excellent essays in Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Werbner 2002), and their lives are filled with meaning, joy and hope - just as people's lives are anywhere. But it is hard to be a student of Africa and not be filled with regret for the fact that too many lives are far too short and contain a barely imaginable excess of pain. The dismal history of Europe's international relations with Africa notwithstanding, this provokes thought, no matter how detached one might prefer to be, on what ought and can be done. The aim is to create conditions in which economic fragmentation is slowed, institutions begin to resonate, and political ideas become more appropriate. The ambition, in other words, is to create societies in which women and men can live well (cf Iliffe 1979: 325). Africa isn't a scar, not even, it seems, on the conscience of

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[27] This is one of the implications of Rita Abrahamsen's innovative work (Abrahamsen 2000, 2003)

the Blair government (as the actions of the Trade and Industry Department testify)[28] but its predicament is, perhaps, something that should concern us all.

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[28] 'Arms to Africa scar Britain's conscience'
http://www.observer.co.uk/worldview/story/0,11581,643774,00.html

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