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Subjectivity, Collective Action and the Governance Agenda in Arumeru East.

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Under the Governance Agenda, NGOs in Africa are being viewed as vehicles for the promotion of a culture of democracy at the grassroots, a project which can equally be construed as an insidious attempt to create 'liberal selves'. This paper examines the social construction of selfhood in a particular District in Tanzania. It argues that selves are currently constructed in historically derived social relations spanning several different sites and having contradictory effects on the capacity for and character of collective action. Democracy functions imperfectly not because of an absence of a 'culture' of democracy, but because that culture is subject to conflicting cross-pulls. An NGO currently working in the area with its own vision of transforming selfhood is shown to be at best partially effective, in main because it fails to make a difference across the several sites in which subjectivity is constructed.

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Introduction

Theories of governance rest on the belief that the experience of social and economic development in Africa has been disappointing because African populations have not been adequately represented in government. As a consequence, unaccountable states have made poor policies and mismanaged resources. The ensuing disaffection with the state has led to resistance, non-compliance and evasion. As a result the formal sectors of national economies have deteriorated.[1] As a remedy to these problems, it is argued that new arrangements for institutionalising norms of reciprocity and accountability need to be found. Participation by the population in the politics of development policy is assumed to be the key to cooperation and compliance with government intitiatives.[2]

In practice Governance has meant the encouragement in Africa of liberal democratic arrangements, including multi-party democracy. It is a premiss of this paper that effective, regularised political accountability in a liberal democracy, of the sort conducive to driving development, rests on the predominance in the population of civil subjects, characterised by individualism, reason, freedom, and a critical awareness; subjects who are disposed to collective, civic action.[3]

Critics who question the suitability of multi-party democracy to non-western conditions often hold - implicitly or explicitly - that subjects in Africa lack these characteristics.[4] But, following Williams and Young, this observation does not derail the Governance agenda, once it is understood that Governance, and in particular the role of NGOs therein, constitutes *a project for creating liberal selves*.[5] Such an interpretation prompts its own questions. If African selves are not already "liberal," what are they? By what social processes is the self constituted, and what conditions would suffice to make up a subject capable of enforcing effective political accountability?

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[1] This is a rather blunt formulation, but for accounts out of which such an argument can be constructed, see for example World Bank (1989, 1997), Chazan (1988), Diamond (1988), Sandbrook (1985, 1993), UNECA (1989), Anyang' Nyong'o (1987).

[2] See in particular Hyden (1993, 1997), Diamond (1994).

[3] There is no space to argue a proper case for this. Suffice to say that on the assumption that political leaders have interests that at times diverge from those of the general population, that government is not perfectly informed about the conditions and preferences of citizens, that political coalitions formed on the basis of ethnic groups or patron-client networks or other communal identities can be damaging to stability and (especially market-based) development, then there is a need for rational, civil collectivities to organise and oversee the administration of their preferences by government. For a similar view of the cultural values and attributes required by citizens, see Diamond (1993), p. 1. For civil society as civic republicanism, see Shils (1992). It will be remembered that in Almond and Verba's classic (1965), a stable liberal democracy did not require that such characteristics be generalised throughout the population. Indeed, it was better if they were balanced by "subject" and "parochial" tendencies. In partial concurrence, it is our view that the critical-rational subject is *not* predominant in western liberal democracies. Partly because of this, government policy cannot be understood as an outcome of the informed preferences of citizens; thus government is not accountable in a strong sense. This may suffice for *stability*, but I contend that it will not suffice for the kind of equitable, participatory development aspired to by governance theorists.

[4] For explicit references see Parekh (1993), p. 168; Chabal (1992), pp. 30, 205-207; for a remark with similar implications, Hyden (1983), p. 150. For more circumspect analyses, in which the nature of the individual is not tackled head on, but in which the civic limitations of civil society are unearthed, consider Bayart (1986), Seligman (1992), Jeffries (1993), Lemarchand (1992), Monga (1995), Fatton (1995), Hann (1995), White (1995), Allen (1997).

[5] Williams (1993), Williams and Young (1994), Young (1996); also Hearn (1998). It is interesting to note that the neo-modernisers behind the Governance agenda consider it impolitic to acknowledge that the object of policy in the developing world remains the transformation of persons. Their reticence marks a contrast with earlier modernisation theorists; see for example Pye (1962), Lerner (1958), Inkeles and Smith (1974).

What I hope to do in this paper is present a sketch of a theory through which we can hope to analyse the self in general, and to make a few remarks about its implications for construing subjectivity in Africa.[6] Next I will provide some data from fieldwork conducted in Akeri Village, Arumeru District, in 1996 and 1997. The data reveals that Meru ideas about political accountability are not translated into practice, and that the experience of multi-party democracy has made little difference to this state of affairs. This can be explained, it is argued, in terms of the contradictory construction of Meru subjectivity. Finally, I will discuss the project of an international NGO in Akeri. It is argued that there is little evidence that the NGO is helping to build a civic culture, and this is because it fails to make a difference across the several sites which serve to construct subjectivity.

Collective Action, and the Social Construction of Subjectivity

In this paper, subjectivity - the properties associated with being a subject - refers to a bundle of capacities, dispositions, beliefs and orientations. It includes yet surpasses common notions of identity. Subjectivity, we contend, is generated by a nexus of socialising institutions in a field of power relations;[7] and this includes both power in a Lukesian, "power over" sense,[8] and power in a productive, Foucauldian sense.[9] We see no necessary incompatibility in these two uses. The institutions generate and are generated by discursive formations bound together with the *materiality of practice*, and it is within these formations that subjectivity is primarily suspended.[10]

Following Kathryn Dean, I argue that the ability of individuals to commit to sustained collective action requires that those individuals enjoy a "distinct and stable sense of self" and that they recognise themselves as part of a collectivity.[11] Stable identities of this kind are generated when the actual or possible material circumstances of individuals correspond to the meaningful categories through which they interpret the world, and when the latter coincide with the social institutions through which that worldview is lived out.[12] In such a context material conditions make possible meaningful action of a socially sanctioned kind which is expressed through the institutions which generate and are generated by that action. Through social participation, the individual acquires a sense of competence, usefulness and recognition, all of which contribute to the maintenance of self.[13] Individuals will commit to collective action in defence of those institutions, or in pursuit of their evolving self-definition.[14] Indeed, participation in social action and collectively determined goals becomes a crucial aspect of self-realization.

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[6] It is not the intention here to essentialise the African self. Clearly, the social conditions in which selves are constructed vary across the continent, giving rise to quite different subjectivities. My fieldwork was limited to Tanzania, and more specifically Arumeru. Nevertheless, we might be able to identify some features common to the historical development of African societies, which permit some very general hypotheses about the subject and its relation to political action.

[7] Burkitt (1991).

[8] Lukes (1974).

[9] Foucault (1977, 1982); Rabinow (1984); cf Hunter (1996), p. 144.

[10] Burkitt (1991), Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Bourdieu (1977).

[11] Dean (1997), p. 1. Dean (1997) bases her discussion on Eriksonian identity theory. Dean (1997a) discusses subjectivity by articulating Unoist Marxism to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. She criticises the post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe for departing from their own injunction to recognise the basic materiality of discursive formations. This leads them, she argues, into a form of essentialism.

[12] Ibid., p. 3. These levels are separated out for analytical purposes, as in reality they are fused within any given social totality. However, it is characteristic of the division of labour in modern societies to separate the levels conceptually and (although the separation can never be complete) actually.

[13] Dean (1997).

[14] A similar, if cruder position is advanced by Bloom (1990).

When material conditions do not correspond to social imaginaries or to social institutions, the individual experiences a loss of centrality and a sense of "identity dissolution".[15] Such is a common effect of the disembedding of individuals from "traditional", kinship-based communities, with its attendant dislocation in the spheres of family, economy, culture and polity; its consequent segregation of affective, expressive and rational values, behaviours and orientations.[16] In such a situation, sustained commitment to persons, projects and institutions becomes difficult. However, in certain historical-cultural conditions in which a mutual congruence of socialising institutions obtains, the individual is able to reattain a strong individual and collective sense of self; an "inner" sense of certainty which corresponds to the "outer" effectivity of agency and recognition in the external world. Such a sense was provided, argues Dean, by the institutional nexus which fabricated the bourgeois subject of early modern europe,[17] as well as by that which produced the nationalistic subject under organised capitalism and a welfare state. In many post-colonial societies, the ethnic group or supertribe has emerged as a substitute kinship group and surrogate for the state, giving rise to ethnic subjects.[18] All of these subjects enjoy capacities for collective action, although of very different types. The first is informed, self-activating, civil, critical-rational. The second is unquestioning, conformist, compliant, manipulable and mobilisable by the politico-administrative complex of government. The third is opportunistic and predatory, undermining of the supposed rational functionality of the state. Each kind of collective action has a corresponding kind of political accountability.

As mentioned earlier, the premiss of this paper is that the kind of bottom-up, participatory developmental democracy aspired to by governance theorists depends on a model of the subject with capacities for collective action of the sort represented by the bourgeois subject. This is to be expected, since it is the self-image of the early-european bourgeois, the Lockean individual, which informs the liberal conception of democracy and civil society (in spite of the fact that this is a gross misrepresentation of the way liberal democracy actually functions in the west). Not only are the conditions for the production of this subject not achieved in Tanzania; but, in a context of informalisation and articulated international liberal capitalism, any form of collective action, engagement with the state, and regularised political accountability appears difficult. While in europe unfixity can be traced to the radical instability of discursive formations under the impact of a dominant information technology,[19] in Africa it owes more to the articulated nature of capitalism. Neither state (independent or colonial) nor capital has been able to smash old communities, disembed individuals, and remake them anew.[20] Instead capitalist structures articulate with and are embedded in pre-capitalist relations; modern forms of science, education and technology coexist with traditional cosmologies and forms of reasoning; utilitarian discourses of consumption cohabit with objects invested with social and ritual significance; imported cultural influences become entangled with artefacts of indigenous origin; and so on. The result is that individuals have options. They are not fixed by any dominant value system; they are not the prisoners of a particular world view; yet neither can they be counted as reliable collective actors. Recent literaure on African subjectivity, which stresses fluidity, hybridity and syncretism provides some support for this conception of the self.[21]

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[15] Ibid., p. 2.

[16] Ibid., p. 4.

[17] Here Dean draws on Habermas (1992).

[18] If what I say below is correct, the ethnic subject in Africa is inherently unstable. Put differently, real individuals are not captured by this description.

[19] Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Dean (1997a).

[20] State and capital have not proved entirely successful in this regard even in the west. Still, they have had much less of an effect in Africa.

[21] See for example Barber (1997), Hannerz (1997), Mbembe (1992), Werbner and Ranger (1996). The tenor of this literature tends to be one of celebrating African agency. While there is a case for appreciating the freedom, creativity and individuality of subjects in Africa, the implications for popular control of the supra-individual

The Social Construction of Subjectivity in Meru

The Meru are an ethnic group of around 150 000 people inhabiting the eastern slopes of Mount Meru and adjacent plains, in Arumeru District, North-Eastern Tanzania. They migrated to Meru around four centuries ago.[22] The area is famous in Tanzania for two historical events of quite different character. In 1952 Meru protested at the United Nations over the alienation of tribal lands for settler interests, an event which contributed greatly to the awakening of nationalist consciousness in Tanganyika; and in 1990-1993 a bitter religious conflict occurred which divided the tribe over a move to secede from the Northern Diocese of the Lutheran church.[23] What are the sites for fabricating subjectivity in Meru? Schematically, I think we can sort out from the jumble of complex and contradictory forces which enter into the socialisation of people in Meru, four clusters of historical experience, the internal elements of which bear to each other a family resemblance.[24]

Firstly, is a set of endowments, ideals and orientations which relate to the productive and social system of the first settlers on Mount Meru. Adumbrated by Spear, it consisted of individual household heads directing family labour on family plots but dependent on close kin and other lineage members for certain collective and ritual functions. It embodied a "moral economy of land" under which each person was entitled to as much land as was required for subsistence, and under which hard work and effort were rewarded, laziness and shirking stigmatised. Clan leaders and chiefs were responsible to clan members, by whom they could be removed, if they failed to use their wisdom and power for the benefit of the whole society. Also significant were age-sets, which increased in importance with the influence of Arusha on Meru in the late 19th century. Clan leaders continue to wield influence today, most importantly in rules relating to the sale of land, thereby preventing a full commodification of land and labour.[25]

Secondly is a sort of subjectivity introduced by Christianity. Early missionaries demanded a sober self-discipline from their converts, and prohibited traditional dancing and drinking, worship of ancestors and practice of witchcraft. They encouraged edifying labour for wages, education, self-development and evangelism. These strictures were relaxed somewhat when German missionaries were deported following WW1. The church became more popular, and more integrated into the community.[26] We conjecture that integration accelerated during the period of Bruno Gutmann's tenure at Moshi.[27] However, ascetic christianity has been revived recently with the establishment of a pentecostal church in Meru in 1968, and a Lutheran revivalist movement in 1978.[28] Early tensions between christians and followers of traditional religion are being re-run as a conflict between Saved and other christians. In 1992 this conflict, sharpened by notions of ethnic identity, tradition and modernity, and complicated by the personal ambition of certain individuals, erupted into a battle for the control of the assets of the

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structures of state and capital seem to be negative. We might then want to consider how meaningful is agency, when it consists largely of an endless round of reactive and often evasive responses to more powerful forces.

[22] Spear (1997).

[23] For acounts of the Land Case see Japhet and Seaton (1967), Nelson (1967), Puritt (1970), Spear (1997). For a detailed account of the religious conflict, Baroin (1996), also Moore (1996). For an analysis which tries to make sense of the two types of action in terms of the perspective on subjectivity employed here, Kelsall (1998).

[24] The account provided here is intended to be relevant for all Meru. However, the nature of the historical record and the hegemonic status of male ideology as revealed through informants inevitably introduces a gender bias into my account. Future research might focus on the differential construction of male and female subjectivity in Meru, and its implications for collective action and political accountability.

[25] Spear (1997), Puritt (1970).

[26] Spear (1997).

[27] Fiedler (1996).

[28] Nnko (1980).

Lutheran church. It was one of the most protracted and violent conflicts in Tanzanian post-colonial history, and continues to simmer today.[29]

Thirdly, the individualism of the christian before god has been reinforced by individuals engaging in the market. Early christians were the first coffee growers and Meru have participated in the market in order to pay taxes and purchase a range of consumer goods. The 1950s and 1960s was a period of increasing economic differentiation (although land and labour were still not fully commodified). To some extent The Arusha Declaration put a lid on these processes, and reinforced tendencies to collective cooperation extant in Meru culture. This has changed recently. The most significant developments of recent years have been the decline in the value of coffee, the growth of the market in Arusha town, economic liberalisation and increasing pressure on land. Together, these developments have increased the length of the working day for all parties, while opening the possibility of increased incomes for some. The market creates new wants, while shortage of land makes them more difficult to fulfil. Most families have abandoned the idea that they can pass economic plots of land to sons. Instead they prefer to give them houseplots, and education to equip them for a life in business.

Fourthly, the traditions of accountability found in the 19th century were given a more modern expression when literate christians availed themselves of the language of rights and democracy. They established a Planters' Association in the 1930s, a Citizens' Union in the 1950s, in 1953 they won democratic local government, and subjected the chief to election. They also established a coffee cooperative.[30] Since independence, a variety of party and government structures have been experimented with, and most have contained some significant provisions for competition and voting, (even if of the single-party variety).[31] In 1992 multi-partyism was introduced, with parliamentary elections held in 1995.[32]

Another crucial dimension of Meru subjectivity is captured by the term ethnic identity. Given greater definition under the practice of Indirect Rule, "Meru" identity is always mediated and contested in terms of the four clusters mentioned above. Crucially, it is also relationally defined, and situationally deployed, most importantly against the Chagga of Kilimanjaro to the east, and the Maa-speaking Arusha, to the west.

These varying clusters, I suggest, result in a decentered subject, and exert a fracturing effect on ideas about accountability and its practice.

Subjectivity and Ideas about Accountability[33]

Research revealed that at an ideational level, political subjectivity in Meru was comprised by strong norms of popular accountability, which ought to have facilitated the effective functioning of multi-party democracy. Ideas about political leadership showed a marked consistency with earlier Meru traditions, continued in clan structures today, and with the attitudes conveyed to Puritt in his 1960s study.[34]

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[29] Baroin (1996), Moore (1996), Kelsall (1998).

[30] Nelson (1967), Spear (1997).

[31] Puritt (1970, 1977), Cliffe and Puritt (1967), Mbise and Moris (1974).

[32] The result of the election at national level was that the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Party of the Revolution) comfortably beat the main challenger NCCR (National Convention for Construction and Reform). But in Arumeru East constituency, the site of fieldwork, Samwel Kisanga of NCCR beat Moses Ndosi of CCM.

[33] Fieldwork in Meru was centered on Akeri Village, Poli Division. Akeri Village is in the heartland of Meru, and is the original centre of Kaaya settlement.[33] It stretches from the main Arusha-Moshi Road in the south, up the mountain to Ndoombo Village in the north, Nkoanrua in the north-west, and Kimundo in the north-east. To the east is Patandi, beyond that Singisi. Our census recorded 348 households.

[34] Puritt (1970).

Informants expected their leaders to have education, to listen to the people, and love them; to be humble, to not humiliate others, to be calm and cool-headed, with wisdom, and to speak the truth.[35] Everyone believed that it was right for a leader to be questioned by the people. I was told that Meru people were very critical, "They will tell you how much you have got and where you have got it from."[36] Many said that in the event of poor leadership (such as corruption, incompetence, poor-decision making, unresolved problems or aloofness), it would be desirable and possible to ask questions or make complaints at village, ward or district levels, either in meetings or face to face.[37]

Such beliefs contributed to a generally positive appraisal of the introduction and future potential of multi-party democracy.[38] Following the election some people claimed to have seen changes in the willingness of people to interrogate their leaders at a village,[39] district,[40] and national level.[41] A majority however claimed to have seen no change at the level of village,[42] district[43] or nation.[44] Although some opined that it was still early days, and anticipated positive changes in the future.

Political Accountability in Theory and Practice

In spite of the prevalence of ideas about responsible leadership, the people of Akeri were failing to hold their own leaders to account. Informants were virtually unanimous in condemning the village chairman as a poor leader who didn't care for the people, was unable to mobilise them, and who misused villagers' money.[45] This was attributed by most to his personal failings. He had been Chair since 1989, and although it appears he did a better job in his first term, he was not particularly popular. Informants attributed his re-election in 1993 to the domination of the contest by the religious question.[46] In 1997, the major grievances were that Akeri's main road was in a parlous state due to poor maintenance. Indeed, during the rainy season stretches of the road became impassable to vehicles.[47] The church-

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[35] AE2, AE3, AP11, AP14, AP17, AP18, AP22, AP23, AP24, AP26, AP29, AP30.

[36] AE1.

[37] AE7, AE6, AE12, AE13, AE16, AE17, AE26, AP3, AP11, AP12, AP14, AP15, AP16, AP18, AP22, AP23, AP25. However, it was clear that some of these people were speaking hypothetically only; moreover, freedom to complain did not entail a satisfactory response. Others felt that it was possible to pursue these matters at a village level, but it was very difficult for an "ordinary person" to do so in the district; AE6, AE4, AE10, AE13. Some thought there was no possibility of doing anything about poor leadership and governance; AE7, AE22, AE27, AP1, AP2, AP4, AP10. AP2, a single mother, stated that it was difficult for poor people to speak at meetings, "Even if the Chair gives me a chance to speak, people will tell me to sit down...You may want to ask a question but it takes so long for you to be chosen and you have to think very hard so that you don't forget what you want to say, that you are just trembling". This, however, was not a common sentiment.

[38] Religion had played its part in the parliamentary election of 1995, and this was confirmed (sometimes reluctantly, or off the record) by many village informants. However, it was not the only influence on the elections, and people were able to distinguish between the reasons multi-partyism had been introduced in Tanzania, and the form it actually took in Arumeru East.

[39] AE3, AE7, AE5, AE20.

[40] AE20, AE23, AE29, AP10, AP24.

[41] AE20, AE21, AE23, AE27, AP7, AP24.

[42] AE4, AE10, AE11, AE13.1, AE16, AE17, AE22, AE23, AE25, AE28, AE29, AE31, AP1, AP7, AP16, AP22, AP23, AP26, AP28.

[43] AE15, AE16.

[44] AE22, AP1, AP13, AP15, AP16, AP18, AP22, AP26, AP27, AP28.

[45] AGI8, AGI5, AE7, AE4, AE13, AE15, AE16, AE17, AE22, AE26, AE29, AE30, AP4, AP6, AP15, AP22, AP24. AP24 claimed, "The leaders in Akeri are very bad. The Village Chairman doesn't like to speak the truth. He is corrupted, he doesn't like development, he can reveal office secrets in a bar, he can gossip about people's affairs in public. But he doesn't like to call meetings where people can question him."

[46] AE11, AE14, AE30. It is also claimed that he sold land to raise money to finance his own campaign; AP24.

[47] This is a common problem in Tanzania, but in a volcanic area such as Meru with good drainage and rocky terrain, it should be less so.

funded water system was failing to function effectively due to lack of maintenance at the source, and as a result delivery of piped water was intermittent. Funds contributed for the building of a new village office were unaccounted for. A set of village development committees which would have responsibility for mobilising collective labour to deal with these problems was inoperative. The Chair seemed impervious to criticism, and evaded more concerted action by failing to hold village meetings or postponing the ones he scheduled.[48] But there was no consistent, organised effort to force the Chair into action.[49]

The introduction of multi-partyism had not made much difference to this state of affairs. In spite of outpolling CCM in the parliamentary election in Akeri Village, NCCR had only 14 resident members. These were split between a few activists who had joined NCCR from its inception, and the rest, who tended to belong to the Saved, Lutheran fraternity.[50] They were divided over the issue of a tribal trust fund and the MP's relation to it.[51] No party meetings were held in the village. However, they were united in their belief that the Village Chairman was doing a poor job, and in 1997 they sent a delegation to complain at the office. Interestingly, although this delegation was made up solely of NCCR members, they stressed that they were going as individuals, not as party representatives.[52] Nothing appeared to have come of this action.

In addition, in spite of their professed willingness to ask questions, the majority of people were surprisingly ill-informed about the workings of local government or the reasons for their current economic predicament. For example, most people paid 2000 shs a year in development levy, which they resented, as they claimed to see no benefit from it.[53] But there appeared little inclination to make any inquiries into the use of development levy. People stated that it was the job of leaders to make a proper follow up of expenditures, it being beyond the ability of an ordinary person. It also seemed beyond them to make a follow up of leaders' following up: "No-one gives a proper answer as to the use of money."[54] Another claimed, "To interrogate leaders is necessary. Some people have the character to challenge leaders. It's easy for me to ask questions. But it's not easy for someone like me to really understand what is going on with the leadership or policies or expenditure, unless you listen to radio, read papers and question many people."[55] In addition, major hardships people identified were the decline in the price of coffee, the removal of credit and subsidisation on inputs, and the introduction of user-fees on health care and education. Few people had any idea as to why these changes had come about, and appeared to accept them fatalistically. A few thought they were the result of multi-partyism. Some claimed to have asked questions about it at the Cooperative, but had not received a satisfactory answer.[56]

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[48] AE29.

[49] Cooperation and organisation for social development were impeded by the religious divide which split the village, and the imperative for many people to pursue private over collective development initiatives. But these are question-begging explanations, and can themselves be explained in terms of the different forces which construct subjectivity.

[50] These members joined NCCR when Augustine Mrema who had helped resolve the religious dispute in their interests, left CCM to become the NCCR leader.

[51] MESODET is an elite-led tribal trust fund, a self-proclaimed NGO, which was deeply involved in the religious conflict, and continues to divide Meru today. See Baroin (1996), Kelsall (1998).

[52] AE30.

[53] AE4, AP2, AP6, AP12, AP17.

[54] AE4.

[55] AP11.

[56] In general the workings of the Arusha Cooperative Union seemed opaque. For example, a large amount of money had been collected by the Cooperative to start its own input-credit scheme, but there was some suggestion that the money had been misplaced. One of the Cooperative leaders charged with implementing the scheme had since resigned, and was living in the village in a walled enclosure, with a car and a tractor. He played no part in village life. But this was not a subject people talked about; JK.

A similar lack of assertiveness was apparent over the issue of land. People were virtually unanimous that land shortage was an acute problem in the village and Meru in general, and that return of nearby settler estates would greatly alleviate this problem.[57] Some expressed the opinion that settlers had no right to the land, especially as much of it was underutilised.[58] Most people were aware that requests had been made to government, at all levels, for acquisition of certain estates.[59] In most cases people stated vaguely that there had been no concrete reply, or they were still waiting for a reply, or the officials concerned had not made a proper follow up, or else they were waiting for the President to visit *Mringaringa*[60] so they could raise the issue with him.[61] My informants were not aware of any current movements to reclaim land for the Meru, but all said that should there be such a movement, they would support it. While there *were* some formal requests in process by the authorities, there was no civic movement comparable to the Land Case. Meanwhile individuals took piecemeal action, releasing their animals on estates, collecting fodder crops, firewood, and picking vegetables.[62]

Subjectivity and Collective Action

Time and again interviews in Meru revealed the conjunction of a belief in the rightness of holding leaders accountable with an inability or unwillingness to put these beliefs into action. How can we explain this disjuncture? Not, it seems, by postulating an absence of representative institutions, or lack of experience in associational life. Meru civil society was and is rich: there are clan committees and meetings, age-group committees and meetings, women's dance groups, irrigation furrow committees, as well as all the parallel organs of decision-making put in place by the party and government, and then a hierarchy of courts as well. In most of these forums participants had and have the chance to state and argue their cases. Amongst men, arrangements are relatively egalitarian. Deliberating, voting and minute-taking are the norm.[63] Historically, Meru have displayed an ability to enforce popular ideas about the responsibilities of power. It was on the basis of this tradition, for example, that the despotism of appointed chiefs was opposed.[64] But we should not infer that an institutionally expressed indigenous tradition of accountability is of itself sufficient to constitute the types of subjectivity required for democratic accountability and good governance.

Discourses about democracy and popular accountability, I argue, are partial expressions of just two of the historical clusters identified earlier as among the complex forces which make up people in Meru. The four clusters together, I suggest, place contradictory demands on subjects during the course of

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[57] AGI2, NGI2, AE5, AE4, AE10, AE12, AE17, AE21, AE23, AE24, AE26, AE27, AE28, AP4, AP5, AP18, AP30. Many did not *attribute* land shortage to the presence of settlers, rather they mentioned population increase; AE17, AE5, AE27, AE28, AP18.

[58] AGI2, AE5, AE26.

[59] AGI2, NGI2, AE5, AE4, AE10, AE12, AE17, AE21, AE23, AE26, AE27, AE28, AP1, AP4, AP5, AP18, AP30.

[60] The name given to a clearing in Poli Village, the site of an mringaringa tree, under which clan leaders traditionally deliberate.

[61] Some informants were more knowledgeable, especially over the issue of the Arusha Coffee Estate. One claimed to have applied for land there in 1972, but never received a reply; AP5. Apparently parts of the Arusha Coffee Estate were invaded around 1985 and people began cultivating; AP30.
At various times between then and 1994 people were told by officials ranging from the Minister for Lands to the Regional Commissioner and MP that the land was going to be surveyed and re-allocated to them, so they should move. Some went voluntarily and some were chased off. But nothing has been done, and it appears that some land has been allocated to "big-shots;" AE10, AE26. Invaders from Arumeru West did not move however, and were supported by the Council Chair and the MP.

[62] NGI2.

[63] See Baroin (1996), p. 552.

[64] Spear (1997), p. 207-208.

their everyday existence. Or, to put it another way, people are pulled this way and that, decentered, by the different forces which construct their subjectivity.

Let us take a quick look at just some of the demands experienced by Meru male household heads, and the means of satisfying them. The first and most pressing is likely to be the need to gain access to subsistence for himself and the household; beyond this to secure an inheritance for offspring and, after that, to fulfil the traditional male prerogative of drinking beer and socialising in the late afternoon and evening. Such demands may be broadly related to the first historical cluster. In addition, and similarly related, there will be a set of what we may more properly call moral demands on action. A male household head will be a member of an age-set, and a clan, and attendance at certain meetings and rituals will be expected, as will certain standards of behaviour. In particular, the individual will be expected to not be selfish and to give up time and resources to help other less fortunate clan members. (The same is true, only with more immediate force, in the case of the *boma* - all the people sharing a common grandfather). Another example of clan acquired obligations/opportunities occurs when a man is appointed as guardian to the wife of a deceased brother. This will usually entail a sexual relationship. Indeed, it is not uncommon for Meru men who have the means to support economically one or more extra-marital partners. At the same time as this, and relating to the second historical cluster, he is likely to be a member of a christian church, which imposes a set of contradictory demands. Most notably, it will deliver messages of varying strength declaiming against drinking, excessive eating, and adultery.

In addition, most Meru men (and women) will wish to acquire the outward trappings of modernity and prosperity: to eat meat every day, build a block house, possess a range of imported consumer goods, even own a car. This is likely also to involve amassing the income to host neo-traditional demonstrations of hospitality such as beer parties and the provision of large quantities of meat. Managing these demands will involve a combination of individualistic striving in the market place and the nurturing of social, communal relations; a dual and not necessarily harmonious strategy. On the individualistic, market-oriented side, a typical Meru household in the coffee belt may work a plot of land on the mountain, and have another plot for maize in the lowlands. Some of the produce will be consumed, some sold; for both the household head will need cash to purchase inputs. If he has a dairy cow, inputs will have to be purchased to husband the cow; he or more likely his wife and children will spend long periods collecting fodder and husbanding the animal, and arrangements will have to be made to market surplus milk. He may also hire casual labour, and or do casual labour himself; or a member of his household might. He or a member of the household may do some small business: transporting or selling milk, maize, fodder crops or vegetables to local markets or as far as Nairobi and Dar es Salaam; mining or trading gemstones; owning or working in a bar or shop. A household member may have salaried employment, and may use it to open avenues for the pursuit of other economic activities.

But these individualistic activities are not of a pure type. All are underpinned by communal social arrangements of one sort or another, which entail or imply certain obligations and standards of behaviour. For example, in order to acquire more land, or to offset potential challenges from others, a person may have to cultivate good relations with clan elders. If a man grows coffee, he is likely to be a member of a coffee Cooperative,(even if he sells his crop to a private trader). Activism, and the cultivation of personal relations within the Cooperative may facilitate priveleged access to farm inputs, credit, or other resources. In the past, improved cows have been obtained through the church and the Cooperative. To ensure access to casual labour, it may be necessary to culitvate a number of social relations to maintain access to employment or employees. Engagement in small business will require the maintenance of a network of face-to-face contacts, and perhaps the ability to stay in favour with local politicians, police and bureaucrats. Retaining a salaried position and its benefits may involve bargaining with and allegiance to other contacts, or superiors. Building a house, or running a small business or lending land or animals may all require close supervision and much shoe leather expense. On top of this, as a member of the village, a household head will be subject to taxation, and

contributions of collective labour. There might also be pressure applied on him to attend village meetings, especially if he is a ten-cell leader, or member of village government. Until quite recently, participation in government meetings would have included a set of exhortations to work collectively for development and to eschew individualism and capitalistic practices.

The above should have been sufficient to suggest that Meru is a social system characterised by syncretism or hybridity. A further indicator is the fact that it is not unusual for men in Meru to hold posititions of responsibility in some or all of the following positions, either simultaneously, or at different times of their life: clan, age-set, village government, church, and coffee Cooperative. This means that the paths of self-realization; the objects and identities invested with emotional energy can conflict, and this makes coherent, sustained action difficult. We are not saying that in this respect Meru differs in *type*, for example, from a contemporary european society. Merely that in a place like Meru this syncretism is much more pronounced. And this is the case because of the state and capitalism's relative lack of success in smashing to pieces old communities and establishing new ones. Thus all the above modes of subjectivity subsist in society and within individuals like a layer of sedimentations, with various forms and combinations irrupting to the surface at particular times.[65]

How does this affect, for example, the ability of a village population to make sure a village government, primary cooperative or parish church uses funds properly and supervises development responsibly? That ability will be contingent, I argue, on the effects of subjectivity on villagers' capacity to act collectively. Schematically, we can analyse that capacity in terms of beliefs and values which serve to orient action, the institutional forms through which action flows, and the material conditions generative of the capacities to act.[66] We have already argued that in the Meru social imaginary leaders should be accountable, and these beliefs are embodied in the institutional structures of village government, church and cooperative. But to make these ideas and institutions effective, people require numeracy skills, some understanding of accounting, knowledge of the village constitution, precise knowledge as to their political rights, and so on. To gain such skills and overcome such barriers requires desire, time and dedication. In a place such as Meru, this is increasingly difficult because of an economic situation where work is time-consuming, where it often involves travel, the nurturing of extended and local contacts, and much down-time spent socialising. Where membership and standing in the local community (a crucial aspect of self-realization) also requires the use of leisure time in drinking and conversation, attending births, deaths and funerals; or else in attending church, in prayer and the doing of good works. And even if the requisite education and knowledge are obtained, the possibility of organising for collective action may be vitiated - and this is crucial - by one's moral relation to a kinsman, or by loyalty to a clan, or by membership in a lucrative if unreliable clientage relation (which may be part of the same thing); by the unwillingness to fall out with potential or actual employers, customers, or contacts. All of which can be variables essential to the secural of subsistence and the paths to further self-realization, and all of which constitute the field of power in which subjectivity is produced and reproduced. In other words, the complex and cross-cutting ties that bind a person to others detract from the ability to act as a critical-rational individual, and for collective action to take the form of such individuals acting in concert. Put differently, demands of subsistence, kin, faction, religion and party may all pull in different directions, making it extremely difficult to coordinate action, and so preventing the practice of the beliefs about accountability. In this situation leaders may most of the time abuse their positions while rarely doing anything constructive. Only at priveleged, overdetermined moments when a combination of factors coalesce is mobilisation possible, and that mobilisation may be difficult to control, may soon dissipate and is not necessarily characterised by a rational-critical subjectivity.[67] The collectivities on which it is based are less self-conscious and less self-disciplined

[65] Spear (1997) stresses the overlaying of worldviews in Meru.

[66] In reality of course, these features are all bound together in the tension-fraught total way of life of the community.

[67] As was the case, I argue, during both the Meru Land Case and the religious conflict; Kelsall (1998).

than those required for bottom-up democracy. These obstacles to accountability, I suggest, have been exacerbated by economic liberalisation and the decline in the value of coffee.

An International NGO

This state of affairs is not necessarily a problem for governance theory, provided that various interventions, most notably the operations of NGOs, can transform the situation. The next section, therefore, says a few words about the efforts of an international NGO - Heifer Project International - in this direction.

HPI is an American-based NGO which specialises in running an "in-kind" credit scheme - using improved dairy animals - for small farmers. It works through partners, (usually churches) who administer its projects in villages. HPI's technical and social objectives are closely intertwined. There is no space here to provide a detailed description of its operations. Suffice to say that a deconstruction reveals the project as a set of technical, legal and ideological instruments for individualising and disciplining subjects, for inducting them into scientific modes of reasoning and problem-solving, and for promoting a kind of socially responsible autonomy in a gender-sensitive, christian communitarian society. At the crux of this is the fact that farmers (both husbands and wives) enter into a contract with HPI. It stipulates that after receiving an animal they must return two to the project. It also allows for an animal to be repossessed if technical guidelines are not followed. The projects encourage the training of women, their joint responsibility as contract-holders, and their equal involvement in decision-making and care of animals. Once the farmer has returned two animals, s/he is released from the terms of the contract. Thus farmers become responsible as individuals for a loan and its repayment. The repayment of loans contributes to the sustainability of the project. But it does more than this. The farmers are provided with an official certificate which proclaims their fulfilment of the contract and solemnizes the fact that they have contributed an animal to a fellow farmer. In this way it is a powerful symbol of farmers' discharge of an obligation, attainment of self-sufficieny and act of civic, or christian, charity. Farmers are encouraged to join the project committee (which is often under the auspices of the church), and contribute to the assistance of other poor farmers in the village. In all these ways HPI attempts to promote a more "just" distribution of wealth, a more equal status and role for women, more self-sufficient family units,[68] and a strong community ethic with robust institutions.[69] Secure in the possession of land, endowed with the techniques of science, trained in the methods of book-keeping and minute taking, and, hopefully, blessed with the spirit of God, the links to christian, civic republicanism are clear. It seems an attempt almost to re-create the townships of New England in an African setting. In this respect, the work of HPI fits with broader, secular attempts by donors to build a democratic culture at the grass-roots.[70]

HPI in Akeri Village[71]

Research focused on two separate HPI projects. The first involved dairy goats, and was run in conjunction with the government livestock institute, LITI-Tengeru. It operated in the villages of Akeri, Nguruma and Singisi. In 1988 Akeri was given 6 goats. The second was a dairy cow project, for which the project holder was the Lutheran church in Akeri. The original project in 1985 had been given 10 cows for distribution, but since the division of the parish, Akeri remained responsible for 4. The goats project had initially worked through village governments, and committees chosen by village

[68] HPI do not limit themselves to working with nuclear families. They also help single mothers and widows.
[69] See Kinsey.
[70] This is not to suggest that HPI is a modernizing, christianizing excresence in a traditional society ordered according to alternative principles. But neither are Meru society and the HPI vision are the same thing.
[71] While figures for this section refer only to Akeri Village, insights draw also on research in neighbouring Nguruma and Singisi Villages, and a short trip to an HPI project in Kilimanjaro Region.

governments had been responsible for allocating the first batch of donated goats. However, because the HPI Director was dissatisfied with some of the allocations made, the farmers themselves had assumed the role of these committees, and had formed groups with a constitution, elected chairman and secretary. They worked together with a supervisor at LITI. The research attempted to answer two broad questions: 1) were the projects reaching the poorest farmers, and benefiting them economically? And 2) were there any indications that the project was having an impact in terms of "psychological empowerment," or an increased capacity and willingness on the part of farmers to hold leaders and institutions accountable?

Research revealed that farmers who had received cows were no longer meeting as a group in Akeri, and none of them had fulfilled their contracts. The group had been a victim of the religious conflict, and had not met since. I was told by a couple of farmers that there had been recent attempts to revive it, but that half the members consistently failed to attend. I was unable to ascertain whether this was due to continuing tension in Akeri village (of which there are other examples); or, a reluctance to be revived so as to fulfil contracts.[72]

The goats groups appeared not to have been seriously affected by the conflict. Research revealed that the project had been fairly successful in reaching poorer farmers, and only a few farmers had failed to realise benefits from the project. Some mentioned the goats as their most important source of income. It is difficult to say whether the project had succeeded in making families genuinely self-sufficient, but it had certainly contributed to keeping them on the land, and lessening their dependence on others. Several farmers mentioned that the animals helped them, "Kujitegemea" - to be self-reliant.[73]

Thus the goats project displayed an ability to reach and benefit poor farmers. For example, if each farmer passed on two female kids over the space of four years,[74] an initial injection of six goats could conceivably lead, after ten years, to a group of 120 assisted farmers. In a village with the size and stratification of Akeri, this would be more than sufficient to reach every farm family which didn't already possess an improved animal. This then gives a rough indication of the potential the project has for alleviating poverty in a village. However, that potential was not being fully utilised, and this was due to a slow rate of pass-ons. Many farmers were not fulfilling their contractual obligations in this respect. The Akeri farmers had passed on fewer than one goat each every 4 years. The total number of households actually helped over the 9 years of the project's operation in Akeri was only 11. Given the poor performance of the pass-on system, it seems there was a danger that the project, instead of benefiting poor people generally, had created a handful of "priveleged poor" in each project village. Thus, while succeeding to help individual families, there was little evidence that HPI's wider goals of strengthening communities were being achieved.

One explanation for the poor rate of pass-ons was technical negligence, or poor project design (some goats had died, breeding performance was poor). Another explanation - for which there was some evidence - was that farmers were keeping, hiding or selling goats, instead of passing them to other poor farmers. The farmers seemed to lack a consciousness that they were a resource base for the community in general. The obligation to fulfil contracts and boost the welfare of their neighbours took second priority to their endeavours to gain as much income as possible for themselves. Alternatively they might pass an animal to a relative, instead of following an impartial allocation procedure. In this respect, the project seemed not to have been successful in generating a "civic" consciousness. In Akeri, the group was functioning only sporadically; participation in it and management of the pass-on

[72] The church was currently entering into a new agreement with HPI and SCAPA (Soil Conservation Agro-Forestry Project Arusha).

[73] Although it made them more dependent on the market and, on occasions, the expertise of a vet or supervisor.

[74] This does not seem unrealistic, even accounting for deaths. The HPI Director, for example, had started with a single goat on his own farm in 1993, and had since passed on 9, retaining 6.

system did not appear to be a priority for members, or a major concern for its chairman. Another cause of the poor pass-on system was inadequate awareness of the project among other poor households. During general interviews in the village targeted at poor households, many people were at best only vaguely aware of the project's existence.

The idea of building a civic culture, made of informed participant citizens, was not an *explicit* goal of the project, although it is consistent with, and one might even say crucial to, HPI's broader vision. Unsurprisingly, its impact appeared marginal in this regard. The majority of respondents did not themselves perceive any relation between their ability to participate in the goats group and their ability to participate in other fora.[75] Most people failed to give informative answers (to women for example, it seemed alien that we should ask them about participation in the local coffee Cooperative), or else they expressed feelings of helplessness and powerlessness in other decision-making arenas. In the Akeri group we gained the impression that the chairman, while managing by consent, was not doing so in a particularly participatory manner. And the inability of other informants to visualise an expanded horizon for their own participation, and the feeling that the group meetings were little more than an opportunity to iron out certain technical hitches, or learn extra husbandry techniques, suggests that the project was not having a significant impact in this respect. To an extent this reflects the success of HPI in targeting disadvantaged groups, in particular women, widows, the disabled. It seems however that the project itself, while targeting the disadvantaged, had not led them to a radical reappraisal of their life situation, a greater awareness of the social structures that perpetuate poverty, or to an ability to act to change those structures or even to assert the formal rights with which they are endowed, all of which are claims commonly made for the NGO sector.[76]

We cannot rule out the possibility that the children of HPI farmers will have acquired an increased capacity to cooperate in development and hold leaders accountable, or that inducing compliance with technical regulations and practices of record-keeping will have a capillary effect on shaping people's subjectivity. However, it appeared that the project was too marginal to the communities in which it worked, its implementors were too focused on technical criteria as opposed to social processes, and that the organisation lacked the resources and willpower to enforce compliance with all its various guidelines to really cause a transformation in subjectivity, or an "empowerment" of people. For example, it was very unusual for animals to be removed from farmers, so that once an animal was acquired, its recipient was fairly free to follow guidelines and dispose of kids as they saw fit. The problem was compounded by using leaders who happened to "emerge" from the community. In this respect the project presented itself as another resource to be integrated into people's ongoing strategies, as opposed to a project on which, once entered into, they became totally dependent. In sum, the project examined here remained marginal; an add-on to the life of the community. It did not create a consistent set of structured interdependencies through which the power to mould social being, to shape subjectivity in a particular way, could operate.[77]

Conclusions

The above analysis confirms the caution of commentators such as Bratton and Fowler towards the thesis that NGOs can make a significant difference to state-society relations in Africa.[78] It also gives

[75] Those informants who did mention increased participation in other fora, and the assumption of leadership roles in other spheres as a result of the project, were few. Also, they tended to be those farmers who were already well-educated, and had experience of occupations off the farm. Moreover it was normal to have to ask patently leading questions to get this response.

[76] See for example Clark (1990).

[77] Research was also conducted on a more ambitious project run by World Vision in neighbouring Arumeru West. Many of the conclusions arrived at were similar.

[78] Bratton (1989), Fowler (1991).

cause for scepticism that encouraging NGOs with democratic constitutions and horizontal organisational structures will be sufficient to produce the civic culture desired by Governance theorists.[79] We have argued that collective action in pursuit of political accountability is only likely to *become institutionalised* when subjects are fabricated by a set of mutually coherent institutions, which serve to bring capacities, dispositions, beliefs and orientations into line. It is probable that the conditions for the creation of individualistic, critical-rational, informed subjects, with sufficient solidarity to act collectively *vis a vis* the state, would include the existence of relatively prosperous, economically self-sufficient and independent households. This would be necessary, we contend, to make available the time and income necessary for individual self-development, collective communication, and organisation.[80]

Thus when assessing the potential for NGOs to build a democratic culture, it is instructive to consider the distinction between two different notions of "culture." The first regards "culture" as the symbolic order of society. The second refers to the total way of life of a community.[81] On the first reading, and also in many of their organisational forms, Meru already display some of the attributes of a civic culture, and they have engaged in political struggles of a form which, from a distance, seem to resemble civic action. Yet they have been unable to institutionalise a commitment to regularised, self-activating, critically aware civic action, and this, as I have tried to argue, is because interdependencies entered into in the modes of securing subsistence act as powerful constraints on the assembling of civil subjects. In other words, as a total way of life, Meru culture is not civic. Thus, the expectation that the institutions of liberal democracy will be sufficient to enable "Good Governance," is unjustified. If NGOs are to change this situation, they need to focus on culture as a total way of life, and this will involve mobilising resources on a quite massive scale. It might also involve a level of intervention which makes a mockery of ideas of grassroots participation. At the heart of the Governance agenda lies a liberal fiction: the idea that promoting a prescribed model of action and personhood can be squared with injunctions to respect other cultures and provide at all times for their participation. Sooner or later, one or other half of this fiction is liable to be abandoned.

[79] Hyden (1997) admits that not all associational life in Africa can be expected to build a democratic culture. He therefore advocates a greater concentration on NGOs with modern and democratic organisational structures.
[80] The parallels with the bourgeois subject of early modern europe should be clear; Habermas (1992). This is not to suggest that Africa ought replicate a pattern subsequently distorted in the west. It is to suggest that given certain very general assumptions about human behaviour certain broad structural conditions will always be required to make action of a particular kind viable.
[81] Dean (1997).

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Interviews:

ME: Meru Elite
AE: Akeri Elite
AP: Akeri Poor Households
AG: Akeri Group Interviews
NG: Nguruma Group Interviews

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