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Civil Society and Governance in  
Africa—an Outline of the Debates

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## Preface

A new research programme, "Cities, Governance and Civil Society in Africa", started at Nordiska Afrikainstitutet in 1997. The programme covers two major themes; 1) the relationships between the formal and the informal city and 2) the new forms of governance that are emerging in African cities. Its aims can be summarised as follows: 1) to bring forth substantive knowledge on the urban crisis in Africa, and how citizens, associations and local and central governments deal with it, 2) to further research co-operation between African and Nordic scholars by creating fora where people from different disciplines can meet and discuss each others, ideas and analyses, and 3) to produce and disseminate books and articles of high quality.

Occasionally, we will also produce working papers. The present one came about in the following way: Anders Sjögren is a student of political science at Stockholm University who in the spring of 1997 had a traineeship from Föreningen for Utvecklingsfrågor (Swedish Development Forum). He applied to Nordiska Afrikainstitutet to spend his trainee period here. Sjögren was assigned to the programme, and his task was to do an analysis of central, recent texts on the concepts of civil society and governance, and their relevance for African urban studies. He managed to cover a lot of ground in the few weeks he was with us, and it is with great pleasure that we now present his report to a wider audience. An earlier version was discussed at an internal seminar at the institute in December 1997. Thanks are due to Joseph Charles, Eva Evers-Rosander, Sherlot Jonsson, Per Karlsson, Endre Stiansen and Ann Schlyter for their comments.

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# Introduction

The two concepts 'civil society' and 'governance' have, over the last decade, been used frequently in a number of discourses on African social, political and economic development—academic, donor community, popular—with different meanings, and for different purposes. Although much has been said, there is still no clear consensus on the meaning and importance of the concepts. The aim of this text is to give an account of the recent discussions of the concepts, and to review some of the related issues. Needless to say, this overview does not pretend to be exhaustive or even to cover the majority of contributions to the debates; instead, it is selective with the purpose of focusing on a few relevant issues by analysing some of the central and representative contributions. Also, the overview will be restricted to the recent debates on civil society and governance in Africa; it will not deal with the classical and more general debates, on which much, of course, has been written—on civil society, see Keane (1988) and Cohen and Arato (1992).

I will start out by reviewing the civil society debate, and in the second part move on to the discussion on governance. Both debates will be treated in a similar fashion. To begin with, matters of definitions will be discussed—'definitions' connoting both descriptive and normative aspects, such as the perceived social location and boundaries of the concepts, as well as the theoretical and political importance attributed to them, respectively. Related to the understandings of civil society and governance are the different opinions on their validity and usefulness as analytical concepts, and, as a possible consequence, their applicability in empirical research, something which will also be discussed. Finally, the theoretical and empirical relations between the two concepts will be examined.

## I. Conceptualising Civil Society

Although an old concept, the current popularity of civil society as a tool for analysing politics is recent. Its contemporary revival is generally seen as related to the political liberalisation and democratisation in Latin America and Eastern Europe during the 1980's and early 1990's. 'Civil society' was transmitted from those areas to the

debate on the future of the welfare state in Western Europe as well as to the discussion of political liberalisation in Africa in the early 1990's. For many of the commentators on the African debate, the concept's relevance is linked to the perceived developmental and democratic failure of the mainly statist and sometimes authoritarian models (e.g. Bayart 1986; Chazan 1992)—even if there are contradicting opinions on and explanations for the reasons behind and the degree of that failure (Gibbon 1992 b). Research attention became directed at the multiplicity of forces in society, and the relations between state and society—sometimes named the study of social movements (Mamdani, Mkandawire, Wamba-dia-Wamba 1988), sometimes the study of civil society (Bayart 1986; Bratton 1989).

Opinions diverge on what exactly civil society should be understood to encompass, and how its theoretical and/or political importance should be interpreted. There is a wide range of treatments of the concept civil society, from intuitive shorthand conceptions with little or no analytical ambitions or content, referring vaguely to associational life in general, to theoretically conscious elaborations. Among the latter, there are different opinions of what is the relevant essence, if any, of civil society: is it a *social sphere*; the *associations* within that sphere; their *activities* in relation to e.g. the state; or a certain *dimension* of those activities? In other words, should one approach civil society as primarily being of organisational, material or moral importance? Some scholars are striving for neutral definitions of civil society, which only mark it off in the 'social geography'. Others opt for more or less explicitly normative definitions, in which one or more attributes signify the political essence of civil society, and distinguish it from other spheres such as the state or just 'society'. These attributes can be organisational, due to structural relations, or ideological-ethical, due to norm-shaping functions. Apart from that, there are also other ways of characterising civil society, not necessarily built into any definition, but nevertheless either implicitly applying to it some quality or characterising it in structural-relational terms.

#### *Between the family and the state*

For 'civil society' to be a useful concept, something must distinguish it from 'society'. Despite conceptual differences between the commentators, it is possible to reconstruct some common ground consisting of a neutral locational definition. Most writers on the subject would agree to define it as the public realm between state

and family, and more specifically as the associational life within that realm—formally autonomous from, yet engaging with the state. Civil society is also commonly understood as a relational concept, working as a mediator between the state and the citizens. The material, organisational and ideological links between state and citizens are given their collectively organised expressions within the sphere of civil society. Below I will present some different suggestions of defining features of civil society beyond this common ground.

In the study of contemporary African politics, Bayart (1986) was among the first to bring the concept to the fore, as a way of explaining popular resistance against states with totalitarian tendencies. Thus, civil society is conceptualised by Bayart as "society in relation with the state...in so far as it is in confrontation with the state' or, more precisely, as the process by which society seeks to 'breach' and counteract the simultaneous 'totalisation' unleashed by the state." (1986:111). Although Bayart modifies this definition by admitting the ambivalent and dynamic relation between state and society, civil society in this version is still significant in so far as it is consciously acting against the state. Civil society for Bayart is not so much the institutions, but the 'social space' they create, and its challenge to the state is mainly performed on the ideological level (1986:112; 120). On the other hand, this resistance against the state does not entail any specific ideological principle within civil society: "[t]here is no teleological virtue in the notion of civil society." (1986:118). Thus Bayart's conception of civil society is prejudiced more concerning its type of activities than their specific ideological content or outcome—although its general ideological position is anti-state, and civil society itself is "by its very nature plural" (1986:112).

Another kind of normative conceptions of civil society can be traced in the works of Azarya (1994) and Harbeson (1994). For Harbeson, associations are part of civil society "to the extent that they seek to define, generate support for, or promote changes in the basic working rules of the game by which social values are authoritatively allocated." (1994:4), meaning that civil society is essentially a norm-setting dimension of associational life—in relation to the state. This, for Harbeson, is the importance of civil society. The concept fills a theoretical gap—that of explaining political legitimacy. What is not problematised is what counts as 'rule-setting activities', and in what way and direction associations can seek to promote changes and still count as being part of civil society. Even if one may assume that what is being referred to are politically relevant, conscious, and systematic activities, thus dissolving the analytical problem, the



ideological question still lingers on: is civil society by definition democratic—or at least civic? May it promote anti-democratic values? Azarya is explicit on this matter. What distinguishes civil society from 'society' plain is its 'civility', meaning roughly acceptance of responsibility of the common good (1994:89-90). This is partly connected with Azarya's contention that civil society is distinguished by its ethical potential. Certain types of collective action, such as ethnic and other kinds of 'primordial' associations, cannot be seen as being part of civil society, due to their potentially parochial influence (1994:94-95). Both Azarya and Harbeson distance themselves from Bayart's thesis of civil society being intrinsically antagonistic towards the state; indeed, one of Azarya's main points is that state-society relations is best understood as an incorporation-disengagement continuum (1988).

In her discussions of civil society, Naomi Chazan approaches a similar standpoint regarding distinctions between 'civil society' and 'society'. Although the main dimension in Chazan's reasoning is the structural and relational aspect of civil society, she also draws a line between those associations with a normative potential, and those that are parochial and self-seeking; the latter being located outside civil society (1992:283; 1994:256-257, 278-279). This is not the fundamental criterion but rather an additional one to the main contention that what distinguishes civil society is associations that are separate from, but address the state (1994:278). Chazan's historically sensitive understanding of civil society focuses on its structural and politically relevant relational activities. Dwayne Woods, however, claims that the most important dimension of civil society is to be found on the mental level: "Civil society is an arena in which the emergence of normative claims from society regarding its own identity and the role of public institutions in shaping that identity are formulated" (1992:96). Civil society is best understood as a distinct and autonomous social sphere, where norms are reflected and redefined.

Similar claims are being put forward in a theoretical text by Larry Diamond which is not restricted to specific African conditions. According to Diamond, civil society is "a realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or a set of shared rules" where people act "collectively in a public sphere" (1994:5). Its distinguishing marks are that it is concerned with public rather than private interests, that it relates to the state, and that it is pluralist (1994:6). Diamond defines civil society relationally, by what

is done within that public sphere. There are limits to civic activities, though. Diamond adds a number of behavioural criteria for an association to pass as 'civic', which together support his claim that civil society has many and strong qualities for strengthening and consolidating democracy—among them its intrinsic pluralism and its countervailing power (1994:7-11). Thus, civil society amounts to a positive-sum game, with democratic culture being the unintended consequence of a sound institutional setting.

One of the first and most vocal proponents for the study of civil society was Michael Bratton, in an influential review article (1989). There, Bratton opts for a neutral definition, free from marxist or liberal overtones (1989:417) and finds Stepan's definition satisfying: an "arena where manifold social movements ... and civic organisations from all classes ... attempt to constitute themselves in an ensemble of arrangements so that they can express themselves and advance their interests" (1989:417). Bratton finds civil society to be "by nature, plural" (1989:418), though not necessarily democratic however, as it might contain patrimonial values and organisational principles as well as democratic (1994 a:13). To Bratton, civil society is an important concept for generalising from empirical findings as well as for discussing political theory. It is related to empirical research by helping to describe popular political action adequately, and to political theory in so far as it is a tool for explaining political transitions (1994 b:51). The fundamental importance to Bratton of civil society, however, is that it is necessary as a social sphere for legitimising state power (1994 b:59). In that way, Bratton seeks to unite liberal and Gramscian understandings of civil society, which, from contrasting perspectives, underline the importance of ideology for the survival of a regime, explained either as the emergence of a consensus of legitimate politics in the public sphere, or as mediation of class hegemony through civil society.

### *Liberal and Marxist traditions*

The arguments above locate and characterise civil society in different, though related ways, and could be categorised as belonging to the same liberal tradition, where the Tocquevillian understanding of civil society remains the most influential strand of thought. In the Tocquevillian version, three types of virtues are attributed to civil society—as a counterweight to state power, as intrinsically pluralistic, and as such an institutionally democratising force, and finally as a sphere for elaborating or transforming normative notions of fair sys-

tems of governance—a locus for the learning process necessary for nourishing a democratic political culture, and as such a democratising force on the ideological level. The above commentators in varying degrees emphasise one or more of these attributes, and by so doing explicate the principal dimensions of civil society. Most of the commentators underline the norm-setting dimension as either defining civil society, or as an unintended outcome of its deepening. Bayart tends to emphasise the countervailing power of civil society, and Bratton and Bayart its intrinsic pluralism. Most of the above mentioned writers also converge on the issue of the emerging African civil society as being positively correlated with the political liberalisation in many countries during the early 1990's. The importance of civil society is linked to either one, or all, of the levels described above. For instance, the emergence of a civil society has been seen as the prerequisite for holding back authoritarian states and creating political space in the short run (Bratton 1989:412), or for creating the possibility for a more sustainable democracy in the long run through another kind of political culture, marked by participation and accountability (Chazan 1994:258). These matters and other opinions on the causes behind the rise of civil society will be discussed in greater detail below.

Another group of scholars have taken issue with these arguments. Departing from a different conceptualisation of civil society, an historicist or materialist understanding rooted in Hegel, Marx and Gramsci, these scholars contest the view that civil society in itself or *a priori* could be regarded as a prerequisite for democratisation or democratic consolidation. The main view among this group of scholars is that the developmental and democratising potential of civil society is an empirical matter, and that conceptual clarification is needed. Reacting to, rather than shaping, the rise of the civil society discourse, these writers' main contributions are ones of criticism and modification. I will start by summarising this critique, before I go into the specific contributions and alternative conceptions.

Against the liberal version, these writers in their analyses depart from the assumption that the roots of civil society are to be found in the political economy, and that civil society is continuously reshaped, although in an indirect and complex manner, through a restructuring in the material sphere. Therefore, the social and economic underpinnings of civil society are emphasised, together with the fragmented and conflict-ridden dimensions among and within civil society associations. In sum, the critique put forward has concentrated on what has been seen as analytical shortcomings and

insufficient empirical research, partly stemming from ideological bias within the liberal paradigm. State-society relations are under theorised and not sufficiently researched; some critics argue that one cannot assume that the gulf between state and society necessarily is the main one. Such a point of departure leads to above mentioned downplaying of the conflict dimension within civil society and the idealising of the latter.

In a number of texts, Peter Gibbon (1992 a; 1992 b; 1996; Bangura and Gibbon 1992) has put forward critique of the current uses of civil society, and has tried to develop an alternative version. Gibbon's critique ranges from questioning the framework within which 'civil society' is understood, to more specific analytical and empirical objections. To start with the former, Gibbon sees the notion of an emerging civil society in opposition to the state as part and parcel of an anti-statist paradigm, in which the state is portrayed as oppressive and civil society in need of liberation. When equating power with the state sphere and exploitation with the formal sector, civil society and the informal sector are seen as democratic and autonomous, respectively. This dichotomy, however, is simplistic, and conceals both the ways the state and civil society interpenetrate, as well as the relations of domination and conflict that exist within civil society and the informal sector (Bangura and Gibbon 1992:20-21). Gibbon traces this, in his view, general tendency to describe civil society as inherently participatory, democratic and accountable, to the conceptual bias of the general framework where the state is described as neo-patrimonial. Representative proponents of this view, according to Gibbon, are Chazan, who sees economic informalisation as the liberation of civil society (Bangura and Gibbon 1992:18), and Bratton, who portrays NGOs as inherently pluralistic and potential carriers of democratic values—entirely on normative grounds (Gibbon 1992 b:12). A similar kind of critique of 'NGO-romanticism' is made by Fowler (1991) in a systematic and exhaustive manner.

On the contrary, one must assume that civil society is not neutrally 'plural', but rather structurally differentiated, due to the relations in the material sphere. Different associations within civil society interact with the state in different ways, relations ranging from confrontational to clientelist. Thus, Gibbon recommends more specific investigations of exactly which aspects of civil society that are strengthened by which aspects of economic and political liberalisation and informalisation (1992:13). An historical understandings of civil society cannot explain what sustains and reproduces it. In his most systematic treatment of the subject, Gibbon crit-

icises both the contemporary, predominantly Tocquevillian, use of civil society, and the tendency for civil society "to be attributed some distinctive immanent principle, which gives clear direction and meaning to all its different expressions and which marks it off radically from other entities" (1996:31). This hides "the real tensions and contradictions within civil society on the one hand, and a connected abstraction of it, from the division of labour, the family and even the state on the other." (1996:31). Instead, Gibbon proposes a materialist analysis of civil society emanating from the division of labour. Rather than to depart from a definition, civil society within a certain social formation may be characterised after its structure has been analysed.

Setting out from the changes within the political economy as a framework, Gibbon tries to characterise colonial, post-colonial and 'post-developmental' civil society (1992:17-23). Even though Gibbon criticises the common use of the term, he still finds it useful for analysing how political domination can be modified or qualified. Different models of accumulation result in differently structured civil societies, which in turn affect politics. While not independent from the economy, civil society nevertheless has an impact on the political struggles in one way or another; by reproducing or contesting existing social relations. By analysing the density and internal composition of different civil societies, it is possible to relate their structure to their political impact (1992 a:166). Bangura similarly (1992) and jointly (Bangura and Gibbon 1992) criticises the tendency to portray civil society as homogeneous and downplaying the structural conditions for its coming into being. Bangura finds civil society, although problematic, a useful concept since social movements may transcend and contest power relations emanating from the state and/or the economy. Naturally, contextualised and rigorous analyses are necessary to establish and theorise on the interplay between an active civil society and political change.

Likewise, Beckman (1993; Beckman and Jega 1995) cautions against depicting the state and civil society as antagonists—something which is more telling of the neo-liberal context of the civil society discourse than of actual state-society relations, according to Beckman (1993:21). Rather, the state and civil society must be understood as mutually constitutive, or, in Mamdani's words: "Forces within civil society penetrate the state differentially, just as the state power reinforces certain social interests and undermines others. Not only is the struggle between social forces found within civil society and telescoped inside the state; it shapes the very character of state

power" (Mamdani 1990:8-9). For Beckman, the structuring principle of civil society that distinguishes it from society is its relationship to the state: civil society "is situated in rules and transactions which connect state and society" (1993:29). There is thus a great need to pay attention to the various interests in the public service nexus, and their respective socio-economic underpinning. Beckman's main theoretical and methodological contention is that scholars in analyses of civil society should abandon notions of conflict relations in solely state-versus-society terms, and also study relations of domination within civil society. Empirical research must be detailed and contextualised, in order to make clear how different forces within civil society relate to each other and to the state, by analysing their particular demands and actions. Civil society in Beckman's view emanates from, but is capable of transcending, relations of production within the political economy and is internally differentiated, due to conflicting interests and values. Beckman and Jega stress that organisations within civil society become relevant to democratisation if and when they contest relations of domination within their own sphere of operation and link their own agenda to more general democratic struggles (1995:169).

In a similar manner Mamdani (1990; 1995; 1996) polemises against views that in his opinion are naïve and tend to romanticise civil society. According to Mamdani, the basic mistake of the majority of the contributors to the civil society debate, is their conception of civil society as being internally homogeneous and democratic, and externally opposing the state. This methodological bias, together with an unwillingness to concretely analyse 'actual civil society', leads to analytical confusion, and prescription rather than description (1990:9-10). Mamdani on his part views civil society as historically emerging and contradictory. The relation between civil society and the state is as crucial to Mamdani as it is to Beckman. The reciprocal relationship between the state and civil society both reflect and shape the balance of forces within civil society. Indeed, it is the existence of a state that guarantees the autonomy of civil society (1995:605). Mamdani equally underlines the need to analyse social movements without any preconceived notion of their democratic or developmentalist potential. Another angle of Mamdani's critique of the civil society paradigm is its implicit neglect of rural conditions. The civil society concept as it is normally understood is of limited value to grasp the material and institutional power relations in rural Africa (1996:18-23).

Turning from the specific contributions of the different scholars, the general relationship between civil society and the state and the economy will now be considered, and more specifically within the context of the economic and political informalisation that has taken place in Africa during the last decade. As argued above, the historicist-materialist perspective attaches more importance than the liberal to the way civil society is constituted and reproduced, and, thereby, to its material and institutional relationship to the state. This relationship is fundamentally portrayed as one of interpenetration, with ambiguous ideological content and varying outcome. To the materialistically oriented scholars, this relationship is of crucial theoretical importance. Their general critique of the liberal civil society theorists on this matter is that the latter, in spite of admitting that civil society is plural and many-sided and its relation to the state is as an important or even outstanding institutional feature and ideologically ambivalent on the empirical level (Bratton 1994 b; Chazan 1994), still do not draw the theoretical conclusions from this. Rather, the liberals are said to portray civil society as on the whole essentially homogeneous, and the relation between civil society and the state as the principal dividing line (Beckman 1993; Gibbon 1992 a and b; Mamdani 1995).

More specifically, this issue has been brought up in relation to the process of economic and social informalisation. There is a general consensus that the processes of economic informalisation and expansion of associational life have occurred and that they are in some way related; the main questions are how to explain and estimate them, and whether the parallel economy is beginning to create parallel politics—in the shape of civil society. In his early contribution to the debate, Bratton regarded informalisation as a process which may create an opening for pluralism and participation, by simultaneously undermining the capacity and outreach of the state, and strengthening civil society (1989). While drawing on, but modifying, Azarya's (1988) thesis of society's disengagement from the state, Bratton sees the possibility of the emergence of parallel values and, eventually, institutions (1989:412), although cautioning against the view that large-scale state withdrawal would automatically and immediately lead to the rise of an alternative (1989:428). Azarya on his part brought together a number of indicators of informalisation to support his thesis of society's disengagement as a result of the growing irrelevance of the state

who sees informal politics and an emerging civil society partly as a result of the economic informalisation (1988). The most extensive and systematic critique of this type of argument has been put forward by Gibbon (1992 a and b). While not disputing tendencies of informalisation, Gibbon criticises both some of the conceptual assumptions as well as the normative overtones of the reasoning. Not only are the various indicators of 'disengagement' disparate and ambiguous, but their anti-statist content also needs to be proved empirically, rather than just being stated as an assumption, according to Gibbon (1992 b:9-13). On a number of levels there have been and remain linkages between the state and the various associations. Furthermore the associations within civil society are not, in Gibbon's view, automatically participatory, democratic or accountable, neither to their internal composition nor to their ideological content. Many are primarily self-seeking and economically oriented as part of survival strategies, and not necessarily capable of or interested in contesting political power relations locally or on a nation-wide scale (1992 b:12).

The diverging conclusions can be related to the different frameworks of the authors. While Bratton, Azarya and Chazan place their findings and theoretical elaborations within a neo-patrimonialist framework, where the state is seen as ineffective and illegitimate both for purposes of economic development and democratisation, Gibbon relates the informalisation mainly to the implementation of structural adjustment programmes, whereby the state is forced to withdraw from many of its former functions. For Bratton, Azarya and Chazan, society disengages from the state due to the illegitimacy of the latter; for Gibbon, the state withdraws from society as part of economic liberalisation.

Regarding the question of whether 'civil society' is a useful analytical tool, most writers would agree, but, as has been shown, use it in slightly or radically different ways. When the concept is used, in spite of many writers expressing their doubt due to its vagueness and ambiguity, it is obviously with strong qualifications. It goes without saying that it is important to be aware of what one means by civil society, why and how it is used, and what research questions it is supposed to answer—especially in times when the concept is used excessively and often without deeper consideration. Uses range from those who see it as relatively unproblematical and fruitful concept, to those who see its value as mainly metaphorical—as a contextualising sphere. There is no need to dwell further on differences in fundamental understandings; here, I will only discuss different uses



of the concept in so far as they generate different research agendas and operationalisations.

The employment of civil society as a tool for empirical research is quite new; historically, it has been used on the level of political theory. Departing from different frameworks, most writers nevertheless find it useful not only for theorising, but also for empirical work. Even though Bratton, for instance, is explicit in his treatment of civil society as an analytical concept, he still concludes that it can contribute to an understanding of everyday politics (1989:426-430). An obvious starting point is that opinions on whether 'civil society' should be operationalised—and if so: how—naturally depend on the view taken on the concept's fundamental content and meaning. In his summary of the contribution to the Harbeson et al volume (1994), Harbeson makes a case for civil society as a concept helpful for understanding social life, and outlines a possible research agenda where important parts are devoted to basic mapping of civil society 'on the ground': how does civil society form and dissolve; how do civil society and the state interact; who performs the functions of civil society? etc. (1994:21). Given the largely normative understandings of many contributors, these questions are to be understood as normative in the last instance, notwithstanding the obvious material and institutional couplings. Research on civil society in this view should thus be regarded as investigations of the foundation, developing and institutionalising of political culture.

The critics of the liberal notion of civil society, on the other hand, are hesitant to use the concept explicitly and as the primary explanatory tool, but still use it indirectly or complementary. As has been shown, both Gibbon, Bangura and Beckman find the concept fruitful for discussing political change, although they distance themselves from any use of it that preconditions its ideological content and tendency. The emphasis is on concrete studies of particular expressions of civil society, their agendas and forms of praxis, and their relation to each other and the state. Contrary to the interest with political culture of the liberal scholars, the central dimension for these writers is the interplay between state and society, as well as within society on the material-cum-structural level.

## II. Discourses on Governance

Perhaps to an even greater extent than civil society, 'governance' has been burdened with a variety of meanings during the last decade, and has been made the conceptual container for various research and

policy agendas. Crudely, one may in the first instance distinguish between the academic discourse on governance and the donor uses—and the latter may in turn be discussed in the plural, as the World Bank's and the bilateral donor's versions respectively. This is not to say, of course, that the different discourses on governance are not interrelated in their understandings of politics in Africa and their concern with the direction of future development, only that the differences are important enough to be recognised. For the purposes of this paper, full treatment will be given to the academic discourse, while the origins and content of, as well as some of the critique of, the World Bank/donor version only will be touched upon in the first paragraphs. After that, it will be referred to when considered relevant.

### *Governance in the donor community discourse*

According to several analysts, the rise of the governance concept within the World Bank's discourse from the late 1980's can be linked to some main factors. Most closely related to the internal doctrines of the Bank were the experiences of the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980's, which had produced results below expectations or simply failed. Now the Bank looked for institutional explanations and solutions to these shortcomings (Leftwich 1993:607-608; Moore 1993:2). This was facilitated by the world-wide intellectual and political processes of the rise of neo-liberalism and the fall of communism, and by African domestic movements for democracy (Leftwich 1993:608-610). The result was the 'good governance' agenda, whereby recipient countries were asked to make changes in their bureaucracy and/or their political system. In their version of governance, the World Bank concentrated on managerial and institutional aspects, while bilateral donors were more explicitly political, and, beyond supporting institutional rearrangements, demanded multi-party democracy and respect for human rights as conditions for foreign aid (Leftwich 1993:606). The World Bank version of governance is furthermore applicable on different, though overlapping, levels: as simply technical management, and as political or systemic institutional changes (Leftwich 1993:611). According to the Bank, governance is "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (World Bank 1992:1), and can be divided into four dimensions: public sector management, accountability,

legal framework for democracy and information and transparency (1992:12).

As is well known, the governance agenda and the political conditionality has been criticised on a number of empirical, analytical and ideological points. The critique will not be repeated here in detail; suffice it to say that critics have claimed that the governance view is naïve and technocratic, launched from a populist managerial perspective, and detached from power struggles and conflict of interests. Within the framework of assumed consensus, buzzwords such as accountability, transparency, participation and empowerment have been said to be left unexplained and unproblematised, and insufficiently contextualised—especially since structural adjustment in the view of many critics are part of the governance problem rather than its solution (see e.g. Bangura and Gibbon 1992; Beckman 1992; Leftwich 1993).

### *The academic discourse*

Meanwhile, an academic discourse on governance began to appear. Early contributions were made in the late 1980's, when a large group of mainly American scholars gathered to elaborate new directions for the study of African politics (Carter Center 1989 a and b; see also Mamdani's critique, 1990). There, governance was described as "a broader, more inclusive, notion than government. It usually refers to the general manner in which a people is governed. It can apply to the formal structures of government as well as to the myriad institutions and groups which compose civil society in any nation." (Carter Center 1989 b:1), and Michael Lofchie argued that the advantage of governance is that it "does not pre-judge the locus or character of real decisional authority." (Carter Center 1989 a:121). These are of course mainly negative and vague notions, revealing little of what the concept actually could be or do. Hyden in an overview essay (1992) tries to pursue the issue further, and to him governance "is the conscious management of regime structures with a view to enhancing the legitimacy of the public realm." (1992:7). It needs to be recognised that by 'regime' Hyden means something similar to the fundamental rules of the political game, both its forms and its ethics. This means that Hyden's notion of governance is an abstract force, far beyond mere administration, and concerned with legitimacy as well as efficiency (1992:7). Considering the way Hyden elaborates on the concept, however, it is obvious that governance developed into being multi-dimensional. As Bratton and Rothchild note, it is simultaneously

used as an analytical framework for the study of legitimate politics, the description of the same legitimate politics, and a desirable value (Bratton and Rothchild 1992:267). In other words, it is alternally an explanatory tool and an object to be explained. One might look at Hyden's use of governance as an attempt to describe and explain how development-promoting institutions, formal and informal, arise and are sustained.

Hyden's methodological point of departure is his rejection of all versions of political economy, as being too cynical and crude (1992:4). Instead, his explicit ambition is to bring political culture back in as "an independent and superordinate factor in the study of development" (1992:8), and, by so doing, rescue and reunite institutions and values which continuously reconstitute each other through what Hyden calls reciprocity (1992:9-10, 20-23). Hyden takes over Lofchie's notion, that the loci and forms of power in a society are indeterminate, in order to analyse state-society relations without preconceptions of where the norm-setting authority lies. On the ideological-normative level of state-society relations, legitimacy is shaped and confirmed, and social capital is created (1992:10-16). The explanatory factor is the general political culture in a society, which Hyden characterises through a typology of regimes (1992:16-20). Thus, Hyden tries to link the two tendencies within the neo-institutional framework, and show the interdependence between formal and informal institutions, organisations and political culture respectively. A democratic political culture produces social capital in forms of trust in norms and human beings, and good governance produces legitimacy for both formal and informal institutions (1992:7). This way, governance can be seen as a metanormative concept, dealing with 'the rules of the rules'.

### *Critical remarks*

As has already been indicated, Hyden's notion of governance is a wide and ambitious concept—a critic would say too wide, and almost all-encompassing. Beyond being vague, the different dimensions might also become contradictory (Bratton and Rothchild 1992:267). Another question is what the concept adds. While some components are vague, others are not quite that new. The dimension of governance serving as an analytical framework for comparative politics may be criticised analogous to the radical critique of liberal versions of civil society. Critics have attacked the fundamental methodological assumptions by claiming that governance should be

put into context, not made the context (Gibbon 1992 b:3-5). Because of attacking strawmen—excessive structuralism, economic determinism—it is possible to interpret Hyden as if all materialist or political economy positions necessarily equate with the extreme versions. There is no *a priori* reason why a political economy approach should not be able to analyse state-society relations, although more attention and explanatory power given to political and cultural factors may be needed. The point here is that material factors are important for explaining changes or stability of political culture. This is related to the dimension of governance intended to describe legitimate politics. Here, governance suffers from the same shortcomings as the related concept 'social capital'. In a narrow interpretation of the concept it is trivial; in a broader version it is vague, bordering on the problematic. Of course all the expressions of 'good governance' and 'social capital' are desirable and cohesive to democracy and a good society—the problem is to describe and explain the necessary preconditions for their emergence. Questions to be answered here are: why some aspects of a political culture manage to survive and not others; and how, why and when norms are contested and changes occur. If one is willing to see political culture as an independent and superordinate factor, the argument tends to be circular: trust explains trust as a sort of mental 'path dependency'.

Critique may be advanced on the ideological level as well. Further elaborations of the key concepts could be useful; for instance, Hyden does not sufficiently problematise 'political culture', 'legitimacy' or 'civic'. First, Hyden emphasises the dominating expressions and seemingly homogeneous aspects of political culture. Secondly, it is not clear what is meant by legitimacy, who decides and by what standards. Thirdly, the civic realm is depicted as one of virtues and consensus. By underlining the reciprocal relations, Hyden downplays elements of conflict and power relations, except between 'state' and 'society' (Gibbon 1992 b). Politics is a matter of struggles between interests and values, rather than management of consensus (Leftwich 1993:621).

### *A multidimensional realm*

Turning to the question of using and operationalising governance as a tool for theoretical analysis and empirical research, it should be clear from the discussion above that governance in Hyden's view is far from an operational tool, even restricted to its descriptive dimension; rather, it is a multidimensional realm with different characteris-

tics. Nevertheless, using the concept entails clear implications for research. While the main theoretical function of governance is to focus on the conscious management of formal and informal institutions, the methodological challenge is to transcend the structure-actor dichotomy (Hyden 1992:20-23), leaving explicit room for institutions and values. The theoretical and methodological levels are united in what Hyden describes as the main task facing studies of African politics—analysing "how to restore a civic public realm" (1992:23). In other words, the study of state-society relations must be conducted on every possible level; central and local, formal and informal, to trace the possible origins of a new civic political culture beyond the present neo-patrimonialist structures.

As benevolent but partly critical readers of Hyden, Bratton and Rothchild try to build on and transcend his contribution to the study of governance, which they still regard as a relevant and fruitful concept. Its main value, due to Bratton and Rothchild, consists in making it possible to identify patterns of state-society relations as a regular but changing flow of reciprocity and exchange that enhances political legitimacy. In addition to that, the indeterminacy of the concept draws attention to the informal social roots and expressions of authority, through everyday discourses, and the way norms and values are institutionalised (1992:264-267). This results in a possible research agenda, where Bratton and Rothchild identify the nexus between formal and informal institutions, and the different phases that constitute and reproduce them, as crucial. To start with, it is important to investigate how norms are sustained, and could function as the ethical foundations of formal institutions. Beyond that, analyses of the manner in and the extent to, which those norms are transformed into and promoted by the institutions and the patterns of relations between leaders and governed are needed. Finally, it may also be fruitful to examine how these patterns influence the choice of regimes in different countries (1992:280-283).

### *Urban governance*

In another contribution, McCarney, Halfani and Rodriguez (1995) observe the importance of governance as a concept for urban studies against the background of changing relations between local authorities and social movements, due to earlier developmental failures of central and local authorities, and processes of decentralisation and informalisation of responsibility (1995:101). McCarney et al explicitly take over Hyden's usage, and argue that the governance concept (or

rather, paradigm) could improve the understanding of urban development in two related ways. On the level of theory, governance adds the dimension of legitimacy to urban policy-making; on the level of method, governance is more dynamic, since it is a relational concept (1995:96). Therefore, governance is capable of incorporating and analysing dynamics and processes on the informal as well as the formal level. A central point on these authors' research agenda is that local associations are going to play an important part, and that much attention needs to be given to the developing civil society and the relations between it and local authorities—analysed within the framework of "patronage, clientilism, corruption and empowerment" (1995:127). All in all, McCarney et al depart from a liberal understanding of civil society, in which it supposedly "reinforces an organic linkage with the communities and procures a high degree of legitimacy, commitment and effectiveness in action" and is "gradually evolving into a power bloc which does not simply strive to influence decision-making but now actually executes its own defined agenda" (1995:102). Civil society is not defined by the authors, and these statements could be complemented by less optimistic versions where the strength, internal homogeneity and political consciousness of civil society is not pre-determined.

#### *Some concluding remarks*

Finally, some theoretical and empirical connections between the concepts 'civil society' and 'governance' in different discourses, as well as possible future directions for empirical and theoretical research, will be discussed. Theoretically, both concepts spring from related state-society paradigms, evolving simultaneously within the World Bank and the academia during the late 1980's. The two paradigms put forward similar views regarding the economic and political decay in Africa, the causes behind it, and the possible way out of it. In the World Bank version, civil society entered a wider governance perspective as a way to ensure popular participation and empowerment. In the academic discourse, and most profoundly in Hyden's version, governance is an all-encompassing framework, of which state-society relations is one crucial part; it is the realm where reciprocity is established and political culture grows. On the other hand, civil society has become the more discussed, and more used, concept. Depending on the view one takes of civil society, different implications follow for governance—first of all, regarding the fundamental (possibility of the) use of the concept. Secondly, it

affects what one should emphasise when analysing state-society relations; civil society as a homogeneous sphere, or conflicts within civil society. Following from that, one may choose a conflictual or consensual perspective on the establishing of norms and political culture within a governance realm. On the empirical level, civil society in the World Bank version is said to function as a counterbalance to state power, guaranteeing external transparency and accountability and the rule of law, and as a realm for an emerging democratic political culture, carrying its own internal transparency and accountability. In the academic discourse, the importance of civil society for creating good governance is mainly, but not solely, due to the moral dimension of the Tocquevillian conception of civil society: as creating civicness and, in the long run, democratic culture and legitimate politics.

As for directions for future research, it may be argued that the time has come to summarise and systematise, from different angles, the great number of empirical studies of African civil society which have been conducted during the last decade. The value of such summaries would be twofold, empirical and theoretical, and interrelated. Empirically, it is obviously of great importance to analyse what kinds of civil societies and governance relations that have emerged under political and economic liberalisation of varying kinds and degrees. What types of cross-cutting civil societies are emerging, and how and why are they becoming religious, gendered or ethnified? What have been the relations between collective consciousness, collective action, social change and political institutions in the formation of these 'publics'? What is the political content of the identities, interests and expressed demands of different social movements? Two enlightening case studies that discuss these kinds of issues have been written by Kiondo (1995) and Ngunyi (1995). Both authors paint nuanced pictures of the developmental and democratising role played by various organisations within civil society. Kiondo's study covers associational life in Tanzania, and its role in reshaping ways of providing welfare, while Ngunyi analyses the political stands taken by different types of religious associations in Kenya. In both studies, the authors link the complex empirical patterns to theoretical discussions of how and why different organisations within a common sphere of society move in radically different political directions as a result of the interplay between cultural, structural and political factors.

In continuing along this line of research, a multidisciplinary discussion would obviously be of great interest. Anthropological studies on the formation of political life-worlds, and how concepts—in-



cluding 'democratisation' and 'civil society' itself—take on different meanings and materialise as concrete expressions, could be linked to studies in political science on how these life-worlds or publics are used to organise and raise demands for recognition and rights, and whether such group specific demands are connected to wider political struggles and social change on a wider scale, and if so, how. This would improve analyses of social change in Africa during the 1990's, as well as confronting the concepts civil society and governance with African reality and thus adjusting them, given the empirical findings. Thus, contemporary studies could contribute in retheorising the concepts, and possibly eliminate some of the implicit ethnocentric attributes and assumptions of societal relations built into them. At the same time, such theoretical reflection may also put the concepts in perspective. Much theorising on African civil society has been dependent on a narrow, contemporary perspective. In order to transcend that, as well as the ethnocentric assumptions mentioned above, it would be interesting to historicise the concepts. How were pre-colonial civil societies or publics formed, with or without what is conventionally understood as states? Such findings could have important implications for an improved understanding of civil society.

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