

# Going with the Grain in African Development?

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*In view of the disappointing performance of the Good Governance agenda in Africa, policy-makers are asking whether better results could be obtained with approaches that attempt to 'work with the grain' of African societies. This article explores what this might mean. It identifies a core set of beliefs and values – concerning power, accountability and social morality – that have proved extremely durable and remain powerful drivers of behaviour across sub-Saharan Africa. It finds that, in general, Western institutions sit ill with these traditions. The question is, therefore, how to redirect development efforts so that they stop working against, and start to build upon, the extant notions of moral obligation and interpersonal accountability in the region.*

**Key words:** Governance, power, politics, Africa, accountability, social morality

## 1 Introduction

For the past twenty years donors have been trying strenuously to transform the social fabric of African societies in the interests of development, efforts that have been organised under what is known as the Governance Agenda. 'Good Governance', according to the World Bank in 1992, meant strengthening public sector management, promoting rules and institutions to provide a predictable and transparent framework for public and private business, and promoting accountability for economic and financial performance (World Bank, 1992: 3). It also implied introducing or strengthening a suite of essentially Western institutions: a separation of powers, free press, independent judiciary, pluralistic civil society, and respect for the rule of law, to which other voices added the idea of multi-party elections (Moore, 1993; World Bank, 1989: 61). At its most ambitious, the Governance Agenda has attempted to reach right into the capillaries of African society, changing the way Africans practise and think about development and politics (Landell-Mills, 1992; Williams and Young, 1994; Young, 1996). The results, perhaps unsurprisingly, have been underwhelming. Although most African countries have now emerged from the profound slump of the 1980s, none are recording levels of economic growth that allow them to make serious inroads into poverty.<sup>1</sup> None appear to be taking off in the way that certain East and South-East Asian countries have done in

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1. With the exception of some oil-producing states.

recent decades. This disappointing record has given rise to the suspicion that the Governance Agenda does not provide sufficient answers to Africa's development conundrum. Further evidence comes from a variety of sources.

In recent years important new research has shown that economically successful Asian governments have rarely followed the kinds of policies proposed by Good Governance. They have intervened in the market, they have got prices wrong, they have engaged in rent-seeking and corruption, they have used clientelist politics, they have eschewed multi-party democracy, and so on (Khan and Sundaram, 2000). East Asian countries did not adopt Western ways of doing things wholesale; rather, they selected certain elements of the Western experience which they then combined with indigenous strengths, creating distinctive new models of development, with the result of dynamic growth that is undeniably reducing poverty. This should come as little surprise, since the historical record shows that Western states themselves developed step-wise from patrimonial and neo-patrimonial foundations – they did not arrive at good governance and prosperity overnight (Weber, 1980; Brewer, 1990; Bendix, 1978; Chang 2003; Gerschenkron, 1962; Moore, 1966). Reinforcing these impressions, a global study by French researchers using data collected by French embassies has recently shown that Good Governance indicators are not the best predictors of economic performance. Instead, factors such as 'co-ordination capacity' and 'strategic vision' appear to be more important (see Meisel and Ould, 2008), leading some analysts to talk about 'good enough governance' (Grindle, 2004).

In 2003, and partly in response to frustration with Governance, the UK's Department for International Development began to pioneer an approach called 'Drivers of Change' in its country offices, based on the idea that 'effective programmes must be grounded in an understanding of the economic, social and political factors that either drive or block change within a country'. Over twenty studies were commissioned, aimed at unveiling the 'formal and informal rules, power structures, vested interests and incentives' informing state and development institutions (see Drivers of Change Public Information Note 2004, available at Governance and Social Development Resource Centre: <http://www.gsdrc.org/go/topic-guides/drivers-of-change>). Each differed in its focus and methodology, but several came to the conclusion that the realities of power and culture in Africa posed formidable obstacles to the implementation of Good Governance. The way power was exercised would have to change if more rapid development was to ensue.

Finally, Tony Blair's much vaunted Commission for Africa also contained a chapter entitled 'Through African Eyes', stressing the importance and potential of African culture, and recognising the salience of patronage, patron-client relations, big-man culture and religion to development. It noted the success Somaliland has had building on local clan structures, concluding that: 'The challenge is to harness the cultures of Africa to find such workable hybrids for the rest of the continent. The overall lesson is that outside prescriptions only succeed where they work with the grain of African ways of doing things' (Commission for Africa, 2005: 35).<sup>2</sup> These sentiments

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2. Another force pushing in this direction is the Paris Declaration, which encourages major donors to develop better partnerships with African governments and by implication to work more with the grain of things. See Hyden (2008: 3).

chime with theoretical arguments to the effect that a society's formal institutions must resonate with its shared habits and widely understood practices if they are to promote stability and development (Shivakumar, 2005), and with empirical evidence that Africa's more successful states have a greater degree of endogeneity, being built on pre-colonial foundations (see, for example, Englebert, 2000; Clapham, 2000).

In response to these kinds of findings, DFID agreed in 2007 to support a five-year research programme to look more systematically at the nature of informal, neo-patrimonial power in Africa, and to see if development policies that better fit the grain of today's – often corrupt – realities might be found. Since then, the Africa Power and Politics Programme (<http://www.institutions-africa.org>) has been devising methodologies and scoping case studies in an attempt to answer that question. But what is it looking for? What is the African grain, and where does it come from? What might development with the grain actually look like? This article provides some evidence-based and conjectural answers to that question.

## 2 Politics and society in pre-colonial Africa

What do we mean when we talk about the grain of society or of a social fabric? The term implies that society has a particular pattern, that it flows in a certain direction; it evokes ideas of a society's culture, traditions, or maybe *habitus*. But these are contested terms. In this article I provisionally define the social grain slightly differently, and less controversially, as 'patterns of thought, organisation, and accountability' in Africa that have been both widely distributed in space and durable across time'.<sup>3</sup> Thus defined, the key features of the social grain in Africa today flow from a history, rooted in an economy, that is centuries old.

Before the arrival of Europeans the African continent was home to a rich diversity of political formations,<sup>4</sup> out of which, with some caveats, a broad evolutionary pattern of increasing complexity and scale can be discerned. The trend is from small bands of hunter-gatherers, to village-based agriculturalists, to more or less militarised chiefdoms and kingdoms, to empires based on production, slave-raiding, and trade, as illustrated in the 4000-year political development of Equatorial Africa described in Jan Vansina's *Paths in the Rainforests* (Vansina, 1990; for a continental overview, see Lonsdale, 1981). Vansina explains how bands of autochthonous hunter-gatherers in the forest zones of Central Africa were displaced or absorbed by migrating Bantu farmers, who brought with them a wet-season crop package and an ancestral tradition in which basic agricultural units or Houses were grouped into villages and loosely formed districts. Out of these a sense of ethnic identity gradually began to emerge, and in a context of population expansion, competition, diffusion and conquest, some areas developed new

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3. I realise that accountability may also be a contested concept. Briefly, in my view, A is accountable to B if A is responsive to B's wishes, and if B can hold A responsible in the event of non-responsiveness, thus inflicting some kind of loss (of face, of income, of popularity, of power, etc.). Accountability thus conceived can be formal or informal, bottom-up or top-down. All political systems contain a measure of accountability, although in those based on random, capricious or paranoid violence, or on ad hoc monetary arrangements, the amount is likely to be comparatively small.

4. 'Mosaic', 'patchwork', and 'tapestry' are the metaphors often used to describe this diversity.

ideologies and technologies that cemented new, more centralised political formations, such as the Kongo kingdom with half a million subjects.

While the evidence suggests that politics in band-organisations was relatively egalitarian and based on face-to-face accountability and participation,<sup>5</sup> the arrival of Houses and villages implied increased authority for senior 'big men'. Further evolution (from about AD 1000) saw the emergence of ideas of 'legitimate succession' and the limitation of political competition to senior patri- or matrilineal, with junior lineages occupying subordinate roles. In Vansina's reconstruction, the institution of primogeniture limited competition still further and permitted an increase in political stability and scale. Thus, in larger formations of several lineages or more, a hereditary chieftaincy emerged, laying the foundations for the emergence of royal dynasties. In places where the resource base permitted and where the leadership was skilful enough, kingdoms grouping together several chiefdoms subsequently emerged (Vansina, 1990; for a textbook overview, see Schraeder, 2000). A kingdom implied some kind of a bureaucratic staff, while in empires the degree of political complexity increased still more, with an expanded staff exercising increasingly specialised functions.

It needs to be stressed that nowhere in Africa was this pattern consistent or linear. Bands, chiefdoms, kingdoms, empires, rose and fell depending on their success in securing subsistence, wealth, and security for their members through hunting, production, warfare and trade (Lonsdale, 1981: 172; Vansina, 1990). In addition, political institutions were not always a product of 'organic' growth: they were often imported, as when refugees from the expansion of Islamist empires in Sahelian West Africa invaded the West African forest zone, setting themselves up as 'chiefs' (see for example Kup, 1962). Moreover, the distribution of political and ritual functions differed from society to society, and the general trend towards hierarchy and power concentration was sometimes constrained by the existence of cross-cutting and counterbalancing institutions, as with the relations between chiefs and secret society officials in Sierra Leone, the Alaafin, Oyo Mesi and Ogboni in the Oyo Empire, or between lineage and age-based political associations in parts of Tanzania (see, for example, Spear, 1997). In the forest regions of Gabon, communities bucked the centralising trend of politics to their south by combining matrilinearity with strong decentralisation (Vansina, 1990: 159).

From where did pre-colonial leaders derive their power and authority? Economically, big men tended to control access to land and reproductive power, the main co-ordinates of what has come to be called a lineage mode of production, the different variants and remains of which can be found all over Africa today.<sup>6</sup> In the ancestral tradition identified by Vansina for example, women were essential to the production and reproduction of the political community. Big men practised polygyny and married as many wives as they could, who were then used to attract young men to the household as consorts.<sup>7</sup> Alternatively if a young man wanted to marry, acquire land,

5. Given the paucity of historical data, this has to be inferred from the contemporary ethnographic record. See, for example, Turnbull (1961).

6. See Godelier (1972); Meillassoux (1972); and more recently Kitching (1980); Spear (1997). Of course the lineage mode gave rise to a significant diversity of productive arrangements and land-holding patterns, some of the political implications of which are explored in Boone (2003).

7. As still seen in parts of Sierra Leone and Liberia. See Richards (2005).

and start a family, he required the consent of the big man. In patrilineal societies generally, men obtain land from their fathers, or else permission from a lineage elder or headman to clear new land; and over the course of his lifetime a man will have to transfer wealth in the form of labour and livestock to his wife's father.<sup>8</sup>

Another economic source of big men's authority was their organisation of what we might call public goods. For example, elders might co-ordinate collective action for bush clearing, harvesting, terracing and maintenance of irrigation furrows where these were used. In larger-scale societies, some of these functions would be under the overall authority of the chief (Giblin, 1990; Koponen, 1988). In the ancestral tradition of Equatorial Africa, the word for 'leader' is tellingly linked to the terms 'to divide' and 'to give away' (Vansina, 1990), and chiefs and kings would often amass substantial granaries for redistribution during peak labour periods or at times of food shortage. In the Shambaa kingdom of north-eastern Tanzania, the chief provided the ultimate refuge for families pushed to the margins of survival (Feierman, 1990: 53). In addition, where chiefs developed large herds of livestock, these could be placed with clients who would then owe loyalty to the chief. In pre-colonial Burundi and Rwanda, for example, cattle clientage was an important foundation of Tutsi political domination (Newbury, 1988).

Political authority also rested importantly on military domination. Talented hunters and warriors were able to protect their communities from wild animals and human attack, and to raid other communities for young men, women, and livestock. The king of Buganda was said to give a foreign war to his chiefs rather as a host gives a party (Lonsdale, 1986: 147). In a continent where labour was typically scarce and populations often weakened by famine, many of the largest and most powerful political formations were linked to slavery, both before and after their encounter with the Islamic and European worlds (*ibid.*: 148-9). For example, in South-West Equatorial Africa, the term for 'pawn' became linked to that for 'prisoner-of-war', and with prisoners one saw the beginnings of slavery (Vansina, 1990). In the Shambaa kingdom, securing refuge with the chief also meant 'personal dependency on the chief, one which in some cases carried the threat the dependent would be sold to slave traders' (Feierman, 1990: 53). In this case, confraternal lineage groups built up funds of livestock to pay indemnities and forestall the pawning of their members to the chief. In Asante, perhaps the greatest sub-Saharan state, much of the heavy labour and dirty work was done by slaves, whose compliance was secured not just by the threat of coercion, but by the remote possibility that they would one day earn their freedom (McCaskie, 1995). Likewise, some key officials of Western Nigeria's Oyo Empire were non-Yoruba slaves (Lonsdale, 1981: 179): 'Kings could use slave troops to police free communities; chiefs and elders could use slave labour to compete with the efforts of their followers and their sons' (Lonsdale, 1986: 149).<sup>9</sup> Even very recently, in places like Liberia and Sierra Leone, forced labour and sexual slavery have been key elements in the political economy of war, and raiding for slaves continues to flourish in parts of the Sudan.

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8. For a good discussion of the economics of women and cattle, see Kitching (1980).

9. He goes on to say 'The support of clients and juniors was in this way devalued; they became more amenable to control, less able to hold their seniors to account. Royal power became more secular, less bound by the ritualised restraints of the past moral economy of production' (*ibid.*).

These economic sources of power rested on the ideological buttresses of family and religion. To take the first, Vansina (1990: 81) notes for the ancestral tradition that, 'Village communities were thought of as a single family whose father was the village headman, and the big men of each House were his brothers. The village was thus perceived as a House on a higher level.' Later on, the patriline provided a template for political governance, viz. a detailed hierarchy of age and generation. Smaller Houses in a village could be perceived as descendants from younger brothers. Closely allied villages were supposedly descendants of older or younger brothers. The former district, consisting of supposedly equal villages, now became a formal structure where every village retained its autonomy, yet occupied a precise position in a hierarchy as expressed by a common genealogy, where cognitive distinctions between senior and junior at each step corresponded to physical superiority or inferiority' (ibid.: 109). Even in a state as large as Asante, the social order was based on the state's underwriting the principle of jural corporateness, the idea that the matrilineage and the uterine family were each in their own way 'a single, indivisible "jural person[s]"' (McCaskie, 1995: 86-9).

In addition, women and youths were taught that older men had the right to rule because of their virility, wisdom and access to other-worldly power. African leaders 'mediate[d] the dichotomy between nature and culture' (Iliffe, 1978: 11) and '[k]ings claimed to help where it mattered, protecting not only the political but also the spiritual conditions of production' (Lonsdale, 1986: 146). **Crucial to understanding this is pre-colonial Africans' religious belief in an invisible world of ancestors, warrior-heroes, nature spirits, and witches, with whom elders claimed the esoteric and ritual knowledge to intercede, thereby bringing fecundity, prosperity and security to their followers, and staving off misfortune, illness and death.** In chiefdoms, kingdoms and empires, the ruler typically appropriated some of these claims to knowledge, often with the assistance of elaborate cosmologies and professional ritual specialists. According to Vansina, 'big men were successful because they had extraordinary supernatural powers, identical with and often superior to those of witches' (Vansina, 1990: 97). Meanwhile, rulers' instrumentalisation of warfare was legitimated ideologically by means of an honour ethic (Iliffe, 2005).

But rulers' authority was also subject to constraint. **At lower levels of political organisation, where lineage elders lacked concentrated means of coercion, power could be exercised only by way of a consultative tradition.** Leaders who deviated too far from this would likely be brought back into line by face-to-face community pressure. Where authority was more centralised, the leader's power rested to a large extent on his ability to build up a significant granary or large herd and to wield the personal authority to mobilise collective action; commoners could often withhold tribute from an unpopular chief or refuse to follow his lead, thereby eroding the material foundation of his authority. In yet more hierarchical systems, kings could continue for some time to extract tribute by force. **But in most parts of Africa populations remained thin, strangers were welcomed, and the locus of a leader's authority did not stretch very far. As Lonsdale observes, 'It was easier to repudiate a king's responsibility by turning one's back than to face him and hold him to account.** And the economics of emigration were not too daunting' (1986: 146). Thus disgruntled subjects could easily abandon a chiefdom, set up on their own in uninhabited land or join the community of a

neighbouring chief. Political obligation and identity were fairly mobile and fluid. All were incentives for a leader to rule wisely.<sup>10</sup>

These economic imperatives were reflected in ideological traditions. Oaths of investiture, for example, often reflected a chief's responsibilities to his followers. On Mount Meru in Tanzania, the *mangi* or chief would sit on a stool before a large audience that included clan elders who would present him with gifts. One of the elders would face him, hold him by the shoulders and say, 'We have given you this throne, sit on it, and rule over us'. Chiefs could be removed if they failed to use their wisdom and power for the entire society (Puritt, 1970: 111). In the Shambaa kingdom, peasants acknowledged the chief's rights in the wealth of their land, but they expected him to exercise those rights in moderation (Feierman, 1990: 48). Even the most ostensibly coercive polities usually contained checks and balances: for example, interviews with a late nineteenth-century Zulu king revealed that his freedom of manoeuvre was considerably constrained by chiefs and their subjects (Mamdani, 1996: 44-5).

In addition, although leaders based their claims to power on privileged access to a supernatural realm, they could never be guaranteed a complete monopoly. In the Shambaa kingdom, for example, 'The chiefs fought for power in an environment where many different individuals established claims to hold healing power: locust specialists, irrigation specialists, healers who treated epidemics, those who claimed special relationships with spirits at caves and trees, or with the ancestral spirits of a locally dominant lineage'. In this context, pretenders to royal power tried to show their strength by holding back the rain (Feierman, 1990: 78, 100). Thus 'Africans drummed up support by proclaiming the fertility of their rule. Some of them were killed when they became senile or the next rains failed' (Lonsdale, 1986: 146). Moreover, the forces of witchcraft were open to harness by disgruntled subjects, and big men lived in fear of poisoning or other forms of attack, which inclined them to generosity in the exercise of power – 'One should never stand out. One should always share ... witchcraft was an ideology of equality and cooperation' (Vansina, 1990: 96). It was thus in the interplay between responsiveness (based on providing economic, organisational and ideological benefits to their followers) and responsibility (based on the possibility of dissent, desertion or attack) that pre-colonial accountability could be found.

### 3 Accountability in contemporary Africa

This pre-colonial past provided the basis for ideas about power, accountability, morality and society that remain terrifically powerful in Africa today, as explored in Michael Schatzberg's book, *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa*, which draws evidence from Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Cameroon, Zaire (DRC), Tanzania and Kenya. By means of a 'close interpretive reading' of the press, speeches and interviews, party manifestos and policy statements, memoirs, theology, philosophy, popular literature, as well as interviews and informal conversations in the field, Schatzberg argues that most studies of Africa are 'out of focus' with local political realities, and urges that '[u]nless

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10. In more constrained cases, particularly where the migration option was foreclosed, rulers might face open revolt or political challenge, as when slavery reached intolerable levels in late nineteenth-century Shambaa, and Bondei peasants threw out their chief, reverting to lineage rule (Feierman, 1990: 94).

we begin to take indigenous understandings of concepts and categories more seriously than we do currently, we shall continue to miss vital and living elements of politics in this part of the world' (Schatzberg, 2002: 37, 70).

The starting point to Schatzberg's new approach is a recognition of the frequency with which familial and paternal images are projected onto political affairs, leading him to conclude that Africans think about the relation between citizens and the state through the metaphor of an idealised extended family. Familial metaphors, he claims, issue from an implicit cultural and cognitive template, which shapes African political thought and action. For Middle Africa, this cognitive template, or 'moral matrix', embeds a number of 'tacit understandings' about power, about the parameters of the political and about political causality. These are further associated with a set of 'general and imprecise understandings' about the rights and responsibilities of political office, about inclusion and exclusion from the political realm, and about how long a leader may legitimately remain in office. The moral matrix forms a 'politically subjacent arena', or set of 'pre-theoretical notions and assumptions' about politics. The ideas and actions that flow from it strike 'immediate and responsive chords' with the population; they are easily 'thinkable' and more likely to be considered politically legitimate.

The book discusses in rich detail the prevalence of metaphors of 'eating' in discussions of power, the role of spirituality in politics, the elision of the spheres of church and state, the idea of the indivisibility of power, and the role of the occult in beliefs about political causality. It also explains the idea that African leaders should be 'Father-Chiefs'. The President, for example, should be simultaneously a loving father and a disciplinarian chief; he should be entitled to 'eat' well, but not when his children are suffering. Needless to say, this implies a moral discourse on corruption that is somewhat incongruent with public discourse on the subject in the West. Another defining feature of the moral matrix relates to generation and gender. Women may participate in the political system, but primarily as advisers behind the scenes. Elders are entitled to power; but the younger generation must be given its chance once it is matured.

Schatzberg demonstrates convincingly that a common cultural logic informs political experience in countries as outwardly diverse as Nigeria and Tanzania, while remaining sensitive to differences in volume and style. And here he is surely correct. While national political discourse in Tanzania is not heavily coloured by metaphors of paternity or eating – even if Julius Nyerere was both *Mwalimu* (Teacher) and *Baba wa Taifa* (Father of the Nation), my own local research revealed that these tropes permeate political talk at a local level. 'Do you want him [the MP] to eat that money only with his children?' a constituent responded when asked what he thought about the MP's habit of ostentatiously handing out cash. 'We are also his children' (Kelsall et al., 2005: 91-5).

The emphasis on 'Father-Family-Food' provides the ideological underpinning for the practices of clientelism and neo-patrimonialism so prevalent in Africa today. A good leader is not a first among equals, he is a patriarch, and he is expected to provide for his followers or family. Patronage invokes a number of meanings that many Africans immediately recognise and understand; it is difficult to disapprove of a leader who nurtures his clients in this way.

Schatzberg also discusses the prevalence of witchcraft ideas in everyday political life; political events are often thought to have other-worldly causes. A similar theme has

been addressed by Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar in their book *Worlds of Power*, and in a subsequent article subtitled 'Taking African epistemologies seriously' (Ellis and ter Haar, 2004; 2007). They begin by contrasting European and African worldviews. Europe has experienced a long historical process of secularisation in which religion was first of all separated from the state and confined to a sphere of private belief, and in which occult forces became further removed from direct personal manipulation. In contrast, many Africans continue to believe that earthly power has its ultimate source in an invisible world, which can be privately influenced by means of spells, charms, rituals, and prayers: 'In such a holistic perception of the world, it follows that people's social relations extend into the invisible sphere. In the same way as they try and maintain good relations with their relatives, neighbours and friends for their own benefit, individuals and communities invest in their relations with spiritual entities so as to enhance the quality of their lives' (Ellis and ter Haar, 2006: 353-4). Further, while most African countries recognise an official separation between religion and state, informally that separation is not regarded as legitimate. Consequently critiques of power are often couched in a religious idiom, and African politicians frequently court religious leaders and employ ritual specialists to buttress their rule.

Such contemporary ideas show strong continuities with the pre-colonial period, where the big man – a household leader, chief, or king – manipulated the spiritual realm to bring health and prosperity to his dependants. This article argues that this pattern of political accountability, rooted in what some scholars have called a moral economy, is not necessarily inherently detrimental to economic or human development. What is detrimental is the way that it has been institutionalised in most parts of Africa today.

To understand this dysfunctionality, we must turn to the colonial period. Colonialism truncated the autonomous development of African states based on a process of competition, diffusion, imitation and conquest, and tied local accountability to the economic and administrative imperatives of external rule. Economically, it unleashed new forces of cash cropping and resource extraction that led to increased pressure on land and increased claims, often coerced, on local labour. Administratively, it often employed local big men as headmen and chiefs, still presiding over their old clientelist networks, but now as clients of a colonial power which patronised them with salaries, advice on cash cropping, improved rights over labour and land, and an increased ability to levy fines, together with a blind eye, in many cases, to processes of extortion and corruption (Berman, 1998; Iliffe, 1978; Ranger, 1983). They became the key gatekeepers, levers and beneficiaries of the new processes of economic differentiation, and local resource struggles consequently dovetailed with the politics of chieftancy, expressed in fiercely moral debates about ethnic custom and the obligations between chiefs and commoners, big men and 'small boys', old and young, male and female (Berman, 1998; Lonsdale, 1992; 1994).

On the eve of independence, the colonial powers introduced competitive national elections. Big men with political ambitions now had to compete for votes by styling themselves as the embodiments of moral ethnicity. To fulfil some of the 'morally ethnic' expectations of their local clients and thus to prevail in political struggles of lineage and clan, these leaders tried to draw on a national pool of economic resources and political patronage. Meanwhile, at a national level, ethnic big men found themselves in competition for state resources with the big men of other ethnic

communities, which for administrative purposes had become more clearly and rigidly defined. They consequently encouraged the creation of ethnic collective actors, able to compete in sometimes violent and amoral ways for votes and resources on a national stage, a phenomenon that Lonsdale has referred to as 'political tribalism' (Lonsdale, 1994). Local expectations and electoral politics thus provided incentives to plunder common central resources without regard to national development, in a tragedy-of-the-commons type of way.

This process has been exacerbated by what we can call the *parallelisation* and *obscurantisation* of political and economic activity. In the run-up to independence, political tribalism was transitorily eclipsed in most countries, although it reasserted itself with a vengeance soon afterwards (for overviews see Allen, 1995; Young, 1986). African leaders tended to respond by publicly denouncing tribalism, as when Samora Machel proclaimed that 'For the nation to live, the tribe must die' (cited in Berman, 1998: 306). Some also created institutions, for example the one-party state, designed to mitigate its centrifugal effects. But this did not signal the demise of ethnic politics; political tribalism merely shifted back-stage, creating a parallel world of tribal politics and moral ethnicity. Politics in Africa became a clandestine, materialistic and opportunistic struggle tied to 'the ability of the big-men of ethnic communities ... to obtain for the regions and districts a significant share of the large-scale collective benefits of development ... as well as the more individual rewards apportioned through the discrete personal contacts of the back verandah' (ibid.: 335). In this way, the deep politics of the peasantry was tied to the high politics of the state, and positions in government to authority relations in the village (see also Bayart, 2000; Berman and Lonsdale, 1992; Chabal, 1992; Chabal and Daloz, 1999; 2006; Reno, 1995).

The problem with this type of politics is not so much that it is clientelistic, as that it is opaque. Although nobody really knows the extent to which it is happening, everybody suspects that other ethnic groups are plundering the national purse for their own benefit. This leads to a prisoner's-dilemma situation in which even those groups and individuals who would prefer to co-operate in the responsible use of the nation's resources feel impelled to act in selfish and damaging ways for fear of being left empty-handed. Lack of transparency also encourages the diversion of collective resources into avenues of personal greed, by allowing those in positions of power to use asymmetries of information for their own private benefit. With some political largesse and well-chosen words, politicians can paint themselves as decent leaders to local populations, while secreting away enormous funds; they can divert resources from their official purposes while ordinary people remain ignorant of the damaging effects (for the discourse of munificence see Haugerud, 1995; Kelsall et al., 2005: 44; Lindberg, 2003).

Numerous initiatives are currently emanating from different quarters to try to make African governments more transparent. Unfortunately they are working against the grain, which means that they are likely to have only limited success. The reality is that these practices must remain opaque because they are both necessary and illegal: necessary because politicians for reasons of traditional legitimacy must deliver resources through personalised clientelistic networks, and illegal because they contravene an imported ideological, legal and governmental system founded on a strong separation between public and private that has never existed in Africa (for a groundbreaking analysis, see Ekeh, 1975). The lack of fit between local culture and

imported institutions consequently creates incentives for rule-breaking and opportunities for self-enrichment. What is more, the formal institutions of the state are working against the grain of society's more dynamic forces. At best, this may hold unmanageable centrifuges in check, but, more normally, it puts a brake on society's energies, channels politics and administration into opacity and unpredictability, and makes trust impossible to attain.

Some might argue that this misfit is so widespread that it has become the grain. Certainly, in some Africanist literature, the 'instrumentalization of disorder' (Chabal and Daloz, 1999), the 'trickery' (Bayart, 2000), the 'generalized informal functioning of the state' (Olivier de Sardan et al., 2006), and the parasitism and predatoriness to which this gives rise are discussed in resigned, if not celebratory, tones. It is true, also, that the misfit is pervasive, that it 'works' for certain African groups and individuals, and that it is often regarded with a mixture of awe, admiration and glee, even by those who are its direct victims.<sup>11</sup> But without getting too constrained by the details of what is after all a metaphor, I prefer to think that this incongruence, rather than being the grain, is actually a particular shape that the grain has taken postcolonially, a sort of unattractive kink in a much longer pattern, and one that could be smoothed out with the right sort of institutional reform.

## 4 Going with the grain of African governance and development

If African development has been constrained by the fact that institutions push against its political grain, what might development with the grain look like? The questions are clear: how to build on extant notions of moral obligation and interpersonal accountability to channel energies into activities that are developmental instead of predatory? How to draw on shared perspectives and deep understandings to solve common collective-action problems (Shivakumar, 2005)? The answers are less clear, since most states in Africa grapple with a broadly similar imported institutional baggage, and since institutions that go with the grain have tended to remain below the radar of development researchers. However, a number of institutions in which accountability is reasonably strong can provide clues.

### 4.1 *Family, community, and religion: the basis for development?*

The most robust forms of accountability and public goods provision in Africa today can be found at the local level, often in the extended family.<sup>12</sup> People in Africa generally place a high value on celebrating basic life-cycle rituals. From my own observations, it is striking how much more willing they are to contribute to these celebrations than to institutions like NGOs or the state. In rural areas, marriages and funerals in particular are often organised by a small committee that collects frequently significant contributions which are typically well-spent. Extended families often also provide mutual support for purposes of education and at times of illness or bereavement.

11. I have observed this in my own conversations with Africans. Mbembe (1992) gives a good account of the ambivalence in people's reactions to the obscenity of power.

12. The scope and nature of this extension vary from place to place.

Successful Africans often find themselves paying the school fees of nephews, nieces, and second cousins for example. In Tanzania, salaried urban people often provide accommodation for long periods for poorer migrating relatives. In AIDS-afflicted Malawi, it is common to find uncles and aunts raising orphaned nephews and nieces.

Meanwhile, conflicts over land, marriage, personal injury, inheritance and so forth are typically resolved not by state agencies, but by immediate or extended family elders, compensated usually only by the status this confers or the small gratuities provided. Indeed, the extended family in Africa arguably remains the primary locus of political obligation and moral imperative, within which people feel obliged to act honestly and fairly – even if they often find this challenging – because of the shared family experience, the ideology of ancestral solidarity, the threat of social ostracism, and sometimes also the supernatural sanctions attached to offices such as clan eldership. For example, in the area of Tanzania with which I am most familiar, clan elders take an oath of office believed able to kill them if they abuse their positions. It has some affinities with a local form of ritual cursing called ‘breaking the pot’, which is used locally to hold people to account for misdemeanours as diverse as adultery, theft and assault (Kelsall, 2003).

Beyond the family, the most effective development institutions tend to have a religious foundation. As with the extended family, Africans tend to be much more willing to support religious organisations – churches, mosques, Muslim brotherhoods, secret societies – with labour and money than secular NGOs or the state. Unlike the latter, religious organisations in Africa are often self-sustaining. Africans are also more likely to treat their demands as moral imperatives. Thus many of the most successful community-based organisations take a religious inspiration, and churches, using a combination of local and external resources, are heavily involved in local education, water and health provision in many parts of the continent. Islamic NGOs sometimes provide religious education with technical training, including in computing and business studies (Ellis and ter Haar, 2006).<sup>13</sup> With few exceptions, the quality of the services provided, especially by the established Christian churches, surpasses those provided by the state. The reason, we can conjecture, must be the historical embeddedness of the church in local areas, combined with the deeply religious worldview of church officials and their congregations, entailing, as its corollary, belief in the potential sanctions of a higher power.

Exceeding the bounds of the family, but still at a face-to-face level, some small-scale development activities, for example women’s revolving loan associations, tend to be highly effective and accountable. Agricultural co-operative societies, especially in Tanzania and Uganda, were highly successful in a previous era, and there are some signs, at least in Tanzania, that they are enjoying a revival.<sup>14</sup> In addition, local communities often solve a variety of collective-action problems such as furrow maintenance, terracing, path- and bush-clearing, community policing and so on. Since most people understand the necessity of these activities, the question is a fairly straightforward one of preventing free-riders, and a local leader enjoying electoral or

13. See also the literature coming out of the Religions and Development Research Programme at the University of Birmingham: <http://www.rad.bham.ac.uk/index.php?section=1>

14. Tanzania Scoping Exercise for the Africa Power and Politics Programme (APPP), February-March 2008.

hereditary legitimacy, such as a village chairman or chief, is usually delegated the task of coercing them into compliance. Many grassroots NGOs in Africa build on this kind of tradition using 'participatory methodologies' (see Manor, 2008: 10-11).

A striking example is Somaliland. Like many African countries, after independence Somalia adopted Western-style political institutions with little regard for the realities of local political understandings, a choice that led to protracted clan conflict and political instability. This was truncated in 1969 with dictator Siad Barre's attempt to transcend the realities of clan-based political association in law and ideology, while simultaneously manipulating clan rivalries. The maladroitness of this approach ultimately led to full-blown civil war and state collapse. When a new state, Somaliland, was founded on the ruins of former British Somalia, local people in the Sanaag region quickly set about using indigenous traditions and clan structures to recreate collective solutions to the management of common-pool resources such as rangelands and water sources. Gradually, clan elders across Somaliland began to emulate their example and build regional governance structures, the importance of which was later recognised by national leaders, leading to a new multi-level constitution that reflects the strength of these bottom-up institutions (Shivakumar, 2005: 121-30).

Of course, the strengths of face-to-face community-based organisations have long been recognised. They were the inspiration for a celebratory literature on associational life at the end of the 1990s (see, for example, Bratton and Rothchild, 1992; and Naomi Chazan's chapter in Diamond, 1988). Unfortunately, in the development literature, these organisations became linked with an external agenda. Influential authors saw them as evidence for a Tocquevillean civil society, rich in social capital, that could be the foundation for a liberal developmental state. Donors were encouraged to support them. But where they were based on particularistic kinship or ethnicity, the usual recommendation was that they should be steered in the direction of openness and universality (see, for example, Hyden, 1997). This, however, was arguably bad advice, since it had the potential to remove the very features that made these organisations strong.<sup>15</sup>

In a fascinating case study, Jim Igoe details how at the behest of donors a pastoralist NGO in northern Tanzania adopted a written constitution and formal procedures; one effect was to distance the organisation's educated leadership from its grassroots base, greatly undermining its effectiveness (Igoe, 1999). I remember studying an NGO village goats project in the late 1990s, also in Tanzania, in which moderately poor members of the community were supposed to pass on the kids to other moderately poor members. In fact, what tended to happen was that people passed the goats on to their relatives. Some of these fitted the income bracket targeted by the NGO, but others were either too rich or too poor. At the time, I saw this as a betrayal of the project's principles; but the project remained reasonably successful, perhaps because, rather than in spite of, the fact that it traced a familial grain.

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15. Critiquing the civil society literature in 1992, René Lemarchand asked incredulously 'If the institutionalisation of solidarity reciprocities is a key requirement of governance, the question arises as to what categories can qualify as partners in the process of reciprocation: ethno-regional aggregates? Witches and sorcerers? Spirit-mediums? Youth groups? Churches?' (Lemarchand, 1992: 191). The answer to all of these, we are now beginning to see, should perhaps have been 'Yes'.

Family and community can also be the basis for development that transcends the very local level, sometimes by drawing on the resource of ethnicity. For example, one often finds institutions in Africa that span local and national arenas and are held together by face-to-face accountability and ethnic solidarity; for instance, home town associations or district development trusts initiated, in places like Cameroon and Tanzania, to assist rural migrants in fast-growing towns and provide a venue for socialisation and mutual assistance. Many of these associations are now transnational, linking rural areas with diasporas in cities across the world. In some areas, for example Hai District in Kilimanjaro Region, Tanzania, they form a parallel development administration, partly overlapping with that of the government (Tanzania Scoping Exercise; see also Kiondo, 1995). Typically, individuals motivated by personal social relations and ethnic pride (Mercer and Page, forthcoming) appear to invest more commitment and resources in these institutions than in bureaucratic organisations like the state.<sup>16</sup>

Home town associations will often attempt to form links with nationally successful kinsmen in the world of business or politics, usually including the MP. Larger-scale local developments such as road or school building are rarely undertaken on local initiative alone; the resources required are too great. In most cases, however, local people can be persuaded to contribute time, labour, and sometimes money, if an external donor – an NGO or the state – can be brought in with additional funds. For example, a local community will build a school and then, through the local MP, the state will provide teachers and books. In Kenya this practice was called *harambee*, and local constituencies often evaluated their MP in terms of the extent to which he secured funds to support their local initiatives, institutionalising a kind of bottom-up client-patron accountability.<sup>17</sup> Today, MPs in Kenya and also in Malawi have been given constituency development funds, with some (mixed) success. In Tanzania, this *harambee*-style development has been rolled out, although in a more centrally driven way, in the recent programme to achieve universal primary education under the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and constituency development funds have also been introduced. Note the constant variables here: face-to-face accountability, big men, clientelism, political largesse.<sup>18</sup>

There is evidence, then, from these examples to suggest that local institutions work best when they build on local understandings of power, authority, ways of behaviour and modes of organisation, and less well when external behaviours are imposed. Another case in point is the law. English common law courts in Anglophone Africa have never been popular, in part because the language, strict adversarial protocol and the winner-takes-all nature of the judgements sit ill with African legal traditions, which tend to be more inquisitive, mediatory and restorative (see, for example, Ferme, 1998;

16. Also based on mutual support and solidarity are ethnic revival associations such as the *Mungiki* in Kenya, the Odua People's Congress in Nigeria, or the Young Patriots Movement in Côte d'Ivoire. However, these organisations, aimed at influencing or capturing political power, tend to be less developmental and more incendiary.

17. For an account of the perversion of *harambee* politics under President Moi, see Kanyinga (1994), and of an earlier period, see, for example, Cooksey et al. (1994).

18. For a comparative discussion of the structures that link local and central levels in India, and their developmental effects, see Manor (2008: 8-11).

Gibbs, 1963; Gluckman, 1964; Moore, 1969, 1992; Gulliver, 1963; Davidheiser, 2006). The latter are better represented in local moots, informal chieftain courts and customary courts, which, while retaining their own problems, tend nevertheless to be more popular and accessible. Some African court systems have therefore been deliberately informalised, for example land courts in Tanzania. In Ghana, an attempt to blend the two approaches seems to have been most successful: state-supported courts or dispute-settlement institutions which offer some of the elements of 'Western'-style justice (impartial adjudication, due process, balance, certainty and enforceability) with informality and accessibility, but *without* the trappings of 'traditional' chieftaincy and customary law.<sup>19</sup> Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms, inspired in the West partly by African examples, are also proving quite successful.<sup>20</sup> Mediation has also been used with some success in post-conflict situations, for example by NGOs such as Conciliation Resources in countries like Sierra Leone. In some parts of the continent neo-traditional solutions are also being used to try and reconcile people after the most serious of conflicts, as with the *Gacaca* courts in Rwanda and *Mato Oput* in Northern Uganda. Of course, none of these initiatives provide perfect solutions to conflicts that are extremely grave, and the latter two in particular remain extremely controversial (Allen, 2006; Baines, 2007; Branch, 2004; Longman and Rutagengwa, 2004; Waldorf, 2006).

#### ***4.2 Tradition and neo-tradition: solutions for African leadership?***

Going with the grain at a local level implies utilising the authority of leaders who already enjoy local legitimacy, instead of trying to create or impose new leaders. In many parts of Africa traditional leaders continued to play a role in development after Independence. In Botswana, for example, one of the few success stories, local administration was built upon a traditional foundation – the *kgotla*. In addition, the country's first President, Seretse Khama, consciously manipulated the symbols of a traditional kingship to legitimise his rule (Gulbrandsen, 1995). More recently, some of Africa's more dynamic states, like Ghana, Uganda, and South Africa, have strengthened the role of traditional leaders in their national constitutions. Ghana's parliament, for example, includes a National House of Chiefs, while in KwaZulu-Natal chiefs occupy, *ex officio*, 20% of Regional Council seats (Englebert, 2002a). Chiefs have even been revived in some places where they were formerly abolished, like Mozambique (Buur and Kyed, 2005).

Recently, there has been no shortage of academic criticism of chiefs, denigrating them as agents of 'decentralized despotism', and it is true that chiefs have often played a predatory role (Grischow, 2008; Mamdani, 1996).<sup>21</sup> In some parts of Africa, even though the chief might sit on a bedrock of traditional legitimacy, links to a central state will have divorced his interests from those of his subjects, as probably in Sierra Leone, where post-war consultations revealed the abuse of chieftaincy as one of the driving

19. I thank Richard Crook for this point. See also Crook (2005).

20. Crook (2005), plus Tanzania Scoping Exercise. Manor (2008: 28) notes the success of the Ugandan case.

21. For an account of the limitations of the Ugandan experiment with traditional authorities, see Englebert (2002b).

factors of the war, yet where the evidence also suggests that people want more accountable chiefs rather than none at all (cf. Fanthorpe, 2006; Richards, 2005). In other parts, it should be remembered, pre-colonial societies were not governed by chiefs, and the institution of the chief is likely to be a colonial or postcolonial imposition. For instance, in south-east Liberia, chieftancy actually goes *against* the grain of extant norms, and it is probable that the chief will be a feckless and ineffective ruler as a result.<sup>22</sup> As we shall see below, social change can also sometimes erode the legitimacy of traditional institutions. It would therefore be a grave mistake to see going with the grain as implying an automatic reliance on chiefs; rather, it should imply fitting institutions to the realities of political legitimacy on the ground.

In most parts of the continent traditional leaders are not elected by what we would normally call 'democratic means'. Among the Maasai, community elders watch their male children closely as they mature, looking for the qualities of a good leader or *Laigwenak*; the anointed child is not told he has been chosen until after the incumbent *Laigwenak* has died, and then he has no choice but to shoulder the leadership role, which is regarded as a heavy burden.<sup>23</sup> In other countries, especially where the chieftancy has become part of the local administration, chiefs are elected by a limited franchise of community elders, for a life term. This can create problems when the franchise is too narrow, or when entire sections of the population are disenfranchised, and the idea that national leaders should enjoy such long terms is doubtless undesirable and unacceptable for many in contemporary Africa. **Nevertheless, evidence suggests that a multi-party universal franchise goes against the grain of traditional norms for selecting leaders, suggesting that experiments with a limited or indirect franchise may be legitimate. Certainly, there is little reason to suppose that foisting universal democratic decentralisation on African communities is going to solve local governance problems. The point is to introduce a system that makes sense to local people.** In post-war Sierra Leone, for example, local people preferred their local elections to be non-partisan, but party elections were introduced nonetheless; evidence suggests that those councils without a dominant party have subsequently become paralysed.<sup>24</sup>

Across Africa, political leadership generally figures in the literature as a problem. Much has been written about the phenomenon of personal rule, patron-clientelism, the tendency for laws and official procedures to be routinely broken (for example, see Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; Joseph, 1987; Médard, 1982). Indeed, this is the essence of neo-patrimonial governance; the rules are merely a screen, or else they are cynically used to create opportunities for rent-seeking. The Good Governance agenda has been intimately concerned with streamlining and strengthening rules, and trying to make African bureaucracies less personalistic and more rule-bound. At the same time, donors have funded multi-party elections and strengthened national parliaments and opposition parties. Yet anecdotal evidence suggests that most African big men continue to intervene in the day-to-day affairs of their administrations, overriding the rules when it suits them, and manipulating or rigging the results of

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22. I am grateful to Amos Sawyer and Jeanette Carter for this insight. Liberia and Sierra Leone Scoping Exercise for Africa Power and Politics Programme, May-June, 2008.

23. Tanzania Scoping Exercise for Africa Power and Politics Programme, February-March 2008.

24. Liberia and Sierra Leone Scoping Exercise for Africa Power and Politics Programme, May-June, 2008.

elections if they can. Many commentators seemed shocked when Mwai Kibaki rigged the 2007 election, but he was merely upholding a time-tested Kenyan tradition, in which no incumbent has ever surrendered power to the opposition. Indeed, the cases where an incumbent in Africa has been beaten at the polls can almost be counted on the fingers of one hand.

In one sense this is a potential strength of the African mode of governance. Five-year terms of office represent a narrow window in which to make sensible long-term development policy. Moreover, rules can be cumbersome, inflexible and time-consuming, especially where administrations are weak and civil servants lack the capacity to follow complicated procedure effectively. The rule of law can actually be a hindrance to effective administration, for example when it comes to fighting corruption. In present-day Rwanda President Kagame has not allowed the rule of law to deter him from throwing suspected corrupt officials in gaol. Permanent secretaries apparently joke, 'Have you got your pink [gaol] uniform ready?' (Golooba-Mutebi and Booth, 2008). Thus neo-patrimonialism might actually be an aid to development so long as one has a publicly interested leader with a sound development vision and strategies for putting it into effect. The problems arise when a leader becomes selfish or loses his way; neo-patrimonialism can then be an extremely destructive force. The question for developers wanting to work with the grain of African society, then, is not how to transform neo-patrimonialism, since that is an impossible or at least very long-term project, but rather how to restrain or mitigate its worst effects: how to ensure that despotism is always enlightened, in other words.<sup>25</sup>

In some countries the emphasis on traditional leadership has been accompanied by a new-found interest in the ritual dimensions of power. Most African societies contain strong traditions of oathing and cursing, powerful supernatural instruments that are used, with some success, to hold people to account. In Rwanda, for instance, civil servants now take an oath called the *imihigo* which derives from when warriors swore to the king in the pre-colonial kingdom (Golooba-Mutebi and Booth, 2008). In Tanzania, following the recent resignation of the Cabinet after a corruption scandal, new Prime Minister Pinda took a Maasai 'anti-corruption' oath. Whatever one thinks about the supernatural efficacy of these oaths, it is clear that they can have important symbolic effects. When combined with other more prosaic instruments of accountability, such as public praise or shaming (in Rwanda public servants are rewarded for performance in front of a football stadium of people), they may be powerful props to accountability. And in places where governance reforms go against the grain of public expectations, ritual accoutrements might be used to smooth them back into line. For example, recent reforms in some countries have led to tighter financial control of local councils and increased resources flowing through programmed budget support, resulting in local politicians having fewer resources and projects to distribute personally, a trend that goes against the expectations of their constituents. We can speculate that the latter's disappointment might be mollified, however, if councils

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25. Hyden has put this slightly differently as, 'how a self-binding element can be institutionalized' (2008: 35), while Manor notes that leaders in Brazil, Uganda and Mozambique have sometimes assertively intervened in their political systems in order to make space for ordinary people's activism (2008: 13-14). An interesting question is 'Why'?

receiving clean audits were given bonuses for the express purpose of holding feasts and celebrations.<sup>26</sup> Can ritual, backed by informal pressure, even play a role in keeping African presidents responsive to the public interest?

### ***4.3 Network capital: an African business model?***

It has recently become fashionable to talk of different models of capitalism: an Anglo-American model, a Scandinavian model, an East-Asian model.<sup>27</sup> But are there any indications of what an African model would look like? Some important literature has pointed to the dynamism of the African informal sector (for example, MacGaffey, 1987), while other seminal work has pointed to the constraints on indigenous capitalism posed by the need to squander investable surpluses on winning popular support (symbolic capital) in a context of communal and insecure property rights (Berry, 1985, 1993). Indeed, property rights, especially in land, remain an area of great difficulty and contention in Africa (Berry, 2002; Boone, 2007). There have also been debates about social capital (Narayan and Pritchett, 1997). In a particularly interesting contribution J-F Bayart et al. (1999) argue that the flexible networks of Ibo extended families have provided Nigerian businesses with a comparative advantage in the world of global drug trafficking (for a critique, see Meagher, 2006). The question for us is not whether or not they have slandered Nigerians, but whether the identifiable advantages of the African extended family in this context can be put to better developmental use in others. Strong yet flexible solidarity is surely a trait that could be used to advantage in a variety of more legal business environments. One example is the use of family networks in the transnational second-hand car trade (Beuving, 2006). Can such networks, or merely the ideology of the extended family, be used in enterprises that are more productive still?

It is well worth remembering that industrial capitalism in the West tended to begin, and in some cases remains, as a family enterprise, and we should not expect Africa to be too different. However, in the West the emergence of capitalism was at the same time intimately linked to the gradual sloughing off of extended family members. Indeed, it is the very weakness of the extended family that makes it comparatively easy for Westerners to separate out their private and professional lives, to resist temptations to nepotism, corruption, embezzlement and so on. Demographic change may be pushing Africa in the same direction, but it is not there yet. One example is that businesses in Africa often find that when they pay high salaries, one effect is to increase the demands of the family dependants.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, increased wages do not always reduce the incentives to mix up the public and private spheres, in short, corruption. While it is true that petty corruption in Africa is partly the result of inadequate wages, it does not follow that increased wages will necessarily reduce the incentives. One solution might be to improve job performance by means of not higher wages (which nevertheless have to meet a minimum threshold), but perks and allowances. Transport to and from work, a

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26. SULEDO is a community forestry project in Kiteto District, Tanzania, which recently won a UN conservation prize of some \$30,000. Interestingly, the communities running the project chose to spend the prize money on two things: one, holding a big feast and celebration, and two, giving cash gifts to members of the district administration! Tanzania Scoping Exercise, February-March 2008.

27. Note that Manor expresses scepticism over the existence of the latter (2008: 2).

28. Tanzania Scoping Exercise.

staff canteen, smart uniforms, and so on can significantly improve the *esprit de corps* of an organisation and consequently its performance.<sup>29</sup> Another option might be to pay a fixed dependants' allowance on top of individual salaries, which, by naming the dependants, might provide an instrument whereby employees could both recognise and also begin to limit their extended obligations. Doubtless, the solutions will vary, but it seems clear that human resource management in Africa can only be successful if it is cognisant of the extended-family context in which most people reside.<sup>30</sup>

Shifting scale somewhat, we have already seen that the moral obligations of the extended family form an ideological template for supra-familial networks of political clientelism in Africa. It seems probable that such networks can also provide a foundation for African capitalism. Although in the donor literature patrimonialism and clientelism have generally been treated as a source of economic failure, this seems too much of a generalisation. While it is true that in countries like Sierra Leone under Stevens, Nigeria under Shagari, and Uganda under Amin, such networks appear to have been economically ruinous, in other contexts, for instance Kenya under Kenyatta or Côte d'Ivoire under Houphouët, the results were more positive. The successes and limitations of those cases suggest that it is a combination of the way in which clientelism is organised, together with the political context in which it takes place, that is the key to providing an enabling environment for growth, rather than the existence of clientelism *per se*. Certainly, different patterns of organised clientelism have been the foundation for more or less rapid economic growth in Asia (Khan and Sundaram, 2000). Again, this supports the idea that a country's model of capitalism should be fitted to its social and political realities, rather than the other way around. In this respect, the World Bank's belief (1996) that 'Markets cannot allocate resources unless property rights are clear, complete, enforced, and transferable' is probably wide of the mark. Businessmen need some confidence that their capital is reasonably protected, but history shows that a generalised and transparent legal framework is not the only source of this.

#### 4.4 *Changing the state: new foundations for service provision?*

Acknowledging the importance of the extended family is the inspiration for my last and probably most controversial point. Following Chabal and Daloz, we might argue that the atomised individual underpinning of much of Western political and social theory has little currency in Africa. Many Africans do not think of themselves first and foremost as individuals, but as members of limited extended families. As expressed by Piot, 'Persons [in West Africa] do not "have" relations; they "are" relations' (1999: 18). Beyond the immediate extended family, they identify concentric circles of weakening moral obligation, with wider extended families, clans, ethnic groups, and only then, if at all, with the nation state (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 49-63). Yet it is striking that almost all government service provision in Africa is directed towards either individuals or

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29. I realised this when speaking to Justice Stephen Bwana who ran Tanzania's Commercial Court, regarded continentally as a model of efficiency and success.

30. As Hyden (2008: 25) has written, 'Any corporation that wants to succeed in Africa has to learn how to live with informal institutions, not just by condemning them but by accommodating them in ways that are compatible with their corporate objectives', citing oil companies and community development initiatives as an example.

particular territorial units. How can the individual citizen stand up for his/her entitlements when the idea of the individual has so little currency? How can service providers feel any sense of obligation to people to whom they are not related, or to areas from which they do not come?

State institutions are designed to supply universal goods accessible to all, but in reality this rarely occurs. The public services in many African countries are informally structured, as we might expect, by the forces of familial and ethnic obligation, where, according to the logic of what Hyden has called 'the economy of affection' (1983; 2006), it is pointless to try to secure these unless one has a relative or at least a member of one's ethnic group on the inside. Services are rendered as entitlements on the basis of kinship; where people lack relatives in official agencies, their entitlements fail and friends or fictive relatives have to be bought. Failing that, services are supplied as favours at the caprice of the people in charge (the best data on what is admittedly a complex and multi-layered process can be found in Olivier de Sardan et al., 2006).

If informally African administrations function along kin lines, would it not be better to formalise this situation? Is it impossible to imagine, at least for some services, multi-functional ministries of ethnic affairs, in which providers and recipients would be bound together by bonds of solidarity stronger than hitherto? As Lonsdale (1986: 131) has observed generally about the conversion of political calculation into norms of accountability, the necessary moral alchemy 'seems the more probable where there is some kinship, however imaginary, between rulers and ruled' (*Ibid.*).

The obstacles to such a reorganisation are formidable, of course. The ethnic ministries, because multi-functional, might begin to look like mini-states within the state. And what would happen if the performance of the different ministries varied considerably? What if some ethnic groups lacked qualified staff to man them? Would not some groups prosper while others were impoverished? How would resources be distributed to the ministries? Would it not create rivalry and jealousy? And what about countries with hundreds of small ethnic groups? What about people of mixed parentage? What about people living in extremely diverse urban areas? What about the cost and disruption of reorganisation?<sup>31</sup>

In the light of all of these perfectly reasonable questions many people will doubtless dismiss this idea as utterly wild. But before doing so, it is worth considering the following tentative answers. First, the idea of these ministries acting as mini-states within a state need not be so disturbing. Isn't this what state and local governments are anyway? I am not suggesting that all functions, for example police, defence and foreign affairs, be devolved to these ministries.

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31. Note that Mushtaq Khan has persuasively argued that clientelism is caused by the deep economic structures of developing countries. If he is correct, then governance reforms aimed at combating clientelism are unlikely to have much effect. Instead, the question of whether clientelism itself is productive for development turns on 'how the competition between factions affects the emergence of a capitalist sector, the acquisition of advanced technologies by that sector, and its ability to begin to compete in global markets. Historical examples show that a number of different patterns of patron-client competition are compatible with the rapid emergence of such a capitalist sector, while many other patterns ... act as a brake on this sector' (Khan, 2005: 722). It is also worth remembering that there is nothing about patron-client relations that logically inclines them to corruption or lack of transparency.

As for the differential performance of different ministries, this is not necessarily a bad thing. The prosperity of different ethnic groups in Africa already varies considerably because of both resource endowments and access to power. If one group found its ministry performing consistently poorly, this would be an incentive to try to put things straight. It might inject some of the competition, diffusion and imitation that characterised the development of pre-colonial states into modern administrations, and without the violence. It would be obvious if certain ethnic groups lacked trained manpower, and national programmes might be designed to rectify the imbalance. As well as being able to raise their own resources, ministries could receive disbursements from the central government, using donor or excise revenues, for example. Transfers could be made to different ethnic ministries on an equal per capita basis. The process would be transparent and would help mitigate some of the rivalry that naturally attaches to these distributions when they are informal and opaque. In countries with hundreds of ethnic groups, some very small, closely related groups could be encouraged to combine. Ethnicity in the pre-colonial period was always fluid; indeed, mobility was one of the strengths of the system.

What is more, in the early colonial period there was considerable invention and innovation, as ethnic entrepreneurs positioned themselves to take advantage of the structures of indirect rule, in what was actually a remarkably peaceful process. The problem is that the structure has ossified since then. It is to be hoped that the architects of any new system based on ethnic governance would devise means that would permit ethnicity to be flexible, but not too flexible. For example, it might be possible to change one's ethnicity, maybe once every ten years, which would allow successful ethnicities to expand, while still maintaining an incentive for others to get their house in order. People of mixed parentage would need to plump for one ethnicity or the other, or they could have their own 'mixed' ministry; ethnic ministries might have their own branches in urban centres, or urban areas might retain a different system. It would not be a case of 'citizen and subject' as Mamdani has described for indirect rule: rather, it would be a case of 'ethnic citizen and urban citizen'.

The potential costs of disruption and reorganisation would be extremely large. However, the potential pay-offs are also large, and it is worth bearing in mind that ministries in many countries are practically moribund. These proposals will sound unworkable to some people, and it should be emphasised that there are no African countries currently ready for such a change. But the idea undoubtedly goes with the social grain of many places, in a way that current attempts to dynamise the public service via decentralisation and new public management do not (cf. Hyden, 2008: 43). In addition, it would probably be less disruptive than other solutions proposed, such as permitting national state boundaries to dissolve and reform (Englebert, 2000; Herbst, 2000).

## 5 Caveats and conclusions

Up to this point I have written about the grain of the African social fabric as though it were made up of family (largely patriarchal), religion and ethnicity, and I have traced this to pre-colonial elements. However, these are not the only significant features on the social landscape, and it is possible to argue that, in some places at least, the economic

foundations for these patterns are eroding, based, as they are, in a lineage mode of production where key decisions have been made predominantly by older men. All over the continent the remnants of this system – with the possible exception of aspects relating to war – remain visible. However, demographic changes are making them gradually disappear (see Berry, 2002). In a context of land shortage and population explosion, as well as erosion in the prices of some traditionally ‘male’ crops, the lineage mode of production is becoming more difficult to sustain. There is no longer free land to allocate to dependants, and the institution of bridewealth is being rendered untenable. Young men and women are less reliant on older men to give them a start economically, and the latter’s authority is waning in consequence. In addition, traditional religion, having to some extent retained its relevance alongside the growth of established Christianity and Islam, is now facing competition from a new wave of less tolerant African charismatic mosques and churches. The effect of this on the overall worldview is at present difficult to discern, but it is likely to be another factor undermining Schatzberg’s ‘moral matrix’. Africa is becoming increasingly urbanised, another factor which tends to weaken the patriarchal tradition, even if neo-tradition often arises in its place (see Hyden, 2008).

Into this mix have come new ideas about democracy, human rights, women’s rights, good governance and the like.<sup>32</sup> In accordance with Bayart’s (2000) ‘logic of appropriation’, they have their converts, even if concepts such as democracy and human rights are usually imbibed with an African twist (see Karlstrom, 1996; Schaffer, 1998). Similarly, African governments and universities now contain individuals who are thoroughly committed to ideas like good governance and human rights, and in some countries they are making painstaking progress in turning their governments around.<sup>33</sup> One could certainly argue that the grain of African social formations is, under a variety of influences, undergoing a profound change; indeed, that Africa may be about to make the kind of demographic transition that occurred in Europe in the early modern period and recently in parts of Asia, or even that it is making a transition of a type not previously witnessed, and that novel and *sui generis* norms may arise as a result.<sup>34</sup> Would it not be counterproductive to encourage a return to some earlier, pre-modern grain?<sup>35</sup>

We do not yet know the answer to this question. But one way of answering it is to study systematically the characteristics of institutions that appear to be comparatively successful in solving collective-action problems and providing public goods in Africa.

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32. In some cases, this has led to the rediscovery of submerged currents in African history, such as women being able to inherit land in certain parts of pre-colonial Tanzania, a right which is enshrined in the country’s most recent land law (see Yngstrom, 2002). This point, for which I thank Renata Serra, provides more support to the idea that the grain in Africa is contestable.

33. Elsewhere I myself have argued that there is not a unidirectional grain to African society. Rather, people are constructed in the interplay of often conflicting social currents, giving rise to complex and sometimes self-contradictory subjectivities, all of which make concerted action in any particular direction difficult to achieve (Kelsall, 2004). Carola Lentz, in her (1998) analysis of big men in contemporary Ghana, urges something similar when, critiquing Schatzberg, she argues that legitimacy should be thought of not as a matrix but as a plural and contested process (see also Durham, 2002).

34. A point made forcefully by Olivier de Sardan (2008) (see also Manor, 2008: 3-6).

35. In addition, some readers will doubtless see anything strengthening fundamentally patriarchal institutions as anti-developmental, whatever the effects on service provision and economic growth.

Are these institutions based around, or do they at least try to accommodate, African extended families, either structurally or ideologically? Do they have a religious component broadly conceived? In other words do they refer to some other-worldly dimension of accountability? Do they capitalise on clientelism and rule flexibility? Are they held together by ethnic sentiment and (neo-)tradition? Alternatively, do successful institutions function in Africa by isolating individuals from the demands of their families, and if so how do they manage it? Do they stress secularism and instrumental rationality? Do they follow rules? Do they deliberately try to mitigate ethnic cleavages? In short, do successful institutions in Africa work with the grain of traditional society, or against it? Is the answer different for different countries, or in different sectors? Are there hitherto unrecognised blends? All these questions need to be answered before we can know whether there is anything of value to the idea that development in Africa will be accelerated by going with the grain, or, more specifically, what forms of going with the grain should be encouraged.<sup>36</sup> It is to be hoped that the search for answers will yield insights into the problematics of African development never considered before.

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36. James Manor (2008: 3-9) has usefully made the point that 'going with the grain' does not necessarily imply a return to 'older' modes of accountability. It is possible, as in India, that new more 'genuine' forms of accountability that also go with the grain may emerge.

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