Normative Politics in Africa – Workshop Abstracts
9th May 2018 LSE - organised by Dr Portia Roelofs and Sa'eed Husaini

Contents

Introduction: **Normative Politics in Africa: Ideas, ideology and values or why the politics of the belly is really about hearts and minds.**

Normative politics – including values, ideology and ideas – is an important but neglected aspect of politics on the African continent. Instead, the study of African politics is dominated by frameworks which emphasize the material, the transactional and the practical. While scholars of politics in Africa have always dealt in normative concepts, their treatment of them has often remained implicit and assumption laden. However, there is a growing recognition that political contestation in Africa cannot be properly understood without attention to the role of ideas. The papers in this workshop seek to contribute to this budding field by presenting new empirical material oriented around the rubric of 'normative politics'. The introductory paper sets the backdrop for the collection by locating their contribution within the existing scholarship on African politics and by presenting a theoretical basis for a renewed focus on normative politics in Africa.

The collection is united by a commitment to in-depth qualitative research which foregrounds the meanings and the imaginaries of our participants on the ground. However, it also demonstrates the way in which such inductive research can nonetheless provide a wealth of insights in terms of theory. Indeed, by studying political contestation in Africa using methods that allow us not only to learn about it, but to learn from it, we can speak back to debates about the nature of politics more broadly. This special collection brings diverse cases studies from West, East and North Africa to bear on a core set of concerns. From this emerge three shared contributions. The first is the imperative of theorising state-citizen relationships in a human way. Next, is the need to dispose of the mind-body distinction in politics and discard assumptions that real, legitimate politics is the politics of the mind. Lastly, the politics of sociality and anonymity have serious implications for western models of not only African politics, but politics everywhere.

Sa'eed Husaini: ***Understanding Stomach Infrastructure: Party Loyalists, Vote Buying, and Moral Competence in Nigeria's Sub-national Elections***

This article re-considers the influence of vote buying in multi-party elections in Africa. It does so by exploring the recollections of two sets of party activists who campaigned in two governorship elections in Nigeria. Cash and other electoral gifts – known as *stomach infrastructure* in local parlance— were openly exchanged in both elections, seemingly confirming the view that clientelism, rather than programmatic policies, are the decisive force in increasingly competitive elections in Nigeria. However, party activists presented a much more complicated perspective on *stomach infrastructure* viewing such gifts in moral terms; in certain contexts, as disrespectful and hypocritical but, in others, as a sign of the responsiveness and accessibility of candidates. These more complex perspectives on electoral gifts affirm the anthropological insights offered by Schaffer and Schedler (2007) who argue that what is often called 'vote buying' is rarely ever a simple economic transaction. Such a perspective also complicates mutually exclusive distinctions drawn in comparative politics between clientelistic, charismatic, and programmatic forms of electoral appeals and party-voter linkages. Furthermore, while electoral studies in Africa tend to focus on voters' intentions in presidential elections, this article sheds light on important but neglected subnational elections in Nigeria and on the party activists and 'middle-men' who are at the frontlines of electoral campaigns.

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Stephanie Diepeveen - **The value of idleness: Hannah Arendt and the Kenyan public sphere**

Publics appear ubiquitous in everyday politics on the African continent, identified by scholars in increasingly varied spaces where people discuss and debate common affairs, from interactive radio, to physical spaces, to social media. Yet, while the idea of publics is employed to explore diverse instances of public talk, normative views on their value in African Studies remain much more limited, strongly tied to Jürgen Habermas' ideas about the relationship between democratic legitimacy and public discourse. This article begins from the perspective that more must be done to interrogate the normative value of publics in African Studies. There is scope to pluralise interactions between western scholarship and African Studies in order to bring to light and question longstanding assumptions about publics and political life. By drawing on eight-months of in-depth fieldwork in 2013-2014 looking at street parliaments in Mombasa, Kenya, this article examines public discussion through Hannah Arendt's and Habermas' distinct perspectives on why publics are politically powerful. It shows how the two theories result in very different views on what conditions are problematic and valuable. Specifically, the argument is made that scholars have spoken too soon in assuming that material concerns and patronage politics have necessarily negative effects on the power of publics. Without these conditions, this article argues the street parliaments' power to create shared imaginaries in Mombasa would be challenged, as these conditions underpin both their dynamism and citizens' interest. This has important implications for how material insecurity and patronage politics are valued in relation to publics, indicating scholars might have been too quick in assuming the problematic status of these conditions for democratisation.

https://www.polis.cam.ac.uk/Staff_and_Students/stephanie-diepeveen

Moritz Schmoll: **The role of norms and expectations among civil servants in the weak enforcement of laws: Evidence from Egyptian tax collection**

Lax enforcement of laws in developing countries is often explained by weak "state capacity", the absence of "political will", or neopatrimonialism. In more recent research, scholars have shown how politicians may "forbear" the enforcement of laws. However, all of these theories still retain a top-down perspective and none takes those actors seriously who actually carry out the job: the civil servants. Furthermore, the literature still pays little attention to the impact of collectively-held norms of fairness at different levels of the state apparatus. This paper seeks to fill these gaps by investigating the politics of everyday enforcement of Egyptian tax laws. Drawing on two years of in-depth fieldwork, including ethnographic work among street-level tax collectors, I argue that collectively held expectations as to what the job of the tax collector should and should not entail, norms as to what behaviour of taxpayers or tax collectors is deemed punishable, and strong feelings of entitlement to employment rights shape how tax collectors will do their job. My research thus emphasises the importance of historically-grown "moral contracts" – both in state-society and intra-state relations – that dominant narratives have largely overlooked.

http://www.lse.ac.uk/government/people/research-students/moritz-schmoll

Daniel Mulugeta Gebrie: **Everyday popular conception of the state, development rhetoric and the politics of citizenship in Ethiopia.**

This article examines development and corruption discourses and religious metaphors to shed light on normative ideas that shape the everyday politics of citizenship and state formation in Ethiopia. Specifically, it looks at how the complex enmeshment of modernist development discourses and local belief system enable local people to construct state power in a way that holds its functionaries responsible for failing to deliver development resources. It argues that these multiple discourses can at once be a mechanism that is used to enunciate rights, press for fair access to government programmes, demand material transformations and enact the politics of citizenship. The ways in which people imagine the state, envision citizenship identity and struggle over development, thus, compel us to reconsider our understanding of the normative systems of patronage and clientelism and to widen the scope through which we study state-society relations in Africa.

https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/politics/people/phd/daniel-mulugeta-gebrie

Eyob Blacha Gebremariam: **Critical Reflections on Ethiopia's Ruling Party Ideological Orientation: Revolutionary Democracy – tracing change and continuity.**

This paper seeks to argue that a critical look into the ideological orientation of ruling elites can be a valid starting point to understand the implications of normative politics in the realpolitik. Hence, it is important to critically examine the ideological orientation of ruling elites in order to understand how they handle the interplay between their ideological orientation and the narratives of normative politics both to maintain power and to build legitimacy. The paper takes the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and its ideological orientation Revolutionary Democracy as case study. Over a period of three decades, revolutionary democracy passed through three distinct phases. In these distinct but not unrelated phases, the ideological orientation allowed EPRDF to interact with the formal institutions, discourses and practices of liberal democracy in different ways. First, from late 1980s to mid-90s, revolutionary democracy was a 'progressive' ideology of establishing a socialist state inspired by Marxism and Leninism. Second, from 1995 till 2005, EPRDF oversaw the establishment of formal institutions of liberal democracy in Ethiopia and consolidation of a procedural democracy. During this period, the ideology remained at the centre of the party's discourse whilst it embraced globalisation and the inevitable dominance of a free market economy. Third, after the 2005 national elections, EPRDF gravitated towards state-led capitalist economy of developmental statism. The party also declared that democratic developmentalism is how revolutionary democracy manifests itself in the 21st century.

http://www.lse.ac.uk/international-development/people/fellows/Eyob-Balcha-Gebremariam

Rui Verde: **Oriental allure? New Normative Politics in Angola. Lessons from 2017 elections**

How does the Angolan leadership define a good political order in Angola? And what for? This text asks about the manners Angolan elites engage normative politics to build legitimacy, and what are the ideological repertoires from which they draw, exploring recent developments occurred in 2017 elections. Orient, principally China and Singapore, present a novel political normative option for Angola, whose elite is always suspicious of the West. Oriental influence does not happen only in economic sectors. The analysis of the "normative vocabulary" used by the new President of the Republic of Angola during 2017 elections denotes the utilization of "normal" political discourse concepts of the Western world, using the notion of "Democracy". However, this concept is subjected to the filtering of "Angolan" and "patriotic" values and ethics. In this sense, there is a "de-Westernization" or "relocation" of concepts. Democracy is qualified according to local values and aims. This is the same approach defended by Singaporean politicians as Goh Chok Tong (former prime-minister).Additionally, the great policy emphasis is placed on economic development (economic miracle). Ensure the prosperity of the country is the goal of the new President. João Lourenço considers that his role-model is Deng Xiaoping and not Gorbachev. Economic reform within an authoritarian setting and not political reform. The ultimate purpose of the Angolan leadership is to maintain power, making use of a constant renewal of ideas. Presently, important political normative ideas derive from China and Singapore, proposing a political model that guarantees the continuity of one single party in power, enmeshing authoritarian politics, some form of popular consent and economic development.

https://www.makaangola.org/en/author/rv/

John Harrington, Harriet Deacon and Peter Munyi: SOVEREIGNTY AND DEVELOPMENT: THE NORMATIVE POLITICS OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN KENYA

In 2016 Kenya legislated to grant communities the right to control their traditional knowledge and cultural expressions and to license them to outsiders in return for a share of benefits. The novel (or *sui generis*) intellectual property regime in the Act is one of only a few of its kind in Africa and was partly inspired by legal work and political debate at the World Intellectual Property Organization, to which Kenya has contributed vigorously. This paper documents and contextualizes the competing justifications for the 2016 legislation articulated by lawmakers, policy makers and community groups. It maps the expectations of key stakeholders against a range of overlapping normative frames: the Kenyan constitution of 2010, taken to have re-founded the republic after decades of autocracy and inequality; transnational discourses on indigenous rights; and inherited national values of development and sovereignty which have an enduring popular resonance. We attend to the parallels and borrowings from international law and policy on intangible cultural heritage and biodiversity, and from Kenyan debates on land tenure reform. We argue that this heterogenous ensemble provides the normative underpinning and idiom for a problematization of traditional knowledge and cultural expressions in terms of their imminent loss, their vulnerability to 'piracy' by foreign companies, and their untapped potential for economic growth. We trace these discursive frameworks through the institutional mechanisms for protection established by the legislation. This is an uneasy combination of ministerial powers with technocratic expertise at national level, and customary authority with devolved government at county level. Each represents a site of problematization, where community knowledge and culture, and indeed communities themselves, are called forth discursively as objects of regulation.

https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/people/view/478863-harrington-john

https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/researchers/harriet-deacon/

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Peter_Munyi

Merve Fejzula: '*Mid-Twentieth Century Black Cultural Citizenship and African Internationalism'*

This paper will examine competing interpretations of the normative goal of pan-African liberation within black internationalist political projects, over the form of "black cultural citizenship" represented by the Dakar-based Society of African Culture (SAC), an umbrella organization with affiliate chapters in Nigeria (NIGERSAC) and the US (AMSAC), between the years of 1956-69. It will reconstruct the debates and tensions between these organizations over the best way to pursue black internationalist solidarity during decolonization and desegregation, and the efforts of SAC and NIGERSAC which emphasized a distinct "Negro-African" cultural identity that united African-descended peoples in a diasporic political community. While Senegalese and Nigerian members understood this to mean a recovery and reconstruction of African cultural values of freedom and emancipation, African American interpretations tended to adapt their understandings of "Negro-African" black internationalism firstly into paternalist American leadership models and secondly into American political idioms of local desegregation struggles. This contestation can help revisit the significance of this contestation and also recover a unique heritage of "African internationalism" that can problematize unitary narratives of a black internationalist tradition.

https://www.gatescambridge.org/members-area/connect/directory/scholar/6922

Portia Roelofs: **Accountability as Accessibility: Technocratic, popular and populist conceptions of governance in Nigeria and beyond**

Elected representatives should be accountable, but what does accountability mean? Over almost three decades of governance reforms lead by international donor institutions accountability has become a buzzword in the good governance agenda. The underlying assumption of accountability as essentially a principal-agent interaction has been surprisingly resilient, withstanding waves of critique and reform to donor programming. Insights from in-depth qualitative fieldwork in southwest Nigeria suggest that actually existing conceptions of accountability – that is, the things that politicians do that render them accountable in the eyes of their constituents – differ radically from dominant donor ideas. Accountability as accessibility expresses the importance of a relationship between rulers and the ruled as one requiring visibility and direct communication, even in the absence of those in power delivering any tangible benefits. This article elucidates a new conceptual framework to make sense of accountability as accessibility. Combining African scholarship on the post-colonial state with work on 'conversational democracy' in the UK, accessibility emerges as a key means by which power is made accountable, not just in Nigeria but in a variety of non-African political contexts.

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