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An Asianist's perspective on the Africa Power and Politics Programme

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This paper is written on the assumption that insights from the study of Asia may suggest lines of enquiry about politics and power in Africa. While there is certainly no Asian 'model', Asian and especially Indian experience is relevant in a number of respects. It suggests a need for caution in attempting to improve accountabilities or 'get things done' by reviving old institutions, and points to the feasibility of mobilising constructive social resources with responsive project designs; the desirability of balance between assertiveness and accommodation in political leadership; and the importance of senior politicians as agents of change. Other topics discussed include the spread of 'post-clientelist' electoral strategies, alternative approaches to containing corruption and the value of South-South policy emulation.

1   Introduction

I like to tell myself that I know a lot about Africa. I have read much on it and have done field research in Ghana, Zambia, South Africa, Mozambique and Kenya. And I have delved, vicariously, into studies of Uganda while co-authoring a book with an East African political scientist. But I have often been pulled up short when discussions with Africa specialists have revealed the limits of my understanding. So some of what follows may be under-informed, naïve or irrelevant. But let us see.

A prominent Africanist, Joel Barkan, has recently been arguing that we now find such diversity in sub-Saharan Africa that that there is now 'No Africa' – that generalisations are impossible. The same point can be made with more force about Asia, which is still more diverse. Pacific Asia (the nations bordering the Pacific Ocean) alone contains countries which are as different as Sweden and Turkey.[1] And Pacific Asia is only one region among many within Asia. Most of the comments here are based on studies of South Asia (which is arguably the most useful Asian region for those seeking to inform analyses of Africa), and of East and Southeast Asia.

2   There is no Asian 'model'

The sharp rise in economic growth rates achieved in East and Southeast Asia from the 1970s onward persuaded some analysts that there was an Asian 'model' which commended itself to other regions – not least, Africa. But it is clear from the lively debates over the alleged existence of an Asian 'model' that there is no such thing.[2] To grasp this, let us consider only some of the variations that we find when we look across the rapidly growing economies in East, Southeast and South Asia.

There are, for a start, many variations *between* individual Asian cases. Hong Kong and Singapore are almost entirely urban while other cases are substantially or overwhelmingly rural. Some possess abundant natural resources while others (Hong Kong and Singapore again) are largely bereft of them. Some can rely upon huge domestic markets while others

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[1]   I owe this point to Anne Booth who was speaking of Indonesia on the one hand and Japan and South Korea on the other.
[2]   See for example the arguments set out in Wade (2003).

cannot and are far more thoroughly reliant upon exports. Some like Taiwan have experienced sweeping land reforms which laid the groundwork for their economic successes, but most have had little or none. Some like China and Vietnam have been convulsed by revolutions while others (most crucially India) have experienced many decades of evolutionary change. Some (India again, since independence) have long been democracies, others (Taiwan and South Korea) have evolved into consolidated democracies, others have become semi-democracies, and still others have remained autocracies. Some have developed strategies in which the state has retained huge powers, others have seen the state's role shrink dramatically, and one case (Hong Kong) has largely been *laissez faire*. Some remained relatively immune to the East Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s while other suffered grievously. The strategies that various governments adopted to respond to that crisis varied considerably – with some (notably Malaysia) throwing up barriers to the international system while others grew increasingly dependent upon it. There are also marked variations within Asia in socio-cultural traditions and practices – in informalities. The point by now should be clear. Asia – or rather the sub-set of Asian countries which have achieved rapid economic growth – is exceedingly heterogeneous.

The heterogeneities do not end there. Consider variations that have occurred *within* individual cases. Several governments in rapidly growing Asian countries substantially altered their development strategies in response to the financial crisis of the late 1990s – and some have begun to do so again amid the new crisis that began in late 2008 – so that their 'models' are now quite different from what they once were. All of the countries which experienced rapid economic growth have also witnessed extremely fast and radical social changes, so that state-society relations and consequently, development 'models' have undergone important transformations.

The most striking change in any country's development 'model' has occurred in China. Deng Xiaoping's initial decision to lift the heavy hand of the party and state was focused mainly on the rural sector, and triggered rapid economic diversification and growth there. To accelerate the process, the government provided generous financial backing to rural enterprises. As a result, essentially private enterprises in the rural sector became the main engine of economic growth in that early phase. But then in 1989, Jiang Zemin and his closest allies who were drawn heavily from Shanghai took control at the apex of the political system. They shifted the emphasis in the Chinese 'model', swiftly and radically, to the promotion of rapid *urban* development which relied heavily on huge state owned enterprises and large multi-national corporations. To pursue this very different line, they squeezed the rural sector for resources to fuel the urban boom and sharply curtailed some social services in rural areas. The result was the growth of yawning inequalities between rural and urban areas, and widespread unrest (87,000 incidents in 2005 by the government's own reckoning) with which the new national leadership is struggling belatedly to cope. The major urban firms that gained ground after 1989 were not private but state owned (Huang, 2008). Given this dramatic shift in development strategy, it is impossible to speak even of a Chinese 'model', let alone an Asian model.

In addition to the variations between and within Asian cases, there is of course the small matter of the sharp differences between Asian and African cases. To illustrate the problem – and the pointlessness of seeking Asian 'models' for Africa – let us consider the case which some Africa specialists see as the most relevant Asian counterpart and point of departure for Africans, namely India. There are deeply serious problems even here. Four key differences between India and African countries need to be noted.

- Pre-independence India experienced a significant degree of industrialisation by private firms which were Indian and not British – and many important British firms were eventually taken over by Indians.

- India made substantial progress in promoting state-led industrialisation after independence, during the 1950s and 1960s.

- That progress was bound up with, shaped and constrained by the strong, broadly liberal, dominant party of that era, the Indian National Congress. It possessed the capacity to penetrate nearly all important interest groups in Indian society, and to make its influence penetrate downward to the local level by way of transactional ties to a great many of those interests (which largely explained its broadly liberal character).

- The liberalisation of India's economy which began in earnest in 1991 has been strongly coloured and limited by this legacy of transactional links to, and thus deference to, certain important interests – notably the immensely powerful lobby of prosperous farmers, and India's strong and burgeoning urban middle classes. Since none of these four things was/is present in strength in any African case, African countries cannot expect to make much headway by emulating the Indian 'model'.

One might, at first glance, suppose that one African case – South Africa – bears many similarities to India. But its early industrialisation by private firms took place under radically different conditions – a harsh, coercive system of racial oppression. Its eventual development of state owned enterprises also occurred in very different circumstances – a siege economy or something close to it. And the nature of its current dominant party, the African National Congress, is very different from and much more illiberal than the old Indian National Congress in its heyday – for the very good reason that its struggle for power differed so markedly from the 'freedom struggle' in India. It might be added that the development 'model' to which South Africa's government has stuck stubbornly since 1994 finds its origin not in Asia but in Washington and in the global financial order of the 1990s which threatened swift and severe punishment for any deviation from fiscal rectitude and tight limits on social spending.

A few African governments – notably Uganda's (Kitabire, 2005) – have taken seriously an argument which stresses export-led growth as a way out of their difficulties. But even in Uganda, the drive to export is far less important to the concerns of the Africa Power and Politics Programme than is the strategy under Museveni to revise relations between formal and informal institutions. And that strategy is essentially home-grown – it owes almost nothing to Asian 'models' (Ng'ethe, forthcoming). So this paper offers no tidy summation of the secrets of Asia's successes. Instead, it offers a diversity of comments, some of which may be useful as we design our research strategy on Africa.

3 Change in social institutions, and the revision or revival of accountability

Our attention has been drawn to African cases in which old forms of what is termed 'accountability' are said to have been damaged by 'modern' changes, and then revived with positive results. The 'accountability' in question was in some cases linked to traditional rulers (chiefs).

This inspires scepticism in someone like me who is steeped in similar Asian episodes. Let me explain (necessarily, in some detail) the reasons for my scepticism. Three are worth stressing.

- Evidence from Asia – mainly but not only from India, which I will use as an illustration here – suggests that 'accountability' may have been tenuous at best when the former arrangements held sway. Perhaps the old order in Africa in which

traditional leaders predominated was more accountable and beneficent than were dominant castes in rural India's old order, but I have my doubts.

- The new arrangements in India which have, quite constructively, taken the place of the old ones have led to new types of accountability – to changes in accountability mechanisms, or the creation of new ones – rather than a *revival* of the old mechanisms. In other words, even if the old arrangements entailed 'accountability', there is no going back to them. Or rather, so many changes have lately occurred that any 'return' would actually be a shift to something different from what existed before.

- We have evidence from studies of successful development initiatives in several Asian and African countries which indicates that the best way to make interactions between formal and informal institutions more constructive is not to seek a revival of old arrangements, but to pursue something rather different – which nonetheless draws upon constructive social resources which survive at the grassroots.

To explain these points fully, it is first necessary (in section 3.1 below) to discuss the resilience of pre-existing social institutions in Africa and India. Once we consider that, we can then move on (in sections 3.2-3.5 below) to more direct comments on the points set out just above.

'Informal institutions' clearly include social institutions. So we are compelled to consider them and, in doing so, to pay attention to patterns of social change in recent times. Here are some suggestions, based on studies of Asia, about how we might proceed with this.

3.1   The character and recent history of pre-existing social institutions

We need to consider the character and especially the resilience of pre-existing social institutions in Africa. This comment is predictable from an India specialist because in India we encounter what is probably the most durable pre-existing social institution in the developing world: one type of caste institution, *jati*.

Jatis are (usually quite small) endogamous caste groups, which is to say that people tend overwhelmingly to marry their children within them. (There are two other types of caste institutions – *varnas* and *jati*-clusters – but in this discussion, *jatis* are most crucial.) The institution of *jati* has retained a powerful hold over people's habits of mind and behaviour, despite many decades in which it has faced what some take to be threats: colonial rule, capitalism, democracy and urbanisation. (Of the four, urbanisation has long posed the strongest threat.)

This comment may sound odd to Africanists, since the literature on Africa stresses the destructive impact of colonial rule on pre-existing social institutions there. India was different. The institutions of *jati* (and *jati*-clusters) actually gained salience and substance under British rule. This happened in part because the colonial censuses used *jati* labels to map the population. And once the censuses were available, the British authorities used those categories in the allotment of benefits to various social groups, and in other efforts to draw those groups into interactions with the colonial state. As a result, members of various *jatis* saw new importance and tangible utility in the categories identified in censuses – so that the self-awareness of *jatis*, and solidarity within most of them, were enhanced. The British tended not to try to undermine *jatis*, but to work with them – to go 'with the grain' of Indian society – partly because that society was both vast and formidably resilient

The institution of *jati* has maintained its influence not because it is unchanging, but because it is adaptable. Rather like India's strong families, *jatis* can accommodate very substantial

changes while bending but not breaking. And this institution has managed to take strength from capitalism and democracy, even as they threaten it in some respects.

At the local level in Africa, we also encounter social institutions which appear to be durable – Tim Kelsall has called attention to lineages, sub-lineages, age-sets, secret-societies, churches, and the like (Kelsall, 2008). We need to ask how they have been affected by the growth of capitalism, the character of various post-independence states, democracy (where it has emerged), urbanisation, national patronage networks, etc. Have these social institutions remained strong even though their old material foundation – what Kelsall describes as a 'lineage mode of production' – is eroding? Have they been at least partially incorporated into patronage networks – and does that incorporation strengthen or undermine them? How and to what extent did the principles of hierarchy and accountability apply within these social institutions, and how have these things changed in recent times? The discussion just below of similar issues within India will illustrate a few potential lines of enquiry.

3.2   The old social order, and 'accountability' within it

Let us consider the character of the old social order in rural India (where two-thirds of the population still resides), its utility in triggering collective action at the village level in order to get things done, 'accountability' within that system, and its recent decline. Until the early 1990s, it was widely assumed:

1) that *jatis* continued to exercise strong influence over people's thinking and behaviour, and

2) that *jatis* occupied different positions in an enduring hierarchy, and that the ideas which attended that hierarchy were generally accepted by most people at all levels within it.

In the early 1990s, we began to get solid empirical evidence from distinguished anthropologists working in several different parts of India to indicate that in rural areas point 2) above was becoming far less true. Point 1) remained substantially valid, but the power of caste *hierarchies* over people's thinking and behaviour had declined quite markedly. Caste was increasingly (and unevenly across India) coming to denote *not hierarchy but difference*. This is an immensely important change.

It appears to be explained by two main things. First and apparently most importantly, many members of different *jatis* had ceased to follow their traditional occupations. Brahmins did not all perform priestly functions, members of 'threshing' castes did not all stick to growing crops, herding castes did not all persist with tending animals, ex-untouchables did not remain confined to degrading occupations, etc. Occupational diversification had destroyed the material underpinnings of the old caste hierarchy. (Kelsall has indicated that somewhat similar processes have been occurring in at least some parts of Africa.) The second main factor was the availability of education to at least some people from lower status groups. Decades of democracy which gave persons from every group the same number of votes also played a part, but it appears to have been less important than the first two things.[3]

Old hierarchies in various parts of Africa may or may not have been losing their influence over people's thinking and behaviour, and that is worth considering – as are the processes which may explain that. One important point of comparison might be the impact of colonial

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[3]   These comments are based on many discussions with the late M.N. Srinivas, India's leading authority on caste, during the mid-to-late 1990s. But there is also a considerable literature on these issues. For a brief and particularly telling example, see Mayer (1997). See also Fuller (1997), Karanth (1995), Sheth (1999) and Gupta (2000).

rule (noted just above) with which the Africa literature is preoccupied. The incorporation of chiefs in Africa into the colonial governing order is usually seen as enhancing their power while undermining their authority. This is often said to have had a destructive impact on African society. Once again, India provides a contrast. In most of the two-thirds of India which the British administered directly, a considerable degree of accommodation between colonial rulers and Indians was the norm. Indians were drawn into the imperial order in large numbers, early on. The British created large universities in Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay and Madras as early as 1858 – the year after the Mutiny – roughly a half-century before metropolitan universities were established in places like Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. Many graduates of those Indian universities were taken into government service, and at lower levels in the administrative hierarchies, Indians had things largely to themselves. These Indians found ways of turning the system to their advantage and to the advantage of social groups to which they belonged. So many openings and concessions were made available to Indians that the historian Robert Eric Frykenberg has gone to the extent (in discussions, though not in print) of describing British rule as a 'Hindu raj' (see his classic study, Frykenberg, 1967).

In the one-third of British India which consisted of princely states – which are sometimes said to have been the model for indirect rule in British Africa – some rulers adopted similar approaches (Manor, 1977; Jeffrey, 1978). So even indirect rule in India was not invariably destructive, as it appears largely to have been in much of Africa. We must ask whether part of the explanation for that lies in a greater resilience of social institutions in India than in Africa. The same issue arises when we consider the capacity of Indians – and not least, *jatis* – to take advantage of the opportunities offered by capitalism, and in more recent decades by democracy – although the explanation in both cases may be found in the greater opportunities provided by the Indian brands of capitalism and democracy. And of course, Indians have experienced a great deal more of the latter than have most of their African counterparts.

Before the power of caste hierarchies declined in India, village society was to a considerable extent self-governing. And the local 'governing' process was dominated by people from *jatis* which occupied higher positions in the hierarchy, which possessed significant numerical strength, and which owned much of the good land (Srinivas, 1959). It is almost impossible to argue that they were 'accountable' to the entire populations of their villages in any meaningful way. If they behaved badly or erratically, they might be eased out of leadership roles by fellow-members of the dominant castes. But there is plenty of evidence that such people often indulged in severe abuses – and got away with them.

When the need arose for collective efforts within villages to 'get things done' – for example, when crops had to be harvested or something had to be constructed – local headmen and others from the dominant *jati* had the influence to draw villagers from diverse castes into collective action to achieve these things. Each caste had its assigned task, and these activities were ritually sanctioned by religious or quasi-religious rites over which Brahmins (priests who were sometimes not the dominant caste) presided.

The decline in the power of caste hierarchies has made it impossible in many villages to 'get things done' in this way.[4] Collective efforts are now impossible to organise in the old manner.[5] There is no going back to the old system.

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[4] I owe these ideas to G.K. Karanth. He is one of the pioneering anthropologists who discovered the declining power of caste hierarchies. The much emphasised phrase about villages' capacity to 'get things done' is his (Karanth and Ramaswamy, 2004).

[5] Tim Kelsall has stated in a communication that his impression from Tanzania is that the abolition of chieftancy in the 1960s had similar effects. But new institutions there offer some compensation since they facilitate new kinds of collective efforts. That theme in India is discussed in section 3.3.

My comments here have focused on India, but it should be stressed that there is also no going back to pre-existing arrangements in most of the rest of Asia. The Chinese revolution utterly uprooted the old social order, and the changes wrought are irrevocable. Much of Southeast Asia has, in the recent era of rapid economic growth, experienced what Anne Booth calls 'social change in fast forward' (and so has China), which again makes a revival of the old social order impossible.

3.3 New ways to 'get things done' – and new, more genuine accountabilities

In India, despite these changes, things still get done, but in new ways. Two new approaches have emerged. The first and less important is the introduction of elected local councils into nearly all Indian villages since a constitutional amendment mandated this in 1993. Where such councils have significant powers and funds, they have the capacity to 'get things done' (Crook and Manor, 1998: Chapter 2). However, this occurs in only a small minority of India's 28 states (in perhaps four to six), because most state governments have refused to empower and fund elected councils at lower levels adequately.[6]

In the rest of India – and even within those few states with potent local councils – another more important approach has emerged. Small-time political entrepreneurs at the village level reach out to government actors at slightly higher levels in the political/administrative system in order to obtain assistance from them. A sizeable army of such mediators, or 'fixers', or *naya netas* (new leaders) (Manor, 2000; Krishna, 2002) has emerged right across India and is a major political and developmental resource. These 'fixers' bridge the divide between informal and formal institutions, something that almost all political party organisations lack the downward penetrative power to accomplish. They help to ensure that government programmes (and goods and services) actually reach the grassroots as they are intended to do. They also help to make governance at least somewhat responsive, and to make democracy a tangible reality for many villagers. This process has been greatly facilitated by a proliferation, over the last generation, of government programmes to promote development and to provide goods and services.[7]

The implementation of some of these programmes has been partially distorted by politicians (typically state legislators when we are talking about programmes at lower levels) who seek to influence them as part of their efforts to pursue clientelism. But for the most part (in most regions of India) that has not happened much or, in some cases, at all.

This is true for several reasons. There are so many of these programmes that it is very difficult for politicians to get to grips with a large proportion of them. Many of these programmes do not have massive funding, and do not deal in commodities, and politicians (together with their co-conspirators in the bureaucracy) tend to concentrate on programmes of which these two things are true. To use their parlance, they prefer to focus on 'wet' programmes and many of

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[6] India's Constitution gives state governments the dominant role in this sphere. They therefore have the discretion to extend only limited powers and funds to elected councils at lower levels.

[7] Tim Kelsall's response to these comments in an early draft of this paper suggest that the proliferation of government programmes in India – and the openings that they provide to 'fixers' – may be even more important than Indian specialists have believed. His observations also suggest a line of enquiry for studies of African cases. He drew upon evidence from Tanzania to show that connections between lower and higher levels in the political system are, and are seen to be, important in Tanzania. But – perhaps because there are fewer government programmes which provide very specific openings for potential 'fixers' – in Tanzania, the connections between lower and higher levels were not the sort that would allow a constituency or a local community to receive entitlements through the government machinery. 'Rather, they were connections to a nebulous pool of wealth and power'.

these programmes are comparatively 'dry'. Some of these programmes are implemented by special agencies that run parallel to line ministries – because leaders atop the political system are determined to insulate them from the clutches of politicians at lower levels. Some programmes are designed to be demand-driven in ways that make it impossible for politicians to get their hooks into them. And one massive programme, the current Indian government's main initiative to reach the rural poor, includes more formidable transparency mechanisms than any programme on earth – and this has effectively thwarted politicians, bureaucrats and contractors from skimming off funds from it. There is reason to believe that it will provide a model for other new programmes and for reforms in existing programmes – and possibly for programmes in other countries.[8]

At least a substantial minority of the 'fixers' mentioned above originate not from the formerly dominant landed *jatis* but from less prosperous, lower status groups. Many of them seek to ensure that disadvantaged groups receive a sizeable portion of the benefits that result from their actions – so that members of the dominant landed *jatis* do not receive the lion's share of benefits as they did under the old hierarchical system. And since villagers tend to defer to those who have the skills and drive to 'get things done' – in ways that partly echo their old habits of deference to headmen from the once-dominant *jatis* – we often see people from the formerly dominant groups treating these 'fixers' from less exalted backgrounds with considerable respect. The social order and dynamics within informal institutions are thus changing in important ways.

These 'fixers' actively seek to be accountable (informally) to their fellow villagers, since one of their main motives is often to earn popular esteem that will translate into election victories to seats on lower-level councils – to launch political careers. If they win such seats, they then become formally accountable at later elections for their performance. There is thus far more accountability in these new arrangements than there was under the old hierarchical system of dominance by the landed castes or *jatis.*

During research visits to several African countries, I have asked whether such 'fixers' are present in strength. The answer has almost always been 'no'. However, one study of Africa argues that such political entrepreneurs are reaching upward, in the manner of India's 'fixers', although they focus more on donor agencies than on their own governments (Bierschenk, Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan, 2000). They may soon shift their focus to governments as a result of changes in the international architecture of aid in the wake of the Paris Declaration (discussed in section 20 below) which give governments greater influence over development policy.

In our programme on Africa, we might consider whether that has begun to happen – and whether my unscientific impression of a shortage of such entrepreneurs or 'fixers' in Africa is actually correct. If it turns out to be correct, we might seek to understand why that is true. The explanation probably lies in the character of both formal and informal institutions. But whatever the explanation, such enquiries might yield fresh insights.

This is apparent from comments by Tim Kelsall on the initial draft of this paper. In Tanzania during and after the 1960s, he suspects that new institutions – the ten-cell leaders, the ward executive officers, coffee cooperatives – attempted, with varying degrees of success, to 'get things done' at the grassroots. But then subsequent changes – the decline in the cooperative movement, the end of single-party rule, and increasing economic diversification – made collective efforts at the local level more difficult. As a result, there is now considerable variation in the tasks for which collective action can be successfully mobilised, and in the

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[8] This is the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme which I will analyse in depth over the next two years.

success of different leaders as mobilisers. The latter is often related to a leader's perceived ability to secure complementary resources from the local council, which in turn is dependent on the knowledge of how to influence council officials.

His comments suggest that we need to consider at least two phases in the (no doubt quite varied) recent histories of African cases. The immediate post-independence phase brought one set of changes. And a second set has occurred in the more recent period in which (in many parts of Africa) more open, competitive politics have emerged and the state's dominance of the economy has diminished.

3.4 Implications for our approach to 'traditional leaders'

Before we leave India's political 'fixers' behind, it is worth stressing what their emergence implies for social scientists who analyse 'traditional leaders' (in Asia or Africa) and for policy makers who design strategies to deal with such leaders. We need to consider three strands to the reasoning that we find in India, each of which contrasts sharply with the ideas that we often hear when Africa's 'traditional leaders' are being discussed.

1) To think back nostalgically to an era in which dominant caste leaders were able to persuade villagers to undertake collective action to 'get things done' on their own is to romanticise a hierarchical system which produced gross injustices.

2) To seek to go 'with the grain' of Indian society by reviving the old role of those 'traditional leaders' is to attempt the impossible because the socio-economic and socio-cultural orders which enabled them to play that role have suffered far too much damage. Seeking to do that now actually goes '*against* the grain' of Indian society which has become quite fluid and amorphous. There is, purely in practical terms, no going back.

3) To seek to revive 'traditional leadership' is deeply misguided not just because it will fail in the changed conditions of today, but because it will enable the once dominant castes to resume their old efforts to bully and enforce deference from other villagers. This also goes 'against the grain' of a new, more genuinely democratic India.

(These comments focus on India, but roughly similar remarks could be made about much of Southeast and East Asia. Countries there may have had less experience with genuine democracy than has India, but most have undergone even greater social and economic change as the result of revolutions, or longer periods of rapid economic growth than India has seen – or both. And in Asia east of India, economic growth has had a greater impact on rural areas than in India, where the recent boom has been felt mainly in urban centres.)

How might Africanists respond to the three points set out just above?

They may say that a certain nostalgia for the days when 'traditional leaders' exercised great influence is more justified – because the old order in Africa was less unjust than in India. There is probably something in that argument, but we need to look carefully at the varying patterns of chieftaincy across Africa, and to form objective judgements about how beneficent they actually were.

Africanists might also argue that we would be mistaken in saying that there is 'no going back' because pre-existing socio-economic and socio-cultural structures and process have experienced less change in Africa than in India. There may be regions of Africa where that it true, but it appears to this Asianist that there are also many where it is not. Consider the number of African countries in which immense damage has been done to society by (i) civilian regimes that became monumentally unresponsive, and often kleptocratic and anomic;

(ii) brutish military regimes; (iii) vastly destructive civil wars; or (iv) violent uprisings against white minority rule. There are next to no counterparts to these cases in any Indian region. Indeed, the pre-existing socio-economic order never broke down anywhere in South Asia – except in Kerala where the matrilineal institutions of the once dominant Nayar caste collapsed in the nineteenth century, opening the way to radical alternatives seen nowhere else in the subcontinent. In Africa, all of the four things noted just above surely wrought profound changes in society.

Finally, Africanists may argue that a resuscitation of 'traditional leaders' does not imply encouragement for autocracy which will run counter to a new, at least somewhat more democratic, egalitarian thrust in Africa – in part because that thrust is less evident than in India. It is certainly less evident, but it is not impossible to find it in many parts of Africa. Those who see revived chieftancy as the best available alternative may be underestimating the constructive social resources that exist in Africa – which form part of the 'grain' with which future efforts to promote development and civilised state-society relations might go. To illustrate that point, let us now turn to a different sort of argument about how to move ahead.

3.5   Another approach which has promise in both Asia and Africa

A set of recent studies has found that a different approach to the promotion of more constructive interactions between formal and informal institutions has proved effective in Africa as well as Asia. Those studies focused on 'fragile states' where conditions were distinctly unpromising, but it is clear that this approach also has promise – greater promise – in conditions that are more congenial.

I summarise it briefly here – it has been explained in great detail in a recent book (Manor, 2007a). A research team of area specialists studied eight reasonably successful development initiatives in five countries.[9] The analysts were surprised to discover that these initiatives shared certain common features which made it possible to achieve more than had been expected in difficult contexts.

In each case, international development agencies and/or NGOs, plus indigenous partners in the countries, began by undertaking investigations which were based on participatory consultations with local residents – so that their views strongly influenced the enquiries. These investigations consistently indicated that greater constructive social resources existed at the local level than at higher levels in the various political systems. It became clear that despite damaging episodes that involved conflict and/or serious (often over-centralised) misgovernment, some constructive resources survived at the grassroots. The specific nature of those resources varied because the socio-cultural legacies in the various contexts were very different, but there was still a consistent pattern. In difficult times, people at the local level had developed coping mechanisms, based on face-to-face relationships which had greater substance and resilience than the more impersonal relationships that exist at higher levels in every political system. Local social dynamics were always ambiguous in character, but relationships of trust and mutuality were present throughout – and it was on these that the development initiatives sought to build.[10] They were 'going with the grain' of those constructive social resources.

As the implementation of development projects proceeded, care was taken to conduct frequent participatory consultations with ordinary – and especially with poor – people in order to obtain feedback on what was and was not working in the projects. Particular attention was paid to the degree to which constructive social resources were being strengthened or

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[9]   They were northern Uganda, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Timor Leste and Cambodia.

[10]   The argument that greater social resources exist at the local level than at higher levels is reinforced by an unusually authoritative study of underdeveloped areas of India (Krishna, 2002).

undermined. The agencies/actors involved consistently remained flexible in their responses to this feedback. Modest or, in some cases, major adjustments were made in the character and implementation of projects – in order to ensure that the lessons learned from feedback were translated into practice. This approach (summarised very simplistically here) enabled these quite varied development initiatives to work effectively.

A central feature of this approach is the fostering of 'accountabilities'. The projects in question usually worked with pre-existing social processes and structures. But their impact did little or nothing to revive old types of accountability. Indeed, accountability had previously been weak or absent in many of the places that were studied. But the repeated use of participatory mechanisms drew into the public sphere people who had earlier had little or no voice, and created new processes (and institutions) which were substantially accountable to ordinary folk – because when consultations with them suggested the need for change, adjustments ensued. This entailed the creation of new accountabilities far more than the revival of old ones.

Here again, we encounter a theme set out above. There is less to be gained by seeking to go back to – and to revive or adapt – the institutions of chieftaincy than by efforts to develop new, more open and responsive mechanisms. It might be argued that this does not entail 'going with the grain' of African society. But to argue that is to claim that 'the grain' is bound up mainly with traditional leaders. The evidence from the studies noted just above indicates that 'the grain' also includes the pent-up appetites of ordinary Africans for voice and influence in processes that affect their well-being. Perhaps that notion of 'the grain' deserves as much if not more attention than the focus on the resuscitation of chieftaincy.

The agencies/actors which took leading roles in these initiatives included either government actors or indigenous civil society organisations operating with government approval – or both. Thus, the processes that were being developed usually amounted to formal institutions. But they were also interacting with informal institutions at the local level, so the line between the formal and the informal was being constructively crossed. Indeed, it was being blurred – since informal institutions, and people who had previously only engaged with informal institutions, were being drawn into formal processes. Most of the cases in this cluster of studies did not involve democratic decentralisation, but what occurred resembled a pattern that is often seen in those comparatively rare instances when democratic decentralisation is permitted by higher authorities to work well. People and institutions which had previously been active only in the informal sphere were drawn into formal institutions – and they brought their energies, preferences, local knowledge and social resources with them.[11] As we develop our analyses of Africa, this approach is worth bearing in mind.

One further question remains largely unanswered by the analyses of these varied cases: 'can the new processes and institutions be sustained once external actors (international NGOs and development agencies) withdraw?' The evidence from these studies provides some hope. Potent figures in various governments were persuaded that these new processes produced better development outcomes and, crucially, that they also served the political interests of those in power. They enhanced the legitimacy and popularity of governments and ruling parties – and they did not trigger instability, about which insecure politicians had initially been very anxious. That leads us to expect that powerful leaders will seek to sustain these processes. As our analyses in the current project on Africa proceed, we might look for evidence that corroborates or undermines that expectation.

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[11] This is akin to the transition, pursued with considerable success by the decentralising Chief Minister of the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh (Digvijay Singh), from *rajniti* or 'rule by the government' to *lokniti* or 'rule by people' who became part of the government (Melo, Ng'ethe and Manor, forthcoming: Chapter 3).

4   Looking beyond accountability

Accountability (including new forms of accountability which we may encounter in our studies) is extremely important. But it is not the whole story. We also need to recognise the utility of other positive things which augment and complement accountability.

For example, Judith Tendler's work on Brazil has stressed the importance of : (i) building morale and an *esprit de corps* among low-level employees in line ministries who deliver services , and (ii) creating popular appreciation for their efforts which enhances their self-image and their commitment to constructive professional norms (Tendler, 1997). (This is discussed in more detail below.)

Another set of examples should not be over-hyped (as sometimes happens) but they also have some importance. When more open and inclusive formal processes erode widespread alienation and cynicism about government and the public sphere among ordinary (not least, poor) people, the result is sometimes a greater sense among such people of mutuality, solidarity, interdependence and trust (of one another, of the government, and of formal institutions). These things facilitate constructive collective action – and they are mostly *not* about accountability.

5   To study 'the formal, the informal and the anomic' is not to study 'the good, the bad and the ugly'

The comments in this section, which emerge from the literature on Asia, may be blindingly obvious to Africa specialists. But I offer them anyway, partly in reaction to the views of some (though certainly not all) 'governance' specialists in international development agencies – who seek to insulate formal institutions, and the making and implementation of policy, from 'politics' (see for example, Kaufmann, Kraay and Zoido-Lobatón, 2003). '"Politics" can be constructive or destructive. Our aim should not be to exclude "politics" from the policy sphere (an impossible dream), but to encourage constructive "politics"' (Crick, 1992).

It is a mistake to construe processes associated with formal institutions (or organisations) as wholly or predominantly positive, and processes associated with informal institutions as wholly or predominantly negative. Each set of institutions generates (and operates according to) certain norms. The norms generated within informal institutions are not all negative or destructive. They are sometimes quite constructive, or can be turned to constructive purposes through positive interactions with formal institutions. What *are* consistently destructive are actions (often by powerful people in formal institutions) which are anomic, capricious – and which flout and destroy constructive norms in *both* formal and informal institutions.

It follows that we should pay attention to the sets of norms which exist in informal institutions in different places – and they vary. We need to understand the extent to which they lend themselves to (or undermine) things like a spirit of mutuality, reciprocity, accommodation between different ideas and different interests, etc. Insofar as they lend themselves to these things, they may also facilitate constructive interactions with formal institutions in ways that might produce improved 'governance' and state-society relations, greater social justice, poverty reduction, etc. But, as Kelsall has helpfully reminded me, in the literature on Africa, informal institutions are usually portrayed as peculiarly vulnerable to anomie and caprice, and to problems like ethnic exclusionism and large-scale corruption. So we will also need to see how far that depiction is accurate.

6   Change in political institutions: the need for *balance* between assertiveness and accommodation

Let us consider a cluster of points that emerged from early discussions in the Africa Power and Politics Programme. On one occasion, I argued (with the second Obote regime in Uganda and the Moi regime in Kenya in mind) that it was important to move from excessive assertiveness by central leaders, to greater political accommodation (Ng'ethe, forthcoming). Africa specialists responded with two comments. First, I was reminded that Göran Hyden had argued that in African polities, too much accommodation was a major part of the problem. Second, I was told that leaders' lack of authority to assert themselves by imposing solutions which entailed adherence to constructive rules lay at the bottom of many collective action problems.

These two points are quite valid, but let me persist with my argument, which is based on hard evidence from certain Indian states, Brazil and African cases such as Museveni's Uganda between 1986 and 2000, and Mozambique since the early 1990s. That evidence indicates that it is feasible and constructive to seek to achieve a balance between a new kind of assertiveness by leaders atop political systems and new forms of accommodation which are broadly inclusive of ordinary people and diverse interests at lower levels in those systems.

Senior politicians in these various settings have asserted themselves in ways that opened politics and the policy processes up to the influence of ordinary folk at the local level. (This is not only a reference to democratic decentralisation, but that is part of the story.) It should be stressed that such openings can only happen when leaders assert themselves from the top down, in order to make some bottom up influence possible. (Every system of democratic decentralisation has required that.) But those leaders are not asserting themselves in the manner of a Moi whose assertiveness had what the Chinese call 'commandist' intent. They were engaged not in control-freakery, but in its opposite. They were asserting themselves in order to give the demands and preferences of a wide array of interests and ordinary people leverage within arenas at low levels.

Several things happened when such new processes were created – and the senior politicians who created them intended them to occur. People were drawn into public action within the new arenas and processes by the opportunities offered there to exercise at least some influence over decisions that tangibly affected them. When they did so, they soon acquired a rough but realistic understanding of what is and is not possible from this new kind of politics which (in an era marked by fiscal stringency) is afflicted by shortages of funds. This undercut dangerously unrealistic expectations among those who thought that they might gain from engaging in public action. They also learned that most collective decisions required compromises. If the processes were sufficiently inclusive (as they were in the places mentioned above), accommodations in which no winner took all were unavoidable. They occurred when decisions were made by lower-level councils in Uganda about which small infrastructure projects should be given priority, by councils within Brazil municipalities about budgetary and planning priorities, and in village councils in central India about which services and minor public works should be stressed. In the process, ordinary people also learned that politics need not be a zero-sum game. Half a loaf was in some ways disappointing, but it was better than nothing, which is what they had before. This understanding undercut another dangerous idea that is widespread among ordinary people in and beyond Africa – that nothing can be expected from engaging in public action. That idea had long inspired alienation and cynicism in the minds of many.

The leaders who asserted themselves by creating these new, more open processes and (yes) institutions were engaging in a paradoxical exercise. Their assertiveness was necessary to open political systems up to influence from the grassroots. But they were also parting with

some powers which they and their subordinates had previously exercised. There were, however, compensatory gains. Leaders and their subordinates then found that they and their regimes became more legitimate in the eyes of ordinary people, and that popular alienation and cynicism were eroded. These changes fortified their regimes and enhanced the capacity of senior politicians to assert themselves further. So like ordinary folk, these political actors at *higher* levels also learned that accommodations did not entail a zero-sum game.

But senior leaders tended strongly to assert themselves in restrained ways which indicated to their mass audience (and to political and bureaucratic elites) that certain rules would now be followed. They would seldom impose their own priorities from atop their political systems on people at the grassroots. They would not permit their clients at intermediate levels to bully citizens at the local-level or to steal large proportions of the development funds which now flowed to very low levels. And they would not – suddenly and without explanation – change course on policy issues, break commitments to groups at lower levels, or cast aside loyal supporters. As a result, governments (formal institutions) came to be seen as less capricious and more predictable. This persuaded many people who had previously operated only within informal institutions to engage with formal institutions, and to inject their energies, skills, knowledge and preferences into new formal processes. This also eased the problem which was stressed in our discussions: leaders' lack of authority to assert themselves by imposing solutions which entailed adherence to constructive rules – which lay at the bottom of many collective action problems. There is always tension between assertiveness and accommodation, but something of a balance between them had now been achieved – so that neither ran to excess.

It is sometimes argued that imposing solutions in a developmental state is about imposing decisions about who wins and who loses. The comments above suggest that this need not be true. The senior politicians who pursued this approach certainly imposed decisions. But those decisions led to the creation of processes in which solutions to collective action problems could be reached in a more participatory and accommodative manner. And those processes tended not to be zero-sum games in which one set of winners took all.

The comments above may seem hopelessly optimistic, but these things have actually happened. They are of course attended by plenty of ambiguities, but they are realities, not imaginings.

These cases indicate that we need not always expect states and leaders within them to assert themselves in an insensitive manner. James Scott's arguments (Scott, 1998) that states and powerful people within them tend to carry assertiveness to excess, to bully and sometimes brutalise important interest groups, and to regard independent power centres as illegitimate and worthy of harsh treatment – are often accurate, but not always. And note that in making his arguments, Scott chose especially extreme examples of purblind assertiveness by leaders within states – for example, China's Cultural Revolution, hardly a typical episode.

7   The under-estimated importance of senior politicians – and the problem of *persuading* them to introduce constructive changes

It may seem odd to dwell on senior politicians when our programme focuses on formal/informal interactions that mainly occur at low levels in political systems. But if we wish to see governments do things that promote more constructive interactions across that divide, we need to look to the people who decide what strategies governments will adopt. Politicians atop political systems usually make the key decisions about such things. They cannot be ignored.

That has not prevented most analyses of development, or even of 'governance' and development, from ignoring them or seriously underestimating their influence. The literature is awash with studies of technocratic blueprints, public sector reform, incentives and disincentives, sequencing and a whole array of related topics. But politicians get remarkably little attention, even though they wield enormous power. The result is Hamlet without the prince – and without *The Prince*, the book by Machiavelli.

It is time this changed (Melo, Ng'ethe and Manor, forthcoming). We might consider case studies in this vein. The crucial question is how senior politicians have been or might be *persuaded* to undertake initiatives which would make interactions between formal and informal institutions more constructive, and which might (in the process) reduce poverty. It is necessary to convince them that it is *in their interests* to do so – because such changes will make them and their parties and regimes more popular and legitimate in the eyes of ordinary people.

Many of these politicians feel insecure. They therefore regard change as threatening and potentially destabilising. But it has been possible – by suggesting pilot projects in limited areas (in for example, India, Uganda[12] and Mozambique; Kulipossa and Manor, 2007) – to persuade some of them to attempt such experiments. When these have improved interactions between the formal and informal spheres in ways that turn out to be non-threatening, politicians have been persuaded to extend the experiments to much wider areas. This entails incremental, not radical reform – the pursuit of 'low-hanging', not 'high-hanging' fruit, to use 'donorspeak'. But it appears to be the most effective way to proceed.

8   The regeneration of formal institutions

When such incremental changes have been introduced, the dominance over formal institutions of invidious informalities is reduced, and more constructive, rule-bound and predictable interactions between formal and informal institutions are fostered. In the process, formal institutions lose some of their former assertive power, but they undergo regeneration – which enhances both their popular legitimacy and their constructive potential (Manor, 1994).

Within formal political institutions in Africa, there is a healthy appetite for such regeneration – 'healthy' both in terms of its magnitude and of it creative potential. Howard White has argued that many capable, low-level employees in line ministries across Africa are yearning for the opportunity to do their jobs properly (White, 2005). Richard Crook and I discovered such yearnings among numerous district-level line ministry officials in Zambia in 2001 (Crook, Manor *et al.*, 2001). Joel Barkan has observed that officials in Kenya's customs service have experienced a surge in morale, self-respect and performance – thanks to regenerative action taken by Mwai Kibaki after the dire Moi years.[13] And in assessing the prospects for such regeneration, we might pay some attention to Tendler's account of how a government in one quite poor Brazilian state systematically raised the morale and enhanced the performance of line ministry employees during the 1990s (Tendler 1997). Government officials retain an appetite to behave as the *professionals* that they see themselves to be. Such things are not infeasible.

9   The depth of political parties' roots in society

Political parties are supposed to provide bridges between formal and informal institutions – indeed, they often amount to hybrids which include both, and to arenas within which the interplay of formal and informal institutions partly occurs. In most Asian and African cases,

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[12]   See the section 16 of this paper on Uganda's local courts.
[13]   Interview with this writer, London, 30 October 2007.

they actually *do* provide bridges – although often only up to a point, and in ways that depart from the expectations of people who are preoccupied with conventional Western notions of parties. So even though most of us will not focus our analyses on parties, all of us need at least a rudimentary understanding of their character and substance in any given country. What follows is a set of questions about parties that Asia (and Africa) specialists ask. Some but not all of them are all too obvious.

We need to know how many *important* parties there are in any given system. Some are democratic (internally), but most are not. Some have corporate or institutional substance in their own right, but others are extensions of a supreme leader's personal networks. A few are ideological, but most are not. A few have organisations with the capacity to make their influence penetrate down to the local level, but most do not. There are huge variations in the degree to which and in the ways in which they engage with various 'informalities'.

What may be less obvious is a related topic that is vastly important in determining the character of the *governments* which such parties head – in South Asia and, I strongly suspect, in Africa. And it is linked to one of our core concerns, accountability. We need to understand how and how much any important party sinks its roots into society. Many parties in South Asia have very shallow roots, and the consistent result is 'feckless' (unresponsive, wayward, capricious) governments (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995). Those with deeper roots tend to be less 'feckless' – that is, more responsive to at least some important interest groups – because they feel at least some pressure to cultivate the support of those groups reached by their roots.

A party can sink roots deeply into society without possessing a strong, disciplined organisation that is capable of making its influence penetrate down to the local level (although it obviously helps if it has such organisational strength). Only one party in South Asia has such a penetrative capacity: the Communist Party of India-Marxist, but it has gained popularity in only three of India's 28 states. However, several other Indian parties, including some regional parties, have sunk relatively deep roots into society by delivering policies, funds, goods and services (when in power) to a significant array of social groups.

Let me illustrate the point about fecklessness with a pair of examples. The first is the Congress Party in most of India's states.[14] Between around 1935 and 1955, the Congress all across India was taken over by leaders of landowning castes (*jatis*) which dominated village life even though they constituted only a large minority of the population. (They were discussed above.) Mahatma Gandhi systematically recruited such leaders in order to lend substance to his struggle against the Raj, and these leaders took over state governments once Congress began winning elections after independence in 1947. So even at an early stage, Congress had sunk firm roots into the rural elite.

Gradually, other, less prosperous groups which outnumbered the landowning castes became politically aware and assertive. Congress responded in most states by opening itself up to leaders of these groups, so that its roots extended still further into the lower reaches of society. But other parties were also busy cultivating ties to all of these groups – in order to compete with Congress. So eventually, multi-party competition became a strong feature of Indian politics – and most major parties in most states had become at least somewhat rooted in society. In most Indian state governments today (and at the national level), leaders from a diversity of caste and other groups hold important posts – and most ruling parties thus have reasonably deep social roots. Those leaders feel pressure to deliver tangibly to the groups from which they come, to prevent similar leaders in other parties from stealing away the votes of those groups. The result in most cases is somewhat accountable, less-than-feckless government.

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[14] An important exception is Orissa where no party has sunk deep roots, and where every government in the state's history has thus been feckless.

The second example is Bangladesh, a very different story. (And similar stories could be told of Pakistani parties.) There are two main political parties there, both of which are led by female survivors of murdered men who once led their parties. The two women's links to these martyrdoms (of which much is made) gives them unchallengeable authority and the capacity to exercise near-total dominance over their parties. Their authority does *not* derive from their ability to assemble coalitions of social groups, and they thus feel little compulsion to cultivate such support by sinking their roots deep into society in the manner of most Indian parties. The result in Bangladesh is consistently – indeed extravagantly – feckless government, no matter which Begum is in power.[15]

We see less fecklessness in India because parties' deeper social roots create pressure on those in power to be at least somewhat *accountable* to an array of interests, and to respond to them. We see more fecklessness, indeed normlessness, in Bangladesh because the very shallow roots which parties have sunk into society enables the Begums to believe that they can get away with anything and still retain the control of their parties – which are largely extensions of their egos and cliques, and not institutions of much substance.

One rather different point is worth adding here. We also need to pay attention to which groups parties seek to sink roots into, and the breadth of the social coalitions that they seek to cultivate. In some Indian states, all major parties seek votes from all (or nearly all) social groups, while in other states, they seek support from more limited sections of society – which makes for a very different sort of politics. The former concentrate on accommodation and uniting, while the latter focus on dividing and the politics of spite. In the former, there is far more policy continuity.

If we consider African parties and governments with these ideas in mind, we will certainly discover variations – in the degree to which parties are socially rooted, in the make-up of their social bases, in the extent to which they feel the need to govern accountably (and to whom), and in the extent to which fecklessness is a problem.

10 Exploring the difficulties of winning *re*-election

This topic may appear irrelevant to Africa, but bear with me. In India, it is exceedingly difficult for ruling parties to win re-election. At five of the last six, and seven of the last nine national elections there, the ruling party or coalition of parties has been thrown out by the voters. At the state level in that federal system, the situation is even worse for incumbents. Ruling parties/coalitions have been ousted at roughly 70% of Indian state elections since 1980. And if we remove the state of West Bengal (where a Communist-led coalition has won every state election since 1977) from the calculation, the figure approaches 90%. These are astoundingly high numbers by international standards. Incumbency is widely regarded as a severe *dis*advantage.

In African polities where multi-party competition is meaningful (and their number is growing), this appears not to be a serious problem. We need to understand why. One reason ruling parties lose so often in India is that the powerful and ferociously autonomous Election Commission ensures that elections are free and fair. In African countries where this is not true or less true, this may partly explain the difference. Another factor in India is demand overload from a huge array of interests. No matter how effective governments are in responding to

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[15] Since January 2007, a limitary-backed 'caretaker' government in Bangladesh has systematically revealed their fecklessness, in an attempt to discredit the two Begums and the parties that they lead. The evidence uncovered is substantial, but the 'caretaker' regime has itself committed excesses which undermine the exercise, and which leave the political system there facing a new kind of crisis.

these demands, they tend to fall short of expectations and to fail to be re-elected. Perhaps African governments suffer less from demand overload (which originates from society).

Demand overload in India is the result of a strong political awakening among voters in every section of society, which has been evident since the 1970s. Ordinary people, including poorer groups, have become more aware of the logic of democratic politics and of their rights under law – and more skilful and self-confident actors in the political process, at and between elections. They have also become more assertive, taking delight in meting out humiliating defeats to objectionable politicians at election time. That awakening made re-election very difficult long before fiscal constraints limited the capacity of governments to respond to demands in the early 1990s. If such an awakening has not occurred – or has occurred to a lesser extent – in African countries, we need to ask why. It is certainly less evident across most of Southeast Asia than it is in India, so Africa is by no means unique.

These issues may be worth examining. Sometimes what does <u>not</u> happen is as important as what does.

11 The inadequacy of patronage distribution and clientelism – and the diversity of 'post-clientelist' approaches in India

One of the conclusions that Indian politicians have drawn from the problems described in section 11 just above is that strategies mixing patronage distribution[16] and clientelism are inadequate to ensure re-election. During the 1950s and 1960s, this mixture sufficed to bring the Congress party back to power on nearly all occasions. But the political awakening described above and decay in the Congress Party's once quite constructive and responsive regional political 'machines' (patronage systems can be somewhat constructive and responsive) then made that impossible.

Today, politicians in nearly all parties recognise that to have any hope of re-election, they must *augment* clientelism and patronage distribution with something else, with 'add-ons'. This does not mean that they have abandoned patronage distribution or clientelism. They persist with them, since they can win support from some interest groups – but not from enough to ensure re-election. They therefore tend to develop 'add-ons', what I have called 'post-clientelist' approaches (Manor, 2006). As the next paragraph explains, this means not one but a whole *array* of things – all of which supplement clientelism.

The remarkable thing about these approaches is their diversity. If we consider just four of India's 28 states since 1993, we encounter four very different post-clientelist approaches. In two cases, ruling politicians polarised society, but they did so in radically different ways. A Chief Minister of the state of Bihar polarised society between haves and have-nots, while his counterpart in Gujarat polarised society between Hindus and Muslims. In two other cases, ruling politicians stressed efforts to promote 'development', but again in markedly different ways. A Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh used an illiberal, top-down approach while his counterpart in Madhya Pradesh used decentralisation and a bottom-up approach If we were to consider the other 24 Indian states, we would find many more variations.

Senior politicians in Africa may be less persuaded of the importance of post-clientelist approaches, partly because they have found it less difficult to win re-election, and partly because many do not need to be re-elected. But there is evidence that several African leaders

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[16] The term 'patronage distribution' implies the allocation of goods, services and funds in ways that cultivate electoral (and other) support from various important social groups. In India, patterns of patronage distribution have been strongly influenced by 'clientelism', asymmetric personalised networks through which patrons provide personal clients (often drawn from those important social groups) channel resources to be distributed for political advantage.

are also augmenting patronage distribution with significant 'add-ons'. This appears to have been true in recent times in for example Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda and South Africa.[17] This theme may be worth exploring since it affects the interplays between formal and informal institutions.

12 Civil society – 'against' the state?

Some studies of Africa perceive 'civil society' as a set of forces arrayed *against* the state (see for example Bayart, 1994, and Chazan, Harbeson and Rothchild, 1994). This introduction of an oppositional role into the very definition of civil society is surprising to an Asia specialist. There are many Asian examples of civil society playing such a role, but almost always, it also plays others. Civil society organisations may enter into partnerships with governments, offer constructive criticism of governments, play advocacy roles which requires distance from but also both opposition to and positive engagement with governments, or they may seek to avoid any contact with governments in order to pursue their goals in isolation. Note the use of the plural here: 'organisation*s*'. In almost every case,[18] we find many different civic associations playing a diversity of roles (see, for example, Blair and Jutkowitz, 1994; Silliman and Noble, 1998; Camilleri, 2000; Varshney, 2002). To boil civil society's role down to opposition is to simplify a very complex reality.

It is understandable that some Africa specialists should have fixed upon adversarial relations between civil society and governments, given the character of many African political regimes. Those formidable analyses are influenced by the genuinely grim struggles faced by civil society organisations in numerous countries. But enough regimes in Africa have become slightly or substantially more open in recent years – after, it should in fairness be stressed, those scholars wrote on this topic – to warrant a broader definition of 'civil society'.

I suggest that we define civil society as 'a domain (and a set of forces) situated between the state and the household which are voluntary in nature, and which have significant autonomy from the state'. This is obviously a broader definition than the one used by the analysts referred to above, and crucially for analytical purposes, it is *neutral*. It does not define out organisations that are '*uncivil*' – a practice which defaces 'studies' by some evangelists for civil society. (This neutral definition requires us to see organisations like the Ku Klux Klan and Al-Qaeda as civil society organisations.) Nor does it exclude *apolitical* organisations like the Bangalore Music Society. But more importantly for our purposes, it includes organisations that engage *positively* with government actors/agencies – by injecting ideas into dialogues with officials, by assisting in service delivery, etc. Such things are actually happening in parts of Africa, and it would be a mistake to exclude them from our studies. This broad, neutral definition is well tested in a major research programme on civil society and governance in 22 countries, five of which were African.[19]

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[17] In response to an earlier draft of this paper, Tim Kelsall that after the demise of the one-party state in post-Houphouet Côte d'Ivoire, virulent appeals to ethnicity became more significant, and that there appears to have been an increase in ethnic politics in many parts of Africa. But he is not persuaded that these tactics amount to 'post-clientelist add-ons'. Rather, he suspects that the different ethnically-based patronage networks that comprised the single-party state have fractured into separate ethnic party clientelisms. But other appeals are also being made – to women, to youth, to the anti-corruption constituency – and these might better qualify as 'add-ons'.

[18] There are exceptions like North Korea where civil society scarcely exists, but they are unusual in the extreme.

[19] This was the Ford Foundation's 'Civil society and Governance' project, coordinated by this writer at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex between 1998 and 2001. See: http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/research-teams/governance-team/projects-and-outputs/civil-society-and-governance-programme/governance-research-civil-society-and-governance-programme

We need to recognise that some African civil society organisations (like the Indian political 'fixers' discussed above) are responses by people rooted in informal institutions to perceived opportunities offered by formal state institutions. They are sometimes self-initiated bottom-up entities, which give expression to the felt needs and preferences of ordinary people at the grassroots. Others are larger non-governmental organisations operating from higher levels in political systems which seek to reach out to such people and give them voice. They therefore cannot be ignored, even when they fail to influence government actions. Such failures are themselves worth analysing (Manor, 2007b).

In order to enhance the analytical utility of the broad definition proposed above, it is necessary to disaggregate the category of 'civil society' – by breaking organisations down according to their aims, activities, internal governance, etc. But it would be a mistake to exclude 'civil society' from our enquiry – or to see it only as a force arrayed 'against' the state.

13 Corruption

13.1 Tackling corruption using draconian means

Some international development agencies have sought to persuade governments in Asia and Africa to bestow vast powers upon special agencies which will take draconian action to stamp out corruption. Their model is often the Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC) created in Hong Kong very late in the period of British rule. I spent two years in Hong Kong in the late 1960s – before the ICAC was established – and corruption in those years had reached grotesque levels. There is clear evidence that by the 1990s, the ICAC had made a major impact for the better.

But could this model work elsewhere? It is difficult to be optimistic. There is no genuine counterpart agency in any other country in Asia, Africa or Latin America. The ICAC depended for its success upon the total, unswerving support provided by leaders atop the substantially undemocratic political system in British Hong Kong. And for a complex set of reasons – not all of which imply pathologies – such support is rarely available in other parts of the developing world. That makes this option infeasible.

To illustrate this, let us consider the case of one Indian state during the late 1990s – Andhra Pradesh. Its government was vastly corrupt. During one decade, kickbacks in excess of $1 million were received by it on more than 100 occasions. But the Chief Minister was extremely effective at pretending to be a reformer, and he managed to take in several credulous donor agencies. He was extremely eager to be seen as the 'first' Indian leader to undertake bold 'reforms', even though most of these initiatives were more theatrical exercises than genuine efforts.

In response to his characteristically extravagant announcements of a desire to eradicate corruption, DFID proposed that the man who had created and headed the ICAC in Hong Kong, Bertrand de Speville, travel to Andhra Pradesh for discussions about establishing a similar agency there. The state government – always eager to please the donors, and sensing an opportunity for another gaudy fraud – warmly welcomed the suggestion. But once he began interacting with the government, de Speville recognised that the Chief Minister had no intention of providing the proposed anti-corruption agency with anything like the powers, autonomy and support that would be required. So he packed up and went home. The ICAC model is not replicable.

In our studies of corruption, we must focus on other issues. Two (among many others, not least those on which LASDEL has worked) are worth considering.

13.2 Tackling corruption through 'quarantining'

A few years ago, I had a discussion with a senior, serving official in an Indian state government who has scholarly inclinations and had lately been studying corruption for a book that he was planning. The government for which he worked was well known to be involved in substantial illicit 'fund-raising', mainly through kickbacks on awards of major contracts. But the same government was also strongly committed to producing good development results in certain key sectors.

I asked him how the two things fitted together. He replied that he had fed into official discussions a description of how the Japanese government had 'quarantined' certain key ministries from corruption, so that their resources were not diverted and the officials within them could focus entirely on performing their assigned tasks. This idea was seized upon by senior politicians in the government. Politically and fiscally vital ministries were duly 'quarantined'.

There is some evidence that 'quarantining' is happening or once happened in some African countries (see for example, Crook, 1989). But the idea would become more vivid if such a label were attached to this practice. It is therefore worth publicising. And if it were emphasised that 'quarantining' had yielded good outcomes elsewhere for politicians who are very like African leaders, the message might seem more palatable to them than if it were marketed by donor agencies. (See also in this connection, section 17 below on South-South emulation.)

13.3 Analysing corruption: the uses to which corruption and illicit funds are put

This topic is seldom analysed, but it is potentially important. Two examples from India are worth noting, since they may suggest that something similar might occur in parts of Africa.

The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh state in India's federal system wanted to introduce a number of constructive programmes – including a serious attempt at democratic decentralisation and several poverty reduction schemes. But he knew that his cabinet colleagues and legislators were unenthusiastic. He therefore needed to find a way to dominate policy formulation and implementation. He set about distracting his colleagues from the policy process by permitting them to enrich themselves illegally. The result was soaring (and quite decentralised) corruption – a distinguished retired jurist who served as the state's ombudsman described the Chief Minister and his colleagues as 'Ali Baba and the forty thieves'. But the distraction worked. The Chief Minister was able to dominate policy making and to make substantial headway with implementation. As a result, a strong system of decentralisation was created, and certain key poverty initiatives proved very effective (Melo, Ng'ethe and Manor, forthcoming).

The Chief Minister of Karnataka state took power in 1972 after 35 years in which state-level politics had been dominated by two landowning castes which had given the lion's share of goods and services to their caste fellows – even though the two castes together comprised only one-third of the population. The new Chief Minister was the first person from a caste other than the two landed groups to hold that office, and to survive inevitable efforts by those groups to oust him, he had to mobilise support from castes of lower status which formed a majority of the population. But those lower castes were poorly organised and their leaders had few funds with which to cultivate popular backing from their caste fellows. To obtain the resources to raise them up and to bankroll caste associations among low-status groups, the Chief Minister developed a centralised system of corruption. Illicit 'fund-raising' duly

mushroomed, but the massive resources that he obtained enabled him to galvanise the lower orders. As a result, the two landed castes have never (in the 25 years since he took power) been able to re-establish control of state-level politics, and disadvantaged groups have gained substantially (Raghavan and Manor, 2009).

So corruption – regrettable as it always is – can occasionally serve progressive purposes. There may be few examples of this in Africa, but this possibility is worth exploring. Even if corruption has never served constructive purposes in Africa, the uses to which illicit funds are put are still worth investigating, since they have an important impact on the interplay between formal and informal institutions.

14 Historical trajectories and political 'bossism' in parts of Asia

John Sidel has noted that two (but *only* two) countries in Southeast Asia – the Philippines and Thailand – differ from their neighbours in that political 'bossism' (an extreme form of patrimonialism akin to *caudillo* dominance in some parts of Latin America) looms large in their politics (Sidel, 1996). Let me try to trace the origins of this phenomenon in the Philippines and contrast it with the very different story that emerges in one Indian state, West Bengal.[20]

The U.S. seized control of the Philippines at the beginning of the twentieth century, and very shortly after taking over, they held elections to new and powerful mayoral posts in the various parts of the archipelago. (This was an early example of the naïve American faith in elections, which lives on.) Crucially, they did so *before* bureaucratic structures of any substance had been created. This meant that the task of establishing bureaucracies was left to the newly elected mayors. They proceeded to pack administrative structures with their relatives and cronies, so that they swiftly achieved overweening dominance over their bailiwicks. They used that power to strengthen their dominance further and to enrich themselves vastly by grabbing large tracts of the best land. The result was the emergence of a group of regional 'bosses' who ruled in an uncompromising, highly illiberal manner. The bosses came from a few families who used their regional bases to acquire leverage over executive and legislative institutions at the national level. To this day, most Filipino leaders come from those families – the Macapagals, Laurels, Marcoses, Aquinos, etc. Some of them have been more enlightened than others, but they have sustained a political system within which institutions have only limited substance, which is unlikely to deliver effectively on development or social justice, and which is prone to instability.

The British had taken control of virtually all of what we now call West Bengal by 1800. They established and gradually fortified solid bureaucratic structures which they dominated. It was not until the 1880s that they permitted elected Indians (on councils at very low levels) to have any influence in the system – and for a long time thereafter, it remained minimal. Elected Indians did not gain substantial powers at the provincial (Bengal-wide) level until 1935. By then, the bureaucracy had acquired massive self-confidence, institutional ballast and durability.

After Indian independence in 1947, the ruling Congress Party swiftly forged a settlement with the subcontinent's bureaucrats. Politicians would make policy and enjoy pre-eminence, but formidable safeguards were built into the system to protect the autonomy, neutrality and job security of bureaucrats. Even today, 60 years after independence, it is next to impossible to sack a member of the national and state administrative services in that federal system. In a minority of states, bureaucrats have been brow-beaten and demoralised by aggressively normless politicians. But the 'steel frame' has not been broken – it remains an important

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[20] A similar story could be told about many other Indian states, but let us fix on West Bengal.

alternative power centre to ruling parties. Indeed, at the national level, it has made a substantial comeback since 1989 when it became impossible for any single party to gain a majority in Parliament. That radically reduced the capacity of Prime Ministers to abuse their power – something that Indira and Rajiv Gandhi had done as a matter of routine before then. At the state level in the federal system, the bureaucracy has largely held its own because in states other than West Bengal, ruling parties have failed to win re-election nearly 90% of the time since 1980.

But West Bengal is different. The ruling alliance, led by the Communist Party of India-Marxist, has won every election there since 1977. This is the only major Indian state with a 'dominant party' system. Despite that, however, the bureaucracy retains much of its old substance and influence. It remains a formidable, at least semi-independent power centre because politicians even there remain hemmed in by laws and conventions which are taken reasonably seriously.

The historical trajectories that we see in the Philippines and West Bengal are strikingly different. Liberal, representative politics flourish in the latter partly because elected politicians were not permitted to exercise influence until strong bureaucratic structures had been in place for well over a century. (The full explanation is of course much more complicated; see for example Manor, 1990.) In the Philippines, where elected mayors were given immense power before bureaucratic structures had been created, liberal, representative politics struggles to survive.

15 The importance of other types of historical legacies

At the risk of making things too complicated, I should add two further comments about other historical legacies. Anyone undertaking an exercise similar to our programme on Africa for the whole of former British India would be compelled to stress two sets of differences inherited from the British period.

The first difference is between the two-thirds of British India that was directly governed by the British Government of India after 1858, and the one-third that was governed by 545 Indian princes. A few of the princes were enlightened, but most were not. And even today, six decades after independence, we still find that most of the former princely areas remain more under-developed and more afflicted by problems in state-society relations than the areas which the British administered directly. This is true even in regions where the same Indian state government has governed parts of *both* former princely and former British India since state boundaries were redrawn in 1956. The tenacity of these legacies is remarkable, and something similar may be found in parts of Africa.

Indirect rule, at least in former British Africa, was inspired by the princely model in India. If areas governed by 'traditional leaders' in Africa suffered misgovernment and under-development that did lasting damage, as we find in most of former princely India today, then we need to consider this in our analyses of contemporary Africa. In the areas that they administered directly, the British left behind important legacies in spheres such as education, law, and the structures not just of administration but of political power more generally. There is also of course the question of the damage down by colonial powers like Belgium and Portugal which paid less heed to institution-building or service delivery. The broad point here is that history matters, and we should examine it carefully.

The second difference has to do with variations in the types of land settlements in different parts of British India. In some regions (mainly in southern and western India), most land was parcelled out in small plots to owner-cultivators – to *ryots*, to use the Indian term. These are called *ryotwari* areas. In other regions (notably in north-central and eastern British India), most land was handed over to major landlords owning large tracts – to *zamindars*. These are

called *zamindari* areas. In post-independence India, politics and state-society relations have been far more constructive in the former (*ryotwari*) areas than in the latter – and development has surged ahead much faster in the former.

There is one further complication. In the first decade after Indian independence in 1947, Nehru and his colleagues recognised that the inequitable land distribution in the *zamindari* areas made for inherently unstable politics which impeded their effort to ensure social justice. They therefore embarked on a major programme of land reform called '*Zamindari* Abolition'. This did not remove all of the problems in those inequitable regions, but it had some impact and was crucial to the tolerably successful working of the democratic process there ever since. In the region of Pakistan where *zamindars* predominated most strongly, Sindh (and in other parts of that country) no such reform was undertaken. The result is that a tiny number of families in Sindh own vast lands, and utterly dominate politics there in an arrogant, feckless manner. Politically pre-eminent among those families are the Bhuttos.

The pressure of population on land in Africa is nothing like as great as in India and Pakistan. So perhaps this latter issue is of much less important there. But issues such as these deserve at least passing attention from us.

16 A little noted experiment of genuine promise in Uganda

The Ugandan government, in concert with the United Nations Capital Development Fund (which has had great success in many countries working across the line separating formal and informal institutions), has mounted a highly promising initiative that is worth noting. (I am briefly departing from Asia here, but this topic is important.) This is a pilot scheme that has created local courts which trigger new and constructive interactions between formal institutions (of which the courts are an example) and informal institutions. I suggest that we analyse this experiment – especially if there are counterparts in other African countries, but even if there are not.

Let me merely quote from a careful (and as yet unpublished) study by a United Nations evaluation team led by Njuguna Ng'ethe. The italicised emphases in what follows are theirs. Their report states that:

> … the courts enjoy *strong cultural legitimacy* because they have recognisable linkages with the traditional elders' courts, which still exist. They are, therefore viewed as organic and authentic institutions. In this respect, we found out that the local council courts have been known to convert themselves into the traditional courts when necessary and convenient. … the courts themselves *tapped into an existing need* or as one interviewee put it 'they were spot needed, therefore no persuasion was needed to have them accepted'. According to another interviewee, 'given the little budget support for the formal justice system, the courts provide not necessarily justice for all, but at least some justice for all.' …the courts are *not only delivering a service but are also seen to be delivering it*, a situation that was enhanced by the sensitization activities of the component [of the project]. In this way, the courts continue to harness the good will of society as evidenced by the increase in the number of cases coming before them. … the courts have a much broader view of justice as not just litigation, but also arbitration, reconciliation, conflict management and promotion of social harmony. They are, therefore, *seen more as social institutions than simply judicial institutions*. One discussant summarized this point rather well when he observed that 'we prefer the local courts because, unlike the modern courts, they allow negotiation'.[21]

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[21] I cannot cite a title and page numbers until the document is formally approved.

The team's report then adds the following.

> A number of programme factors have had a positive effect on achievements. One, as indicated earlier, the pilot sought to tap into existing institutions and practices. Two, the pilot correctly identified training as the key input in the capacity building of the courts, rather than some other input such as provision of equipment. Three, the pilot adopted the correct training strategy … which made the per capita cost of training quite low. Four, the village as the key entry point of the component, created an immediate identification with the people. Five, placing the component within the Ministry of Local Government, rather than the Ministry of Justice, underscored the grassroots nature of the courts and at the same time eliminated any potential conflict between the courts and the formal justice system.

Other participants in our programme know more than I do about whether there are – perhaps less successful – enough counterparts elsewhere in Africa to make a comparative study possible.[22] But this Ugandan experiment merits attention. It was viewed by the evaluation team as the most successful element of the overall programme of the United Nations Capital Development Fund in that country – and nearly all of the other elements were deemed to have succeeded. And note that the team leader, Ng'ethe (a Kenyan), is no uncritical analyst of the Ugandan government. He was one of the signatories of the 'Barkan Report' on Uganda which was substantially negative in its findings.

17 The under-estimated importance of South-South emulation/replication

Senior politicians are often persuaded to undertake new development initiatives or political reforms not by advice (or pressure) from donor agencies but by events in other, similar countries – by the example of their peers. South-South emulation and replication are more important that is often assumed.

Consider one telling illustration. For several years now, most donor agencies have backed democratic decentralisation. But what is often overlooked is that most international development agencies were late arrivals on the decentralisation bandwagon. Decentralisation had become something of an international fashion by the mid-1990s – before most donors lent it solid support. By then, experiments with decentralisation had begun in over 60 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe – largely without donor encouragement. Those experiments were undertaken, unbidden, by senior government actors in less developed countries because they had learned of gains that had attended decentralisation in other similar countries (Manor, 1999). Many donors do not know this, and thus under-estimate the utility of promoting South-South communication. We should be aware of it as we pursue our analyses.

18 Analysing information flows

Poor people's lack of access to information about processes which might assist or injure them is an important facet of their poverty in less developed countries. It exposes them to exploitation, and limits their awareness, capabilities, opportunities and liberties.

Numerous governments have implemented (or are devising) laws and programmes to give poor people greater access to information – often because they expect this to enhance their legitimacy and popularity among the numerically powerful poor. As political systems open up and the votes of the poor thus matter more, this trend is likely to continue, so we might

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[22] Tim Kelsall suggests that Sierra Leone offers interesting comparative insights. Richard Crook has studied access to justice in West Africa.

undertake studies of how to encourage it, of its impact, its implications, and how to turn it to the advantage of poor people. We have few empirical analyses of how such initiatives impinge at the local level, and of efforts by poor people and their allies in civil society to make use of them.

A good start has been made in assessing (*inter alia*) the array of devices used to extract information from governments (Gaventa and Goetz, 2001) – based mainly on evidence from Asia and Latin America. In our programme, we might examine the use (or non-use) of such devices in Africa – and the policies of various governments which facilitate or impede their use.

19 The changing architecture of aid

Relatively few Asian governments are dependent on aid, although this writer encountered the problem while working on Cambodia in 2008. But numerous African governments face that problem.[23] Since aid arrangements and modalities impinge powerfully upon many African governments (and ultimately on the ways that they deal with informal institutions), we need to be aware of significant recent changes in the international architecture of aid. Three are worth stressing.

The first is the set of changes that followed the Paris Declaration, which was the culmination of a series of international conferences on aid attended by both donor and recipient governments. It enjoins international development agencies working in specific countries to harmonise and coordinate their programmes at country level – to reduce dissonances, duplication of efforts, and the transaction costs imposed on recipient governments. As a result, very substantial rearrangements are occurring in many African countries, and certainly in Zambia.

As harmonisation proceeds, a small number of donor agencies (usually two or three) are given the leading roles in each specific sector. Since these roles tend to be shared out equally among donors, this sometimes means that the agencies best equipped to lead in any given sector are not given the key roles that they deserve. The lead is sometimes given to agencies which have substantial funds to deploy, rather than to those with the greatest expertise. This tends to place UN agencies (which are often short of resources) at a disadvantage. But it sometimes has the opposite effect when well-funded 'joint programmes' are created under the leadership of UN agencies with greater expertise than the others, as is the case with an admirable HIV/AIDS initiative in Zambia.

The second change (which is in part a consequence of the agreement in Paris) is the increasing tendency of donor agencies to resort to the provision of broad 'direct budget support' to recipient governments. This is not happening in an even, consistent manner across Africa, but the trend is clear. This tends to result in fewer detailed conditionalities, and it gives recipient governments more room for manoeuvre. This will often have positive impacts, but when recipient governments are disinclined to take constructive action, it may make things worse. Officials in those governments worry that decisions by donors to suspend aid because they disapprove of government actions or inaction may prove more devastating than when such decisions were taken by only some donors.

The third change, which is sometimes overlooked, is the pursuit by various UN agencies of the goal of 'One UN'. This is an effort to bring greater coherence to the work of various UN agencies working within any given country. This – and the broader harmonisation noted above – have caused individual UN agencies certain problems since their charters prevent

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[23]   These comments are based on my work in Cambodia in 2008, and in Zambia in 2007.

them from making flexible adjustments required by the 'One UN' campaign and by post-Paris harmonisation. Such agencies have often come in for harsh criticism from certain bilateral agencies for their lack of flexibility, and yet the governments of these bi-laterals' countries have actually imposed those rigidities upon the UN agencies at a global level. That lack of flexibility has deprived certain UN agencies of leadership roles in various 'joint programmes' in sectors where they have superior expertise. This has a negative impact in two senses: because they have that expertise, and because recipient governments tend (rightly) to regard UN agencies as more fraternal partners in development.

20 The waning importance of aid – especially from Western countries

Here are a few more (probably rather obvious) comments. Western (Northern) aid agencies have sometimes succeeded in persuading recipient governments in Africa (and Asia) to engage more with civil society organisations – for example in discussions linked to the preparation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). This and other donor efforts have some potential to enhance constructive interactions between formal and informal institutions. It must be stressed, however, that the 'consultations' about PRSPs have often been decidedly cosmetic.

Insofar as donor efforts have had this effect, their importance is waning, as is their influence in Africa – as a result of two recent changes. First, the prices of many primary products which African countries export have risen because of greater demand in China, India and Southeast Asia. This had reduced the importance of Western aid relative to exports. Second, the Chinese have moved energetically into Africa with substantial offers of aid in order to win contracts to export raw materials. As officials in Zambia and Kenya stressed to me in mid-2007, these offers carry no troublesome conditionalities concerning human rights, engagement with civil society, or environmental protection. And when an agreement is made, the Chinese immediately deliver funds in full to recipient governments – something which Western donors seldom do.

These changes may make government actors in Africa less inclined to adjust or increase their interactions with informal institutions in constructive ways.

21 The psychological impact of minimal openings in closed political systems

Enthusiasts for more open politics and more constructive interaction between governments and informal institutions are often disappointed by the minimal steps taken by governments that have been substantially closed and autocratic. But evidence on extremely modest political openings in China, Vietnam and Cambodia[24] indicate that even minimal steps in such systems have a greater psychological impact on ordinary people than to do ambitious steps in more open systems. They tend very powerfully to whet the popular appetite for more of the same – because they represent such startling departures from previous practice. We might look for signs of this in African systems which have until recently been substantially closed.

22 Conclusions

This paper has ranged too widely to make a tidy summation possible. So to conclude, let us very briefly revisit three of the more important themes discussed above.

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[24] These comments are based not on documents in the public domain but on private communications from UN officials who witnessed this process in China and Vietnam, and on this writer's own work in Cambodia in October 2008.

First, clientelism and patronage networks have their limitations. They plainly do not provide 'good governance' – indeed, they do not even provide tolerably acceptable governance, what Merilee Grindle has usefully called 'good enough governance' (Grindle, 2004). But just as importantly – since senior politicians must be persuaded of the need for more constructive political strategies if such strategies are to be adopted – clientelism and patronage networks do not ensure the legitimacy, popularity and political survival of leaders and ruling parties.

This is less apparent in Africa than in, say, India because many African elections have not been as fair as those in India – where frequent defeats for incumbents have dramatised this point. But nearly all African leaders see that legitimacy and popularity serve their political interests. It is therefore to their advantage to go beyond clientelism and patronage distribution – which reach too few important social groups. They need not (and like Indian politicians, they will not) abandon patronage politics, but it is in their vital interests to de-emphasise it and – crucially – to supplement it with other initiatives that make the political and policy processes more open, accountable and responsive. Such post-clientelist approaches tend strongly to break down popular apathy and disillusionment. And they reach far more people than patronage does, so that they enable regimes and ruling parties to sink their roots more deeply into society, and – as we shall see below – to go 'with the grain' of society more effectively.

Second, the literature on Asia suggests that as we seek to discern constructive ways of 'going with the grain' in Africa, we should be cautious about romanticising traditional institutions and leaders – for several reasons. Many senior politicians in Africa will be reluctant to resuscitate chieftaincy – because that would threaten their influence and might revive ethnic conflict. More importantly, there are reasons to doubt that in former times those traditional institutions entailed or permitted much in the way of accountability, or that they were particularly effective at delivering public goods. And even where their record was somewhat encouraging, their searing experiences under colonialism and destructive post-independence regimes – and amid 'modernisation' and the rise of capitalism – have radically changed them and the people over whom they once held sway. It is thus unlikely that they are in a position to play a major role in pursuing development and in making politics more constructive. We must not permit our deep disillusionment with post-colonial politics to inspire naïveté on this issue.

Finally, as we seek to generate ideas that go 'with the grain' in Africa, we need to ask ourselves 'what is the grain?' Traditional institutions and modes of leadership provide one answer to that question, but they do not take us very far. A very different answer emerges from changes that have occurred in places like Museveni's Uganda and in Mozambique (and in some troubled countries in Asia) over the last decade. Those two governments have achieved significant improvements by decentralising power to representative bodies at lower levels in their political systems. They have empowered those bodies to take decisions which have led to outcomes that reflect the preferences of ordinary people. This has made the political process more responsive, and has enhanced the legitimacy of the regimes which introduced the changes. It has also broken the utter dominance over the political and policy processes that bureaucrats and ruling party minions once exercised at lower levels – unaccountably and often abusively. This has enabled the governments of those two countries to tap into constructive social resources which survived at the grassroots during difficult times, to a far greater degree than at higher levels. People at the local level in those countries – who had long been alienated from formal political structures, and who had sought mainly to elude them – have responded positively to these changes. They have become willing, often for the first time, to engage with the political process and to inject their energies, skills, knowledge and preferences into it – because (again for the first time) there are good reasons for doing so.

This suggests that by trusting ordinary people and grassroots social resources to bring renewal to sclerotic political and administrative structures, these governments have gone 'with the grain', with the aspirations and latent capacities of their societies. In many African (and for that matter, Asian) countries, leaders may seldom or never have gone with this version of the grain. But this approach appears to offer greater promise than a 'revival' of imagined 'traditions'.

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