



The Politics of Governance: Power and Agency in the Formation of Political Order in Africa

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A rebel soldier
directs traffic on the
occasion of a public
event (Korhogo,
Jan. 2009).

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Background

This paper has a rather ambitious objective. We seek to theorise a political understanding of governance, calibrating our analytical lens on actors and agency as well as on the emergence of political order. The background of this quest lies in a frustration with existing conceptualisations of governance, that, as we argue, fall short of capturing both the dynamics of agency as well as the emergence and institutionalisation of many governance arrangements pertinent to contemporary African societies – in other words, governance arrangements that do not necessarily feature formal initiatives by state actors, private sector companies or donors.

This frustration is both on an applied as well as on a theoretical level. As to the applied level, many governance regimes are short-lived and resistant to sustainable institutionalisation. At the same time, the hardships faced by a majority of African citizens and the shortcomings of public goods and services make such arrangements ever more pertinent. On a theoretical level, we have encountered great difficulties in resorting to one school of thought or one theory that would enable a deeper understanding of governance processes. Whereas certain terms and concepts have proven useful, they have not been incorporated into a system of thought that would allow us to address and analyse the problems of coordinated agency addressing complex societal problems with sufficient attention to agency, actors and power.

Our struggle to quite literally come to terms with these problems have led us to develop the heuristic framework in this paper. The different sections of this framework reflect the concepts that we feel are central to the inquiry. However, the framework is ambitious and also demanding, as it seeks to weld together a variety of disparate theories, forging them into a coherent analysis of the politics of governance. The framework is intricate in parts and sketchy in others; we could draw on a wide body of literature for some facets, and had to develop our own tools for others. However, this paper is also programmatic in character, as it is intended to be the launching pad of debates and dialogues around the issues framed here.

In constructing the analytical framework we



A mural at the cultural centre of Korhogo shows how the former national army harasses an old man from the North. They control his identity card which reveals that he has a Manding name, making him suspicious in the eyes of the soldiers (Jan. 2010).

have proceeded as follows. The first section discusses political order in general, as the processes we hope to be illuminating are ultimately part and parcel of the creation of political order. The second section lays out key aspects of agency and creativity, as a focal point of the inquiry is on the underexplored emergence of governance processes. The debates in the area of both agency and creativity are manifold, but again they have not been brought and thought together under the umbrella of governance. This leads us to the third section, which entails a short review of conventional governance approaches. The fourth section is perhaps the most adventurous component, laying out some important heuristic tools to understanding governance in a more social-scientific way. Sketching out a heuristic typology, the fifth section outlines governance figurations that are derived from patterns of interrelations between actors. With these analytical clarifications, the last section seeks to illuminate and apply the terms and concepts to a short case study of Korhogo, a town in Northern Côte d'Ivoire. Lastly, drawing on the insights from this paper, the concluding section sketches out some benchmarks for a research programme as a reference point for further dialogue, theorisation and empirical inquiry.

Political Order in Africa

Conventionally, political order is understood as the organisation of society legitimised by a notion of the public interest (Philp 1997, Chabal 2009a). The formation of political order in post-colonial societies has been a central strand of inquiry of the social and political sciences, indeed it has been formative for the emergence of classic development theories.¹ The first decade of theories on political order in post-colonial states of Africa highlighted the rural/urban divide (often equated with the dichotomy traditional/modern), with political elites struggling to achieve administrative control and socio-economic penetration of its territory. More recently, types of political regimes were captured in terms of neo-patrimonial rule, where the 'modern', legal-bureaucratic state is interfused by intertwined rationalities, values, norms and practices.² Depending on the theoretical framework, the inquiries left a greater or lesser degree of openness with regard to the chances of the emergence of sustainable, rights-based political inclusion and productive economic relations.

Recent seminal contributions have radicalised conceptualisations of politics in Africa. In the nineties and early 2000s, a wave of influential literature discussed politics in Africa under captions such as 'disorder as political instrument' (Chabal/Daloz 1999, Chabal 2009a), diagnosing a political rationale *sui generis*. This 'instrumental' rationale is not based on the notion of the public interest, but the private-regarding and rapaciousness of political elites; the 'criminalisation of the state' (Bayart et al. 1999), asserting the tearing of the social fabric through increased illegal commercial and illegitimate practices and networks by political elites, alienating and disenfranchising the population further in a vicious spiral; or even 'necropolitics' (Mbembe 2002), stating that the monopoly of legitimate violence has now been dispersed and privatised throughout society, rendering violence and death a normalised feature of politics and everyday life. Across these different perspectives a key statement could be drawn, namely that in spite of the wave of democratisation and the consolidated focus of foreign aid on governance and democratisation witnessed in the nineties, politics in Africa have, if anything, become increasingly particularistic, illegitimate and violent.

We do not subscribe to this doomsday diagnosis of contemporary African politics. We posit that even where these analyses are grounded in empirical studies, they extrapolate stark conclusions that are grossly generalised to characterise 'African politics' as such. From more differentiated literature³ as well as from our own research experience, our view is that politics in Africa do not subscribe to a single, dominant logic. Although politics in Africa may also be characterised by particularised political orders, socio-economic exclusion and weak administrative capacity, we argue emphatically that processes of political articulation and organisation are far more varied than such models suggest.

It is our intention to explore these processes and analyse them with regard to the formation of political order. For in spite of our caveats with regard to much conventional theory on politics in Africa, it would be flippant to disregard the serious problems arising from the inadequate provision of public goods, protection of basic democratic

1 For development theories see seminally Huntington 1968 or Myrdal 1968; for development theories of Africa see for instance Bates 1981 or Jackson/Rosberg 1982.

2 For two influential contributions see Médard 1982 and Bratton/van der Walle 1994; Engel/Erdmann 2007 for a comparative analysis.

3 For general social-scientific contributions see Migdal 1988, 2001 or Ortner 2006; for Africa see de Bruijn et al. 2007, Booth 2009 and 2010, or Tripp 2010.

rights, or the allocation of economic wealth in many African countries. Therefore, we draw from a second field of inquiry that conceptualises the provision of public goods from a more problem-oriented perspective, namely governance theory.

However, governance is barely understood if the agency of the actors is not taken into account. The theoretical clarification of agency is particularly important in a context where conceptualisations of politics in Africa are more often than not stripped of such agency. The analytical lens needs to be re-adjusted to understand “what agency means in specific situations” (de Bruijn et al. 2007:10). But beyond the analysis of specific situations, a key objective of this paper is to theorise agency in a more sophisticated manner than most political scientific concepts of political agency – especially with regard to Africa – undertake, and relate this understanding to governance processes.

Agency and Creativity

In African studies, the question of how novel movement and order grew out of the existing social fabrics mainly rotated around three interrelated debates: i) the articulation of the ‘old’ towards the ‘new’ or, in more conventional terms of ‘tradition’ versus ‘modernity’, ii) the interaction and interdependence of the periphery and the centre or, in more fashionable terms, the local and the global, and iii) the juxtaposition or subversion of (state) domination by the popular. All three approaches implicitly or explicitly presume that the formation of new social order grows out of the interaction of opposing forces. With a few notable exceptions, these forces are conceptualised as binary antagonisms. Such opposing forces may be good to think, but we believe that they insufficiently depict African reality on the ground. Suffice to point out the general theoretical weaknesses of these three approaches.

The first two debates share an inherent image of African societies as bounded either by time or by space. This image has met severe criticism (e.g. Kössler/Schiel 1996). First, it is not clear what is actually identified as ‘old’ and ‘new’. Even the most basic features of African societies turned out to be mere constructions, often of colonial origin. Tradition itself is perhaps the most prominent example (Hobsbawm/Ranger 1983, Anderson 1983 [2006]), ethnicity another (Barth 1969, Sollors 1996, Eriksen 2002). Though there are limits to constructivism (Lentz 1998, Lentz/Nugent 2000), it is clear that the formation of identities in an African context raises more questions than it answers. Second, the implicit teleology of modernisation as well as (inter-) dependency theory, looking at change as an irreversible and inevitable process, does not leave space for the agency of those who, according to this perspective, are only subject to it. This weakness was only partially overcome by efforts to re-conceptualise modernity and a little later by globalisation theory.⁴ In particular anthropological and sociological attempts to address local practices in the context of globalisation showed that a focus on local agency, for instance framed as ‘appropriation’, can be as one-sided as the other, older views that saw outside forces as the main causes of change (Probst/Spittler 2004, Loimeier et al. 2005). A binary opposition of global versus local cannot cope with the complexity on the ground. The discussion proved that any analysis of such processes needs to build on a learned, theoretically informed understanding of agency – one that takes all possible options into account (Förster 2005).

4 See Giddens 1990, for other perspectives see Latour 1991, Appadurai 1996.

The third debate starts from a more open understanding of agency. It also builds on a binary distinction, but one that runs right through African societies and their culture. Under the heading of ‘popular culture’, this strand of research looked at how actors, mainly in urban settings, developed a subversive and creative attitude towards domination and the state. In the rural social world of peasants, the ‘arts of resistance’ were a direct complement to these studies (Scott 1985, 1990, 2009). In the urban, it stimulated a series of empirical studies that all more or less celebrated the creativity of the ordinary (see Barber 1987, 1997 for overviews). These mainly historical and anthropological contributions made us aware of the complex character of identities and the corresponding social imageries.⁵ They are not cast into the strict binary opposition as implied by the prevailing globalisation theory nor are they captured by neo-patrimonial theories of domination, i.e. the opposition between personal, patrimonial ties and a legal-bureaucratic public sphere. Creativity at the local level incorporates more strands than two and hence is far less predictable than the dichotomy of patrimonial versus legal-bureaucratic rationalities implies.

The shortcoming of these approaches is another: They relegate agency and creativity mainly to one realm, the ‘popular’, to some extent replacing the ‘local’ in globalisation theory (e.g. Fabian 1998). Yet in most African societies, it does not make much sense to speak of the popular as it lacks an opposition, for instance in a dominant elitist culture. And even if domination is seen as its other, the distinction remains debatable (Mbembe 2002). The nexus of consumption and local imageries that is at the root of popular culture and that informs this strand of research neglects that both agency and societal creativity can have many more sources than the fuzzy notion of the popular suggests.

These findings point to a theoretical weakness that translates into a methodological one: To understand the formation of novel social and political order in Africa, we need an interrelated, general conceptualisation of agency and creativity. With regard to agency, we adapt the definition by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) and understand *agency as the temporarily constructed engagement by actors of different social environments which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement structure their life-world in interactive responses to the problems posed by the historical situation they have to cope with*. Very much like Joas (1992), we see agency as inherent in human action, and like Emirbayer and Mische, believe that three elements will allow us to address agency empirically: habitual iteration, intentional projectivity, and the reflexive evaluation by the actors.

In extension, we understand creativity as social action that leads to the change of pre-established habitual, socially or culturally bound intentions and, as societal creativity, to a re-structuring of the situation that the actors are facing. Creativity thus introduces novel possibilities from the actors’ point of view and hence changes social reality, understanding the latter as sedimented perspectives on social action and practices.⁶ The distinction between agency and creativity is one of act and product. Creativity needs identification in retrospect, while agency needs observation of and participation in the process itself. As a pair, they call for a methodology that explicitly addresses the link between the two.

5 See for instance Martin 1995, Meyer/Geschiere 1999, Dolby 2001, 2006, Diouf 2003, Hofmeyer et al. 2003, or Meyer/Moors 2006.

6 Compare Sharrock/Button 1991, or de Bruijn et al. 2007.

Agency and especially creativity hence shape and change social reality, and are therefore (usually merely implicitly) inherent in all conceptualisations of social transformations. They serve as our theoretical backdrop to a specific understanding of governance. More precisely, they serve as a backdrop to conceptualising the politics of governance, which in a double sense imply social transformations. In the following section, a brief literature review shall be undertaken, before turning to our own understanding of governance.

Governance

Currently, there are three dominant concepts of governance, all responding to the complexities of a globalising and multilevel context. Firstly, good governance, as primarily used in development cooperation, denotes a set of specific institutional features and configuration of an effective, efficient and accountable public sector.⁷ The good governance agenda has been severely criticised for its normative bias towards a particular, Western set of public institutions and its disregard for prevalent practices and properties of authority and decision-making.⁸ Second, a social-scientific concept, which denotes processes of coordinated collective action between both state and non-state actors to resolve complex societal problems.⁹ Social-scientific governance approaches capture processes that go beyond the hierarchical regulation and capacity of governmental or inter-governmental regulation, and yet affect areas and issues that are of public interest. They have been critiqued for their propensity to functionalist reduction, stemming from a certain degree of blindness to actors and actors' perspectives of both governance problems and solutions, on the one hand, and to power relations impacting on the representation and participation of actors involved in governance processes on the other hand (Mayntz 2004, Offe 2008). Both dimensions affect the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance processes (for a case study see Koechlin/Calland 2009). Thirdly, governance is commonly understood as a policy measure that includes the involvement of non-state actors in planning, regulating and governing.¹⁰ Again, this dimension is critiqued for its inability to transcend technocratic solutions that prevent the kind of innovative problem-solving that 'governance' promises.

In spite of these valid critiques, we posit that certain governance perspectives are indeed fruitful for their ability to understand a variety of modes, sectors and actors in addressing regulatory problems, exploring both the coordination between different actors as well as between different types of coordination. They are thus particularly well suited to capture key problems African countries are grappling with, especially the provision of basic public goods such as health or security in a context of weak states (Risse 2008, Börzel/Risse 2010). We therefore subscribe to a non-normative, social-scientific understanding of governance, understanding *governance as denoting processes*

7 Seminal see World Bank 1992, 1994, or for more recent governance policies of bilateral agencies see DFID 2006, 2007.

8 For an early scholarly critique see Leftwich 1993, more recently see Chabal 2009b.

9 See Rosenau/Czempiel 1992, Pierre/Peters (eds) 2000, Kooiman 2002, Mayntz 2004, Rosenau 2006, or Benz et al. 2007.

10 For recent applied perspectives in an urban context see the Habitat Reports (UNCHS 2008, 2009).

of coordinated action between actors to resolve complex societal problems. However, to harness the analytical and practical potential of governance more attentiveness to following areas is required:

- the nature of power relations between actors, as well as the social setting that the governance arrangement is embedded in;
- the perceptions and interpretations by stakeholders (within and outside of the governance arrangement) of the problems and solutions defined, addressed and implemented through governance processes;
- the dynamic, contingent nature of many of such processes, where both problems and solutions may constitute moving goal posts (e.g. an initial phase of trust and confidence building through dialogue, to more specific objectives and actions, to a formalised set of norms and sanctions).

With our title “The Politics of Governance” we wish to draw attention to this particular analytical perspective, which takes the dynamic relationship between power relations, social practices, norms and values, and interpretations in the formation of political order into account. The following sections will discuss the theoretical dimensions of such an approach in more detail.

The Politics of Governance

At this point it is important to underline that the term ‘politics of governance’ does not denote a political scientific analysis of governance processes. Our quest is to develop heuristic tools with which the type and degree of political articulations inherent in or triggered by governance processes can be assessed. So first of all, what do we mean by politics? At its most basic, politics is concerned with power in its social context. Politics in this sense does not primarily refer to the conventional understanding of politics as public affairs of a polity, but to the processes through which social actors articulate certain ideas and interests, the more or less fluid patterns which frame such articulations, and the struggles between social actors in asserting and generalising such ideas and interests. Political articulation refers to the way in which particular, differential interests link up, confront or engage with other particular interests. Politics are thus actions and processes through which social actors seek to generalise particular meanings across social relations. The more political such actions and processes are, the greater the generalisation of such meanings.¹¹ A rich example is the notion of the ‘public interest’

11 This understanding draws heavily from post-Marxist theory, especially on the work of Ernesto Laclau (see Laclau/Mouffe 1985, Laclau 1996, 2000a,b,c). Politics are seen as operations through which social actors seek to link particular interests, and forge chains of articulations which ‘fix’ universalised meanings. Politics in this sense is a Gramscian hegemonic operation, i.e. it is not necessarily a repressive process. On the contrary, it is the very stuff that social relations are made of, the overcoming of particularities to create spheres of universalised understanding. Important for the purposes of this paper is the a priori value-neutral premise that politics and thus power are inherent in all social relations. The understanding of the productive, emancipatory, or indeed repressive effects of politics on social actors is on a different analytical plane, which is not on centre stage of this analysis. However, it is central to analysing the specifically emancipatory effects of governance processes, to which we shall turn in the last section of this paper.

or ‘public good’ – what constitutes desirable social objectives, what goods and services should political orders provide to whom and how, and through which actors and operations are these terms filled with generalised meaning?

The important, defining moment here is the engagement between different interests and actors, the moment of articulation in relation to other actors, issues and horizons. These articulations are eminently political, for as soon as they are enunciated with reference to other actors and interests, they instantiate changes of perceptions, actions and judgements. In other words, such articulations necessarily effect changes on the habits, imaginations and judgements of actors. These changes affect the life-world of social actors; as governance by definition involves coordinated action, and thus the intentional, knowledgeable cooperation of different social actors, they also effect changes on the structuration of the relations between these social actors. This process is what we term political. What kind of structuration effects such processes have is subject to empirical inquiry.

Clearly, any notion of politics includes a notion of power. Power in our understanding suffuses politics, for such articulations and generalisations are expressions of power and powerlessness respectively. They are attempts by social actors to define meanings and fix relations, but these relations are necessarily contingent in nature, no matter how ‘fixed’ and given they may be depicted or interpreted as.

However, as was discussed above, many governance processes are not characterised by a great degree of social and political negotiation or contestation. On the contrary, they are valued for and evaluated with regard to their problem-oriented, functional character. On the surface, this seems to contradict above elaborations on the political nature of governance. But a functional governance arrangement – in the sense of performing a specific problem-solving function – does not a priori exclude political effects. We posit, however, that the political effects of governance processes are highly varied and contingent. Rather than unmoor governance from politics, or, conversely, drown the concept of governance in politics, we have sought to tackle this problem differently. The challenge is to develop a heuristic tool with which the degree of the political can be captured. Based on above thoughts, we argue that governance processes are located along a continuum of political articulations.

This continuum is depicted along the vertical axis in Figure 1. One pole is what we have termed ‘interventionist’, implying the kind of more technical governance arrangements that do not involve significant political contestation and negotiation. The other pole is what we have termed ‘political’, involving contestations over and articulations of issues, interests, judgements and imageries.

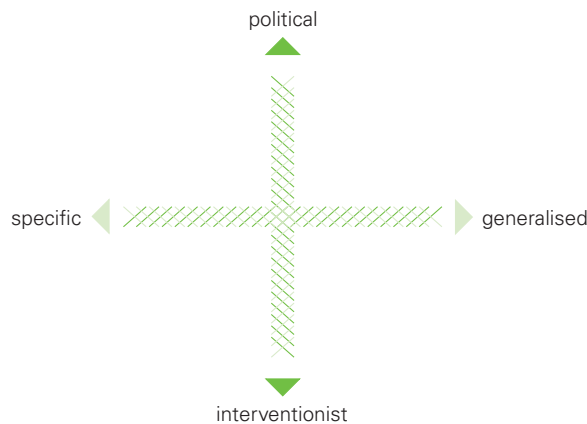


Fig. 1
Heuristic typology
of governance
processes

To illustrate the difference, a governance arrangement can lead to the provision of electricity in a specific part of town. If this arrangement is uncontested, it is interventionist in nature. If on the other hand it is contested and debated beyond the immediate



Despite a project of an international NGO, garbage collection is a problem in most parts of Korhogo. Children jump over smouldering fires, looking for empty bottles that they can sell (Jan. 2010).

stakeholders involved, perhaps involving discussions on the actors or motives involved in the arrangements, or leading to the redistribution of economic opportunities and social status, or fuelling certain social imageries, it becomes political in nature.

The horizontal axis of Figure 1 depicts a second continuum located between the two poles of specific – generalised. This dimension enables the assessment of the outreach of governance processes. We understand such processes to be simultaneously shaped by and generating social spaces. Outreach in this sense has a double significance: it looks at how and to what degree social spaces are penetrated and shaped by governance processes. More specificity is attained when governance leads to the articulation of a field of action that is neatly defined by and for the actors. More generalised are modes of governance that do not shape a particular social space. For instance, a governance arrangement leading to the establishment of a health care centre in a particular neighbourhood would be located towards the left, whereas a governance arrangement leading to the provision of basic health care throughout the country would be located on the right side. Capturing outreach is significant as a means to assess the types of social spaces that are framed by governance processes.

Before arguing the heuristic value of the two axes in more detail, we need to say a word on what is not captured in this heuristic typology. Firstly, conventional attributes of governance processes, such as the effectiveness, accountability or legitimacy of governance-processes cannot be assessed. We mention this explicitly because governance is all too often equated with or at least viewed through the lens of these attributes. However, more often than not these are very misleading terms.¹² Our perspective is a more phenomenological approach, paying particular attention to actors and agency framing governance. Here the question of perceptions and interpretations of what constitutes both problems as well as ‘effective’, ‘accountable’ or ‘legitimate’ solutions is of particular importance. Therefore, the inclusion of such terms in a heuristic typology would obscure more than it would illuminate, imposing categories rather than revealing them.

¹² Suffice to mention the body of Foucauldian contributions deconstructing the highly political processes that define the meaning of dominant terms in a given context.

Secondly, whilst the typology allows an analysis of the political content of governance processes, it allows no inference about the power relations shaping these processes. This is not a weakness of the heuristic grid, which is aimed at capturing other dimensions. But the power relations informing perceptions, experiences and judgements of societal problems, inclusion/exclusion of social actors into collective action, the definitions and implementation of collective action, as well as the positioning of social actors are of key importance to understanding trajectories of emergent and existing governance processes. The research methodology will be particularly sensitive to this aspect, seeking to interpret the discourses articulated by social actors.

Thirdly, this typology reveals nothing about the type of actors involved in governance processes and their agency, to which we will come back again later. Indeed, the types of actors require far more theoretical attention. However, rather than overload this typology with a third dimension, intended as it is for heuristic purposes, we shall combine it with a heuristic grid on types of social actors and how they relate to each other. The grid on social actors will enable the empirically grounded (rather than conceptually pre-determined) characterisation of actors involved in governance arrangements in a given time-space arrangement as well as over time and space.

With these disclaimers, we argue that the heuristic typology (Figure 1), linking the degree of political articulations with the outreach of governance processes elegantly cuts through several Gordian knots of conventional governance concepts. It overcomes the problem of unreflected normativity; it allows for the empirical assessment of levels and outreach of governance processes; and it enables a differentiated assessment of governance processes according to their political effects. It also allows for a more subtle empirical analysis of power, which suffuses all four poles of the typology. Governance thus sheds its functionalist skin and re-emerges as a useful analytical perspective with which processes addressing the resolution of societal problems can be understood both in terms of their political effects of social transformation as well as their social integrative force. The beauty of this heuristic tool is that the assessment of governance processes does not derive from its location within the matrix. On the contrary: governance processes can be assessed inductively, and yet their analysis is shored up by differentiated and politically relevant indicators.

As emphasised above, this perspective is grounded in a theoretical concept that frames agency and actors as key to understanding social realities – the kind of social realities that (the lack of) governance processes are affecting.

Four Figurations of Governance

Since we aim at a comprehensive understanding of governance, we believe that a few thoughts about possible figurations of actors and how they relate to each other will help to clarify the scope of our research. We preliminarily distinguish four figurations that are mainly based on our experience from Africa. However, we are convinced that they are also relevant for other parts of the world, including the West. Further research will show if the four figurations outlined so far need to be complemented by other types of figurations. Their status is heuristic, not an empirically based analysis of four selected case studies or a generalisation on that basis.

1. Contingent Polycentric Figurations

This figuration is characterised by a few but highly important features. The communication and exchange between the actors is irregular and restricted to few occasions and topics. The reasons can be manifold, but a typical situation would be an unclear if not confusing war-like setting. Consequently, the different actors do not know much about each other and in particular about the intentions of the other actors in the field. Trust in the other is reduced to persons with whom the actors are familiar. Trust in institutions, for instance in their capability to mediate between the different interests, depends on their perception as neutral, outside actors that are not part of the game. Examples could be international NGOs if they manage to legitimize themselves by means different from those put forward by the other actors.

Such a figuration fosters a reduction of the relations between the actors to offer and demand, the logic of a market. Because the different actors do not know much about the intentions of the other, they tend to assume that the other is acting more or less exclusively on the basis of his own interests, trying to achieve as much as he can by whatever means. The actors perceive each other as competitors, not as partners. In such figurations, the coordination of collective action, including governance, is much more based on competition than on cooperation. Though such reductions to market logics never penetrate all social relations, they frequently characterise conflict settings.

Governance is often instable and partial, i.e. focused on only a few but vital public goods such as security. It is then offered to those who pay or to those who offer other services in return. In our heuristic grid, it would be highly specific and more interventionist than political. Typical examples were certainly Liberia and Sierra Leone during the civil wars (Reno 1995, forthcoming; Richards 1996). Eastern Congo may be another. In the scholarly literature, they are analysed as “markets of violence” (Elwert 1999) or “oligopolies of violence” (Mehler 2004).

2. Segmentary Figurations

Segmentary figurations are characterised by constant, more or less regular interactions of the different social actors. In a literal as well as figurative sense, they speak the same language, i.e. they have a mutual understanding of each other and know the other's intentions better than in the first type of figuration. This exchange sustains and simultaneously is sustained by a set of shared norms and values. No less important is that the cultural basis together with the regular interaction induces a shared understanding of the situation they have to cope with. Segmentary figurations of governance can be very stable, depending on the status of the norms and values that inform them.

However, the norms and values are seldom made explicit in that communication. They are rarely topics of debates and negotiations; they are taken for granted. Such norms and guiding values often grow out of a pre-existing coherent cultural context that the actors implicitly refer to or they grow out of a habitual practice in a particular

social context. Debates rotate more around questions of appropriate interpretation of this shared basis than around the validity of the norms that are related to it. In other words, the actors trust that all possible actors will accept these norms and values while they may question the way other actors relate to them. Because of this underlying assumption, the actors will more easily accept debates and discussions that may help to establish an agreeable interpretation for all parties involved. The shared cultural background frequently becomes visible in the imagery that is used for such interactions, for instance on the occasion of events that embrace all actors.

Segmentary figurations build to a considerable extent on normative trust. The more immune the cultural basis is, the easier is the reciprocal exchange between the actors. If the cultural background has a religious or a quasi-religious status, the various actors are more inclined to recognise the legitimacy of the other actors in the field and to develop some sort of segmental governance. Segmentary figurations may foster the emergence of institutions that mediate between the different actors and their interests, in particular when they acknowledge the superiority of a third party in terms of cultural expertise. For instance, religious and ritual experts may acquire such a status.

Segmentary governance often allocates particular fields of governance to different actors. Or it may foster complementary practices that are related to only one field of governance. Segmentary governance is almost always highly political as the different actors are likely to engage in the constant exchange that characterises this figuration. In fields of governance that are closely related to the underlying norms and values, segmentary figurations may develop generalised modes of governance, but much more likely are specific modes of governance, in particular where the relation to the shared norms and values is less obvious. Segmentary governance may be very flexible and adapt easily to the specificities of the respective social settings and problems.

Segmentary governance often emerges in situations where no single actor can hope to gain a dominant position but also is and feels strong enough to reject attempts of others to oppress him. An example is the city of Korhogo in the rebel held North of Côte d'Ivoire (see the case study in the following section), but similar segmentary modes of governance exist in many peri-urban spaces throughout Africa.

3. Contractual Figurations

The third type does not build on shared norms and values, it can and often does incorporate actors of highly different cultural backgrounds. Contrary to segmentary figurations, almost all norms are potentially subject to negotiations and eventually mediations. This necessitates an intensive exchange between the stakeholders as possible partners, but the interaction does not necessarily build on an already established, almost habitual practice of communication. The negotiating power is a central issue as long as no contract is signed. Debates tend to rotate around questions of which norms shall be applicable to all stakeholders while their interpretation is sometimes a secondary issue. After a contractual figuration is established, questions of accountability and sanctions in case of a violation of the contract will often become more prominent than the validity of the norms on which they are based.

Contractual figurations build on the reliability of the social actors as contracting partners, not as members of one culture. As long as this reliability is questionable, contractual figurations can be fairly instable and will then only lead to partial governance. They often need outside institutions as mediators between the various partners. Institutional trust in a mediator is then needed to implement such contractual modes of governance. At times, however, contractual figurations may also stimulate the emergence of such mediating institutions. In general, trust in contractual figurations is more institutional than personal or normative, though trusting the other as a person that engages in a particular treaty may play an important role if the social actors are not perceived as an institution but as a group under personal leadership.

In particular where the cultural background of possible partners is unknown or badly understood, it may take considerable efforts to sort out the relevant social problems and the scope of governance. Contractual modes of governance can be limited with regard to the fields they address because their delimitation is already part of the political process. But within such fields, contractual modes of governance are frequently aimed at generalised solutions valid for all possible actors. Hence, the process that leads to contractual figurations is highly political and then leads into much more generalised governance than segmentary figurations. They are also much more interventionist once a contract is agreed upon.

Contractual figurations of governance often emerge where actors that were not part of a conflict serve as intermediaries between the opponents. Examples come from many conflict areas in Africa and elsewhere. Empirical studies address well-documented cases in Niger, Burkina Faso, Kenya and Tanzania where the figuration of (international) NGOs and the state administration often illustrates this type of governance nicely (Olivier de Sardan 2008, Neubert 1997, 2004).

4. Figurations with one Dominant Actor

Many see and rate this last figuration of governance in a normative way because it is closely linked to the modern experience of the state holding a monopoly of legitimate power. However, there is no reason to assume that only a state can take that dominant position. There are enough examples from history and anthropology that other actors may become as dominant as the modern state in the West. The real challenge is to rethink such figurations beyond the usual dominance of the state. Already the lack of an appropriate vocabulary shows to what extent political thinking still builds on the experience of the modern state.

Figurations with one dominant actor can be very stable, even if they are not based on an excessive use of violence. Dominance may also be based on cultural legitimacy (e.g. religious dominions) or on the persuasive power of organisational capabilities (e.g. the 'unofficial empires' erected by some private companies in (neo)colonial settings).

Governance in such figurations varies between more political and more interventionist modes, depending on how and to what extent processes of negotiation are embedded in the institutional framework. The interventionist character will surface most prominently when the dominant actor is a totalitarian institution, while more political approaches will be fostered by democratic regimes. But whatever character such processes have, they are always aiming at generalised modes of governance that claim validity for every other actor and for all possible situations. Figurations with only one dominant actor seldom engage in local adaption of generalised governance, though they may focus on a narrow field of governance if the dominant actor does not see any necessity to enlarge the scope of his activities.

Though figurations with one dominant actor tend to be stable, they also have a flipside: The more violence they embrace, the more they will also breed resistance and evasive social movement. Under such conditions, a figuration with only one dominant actor may turn into a risky undertaking that can bring the position of the dominant actor to a quick end. Precisely because of this 'danger', specific governance in such figurations often shows a tendency to enlarge its scope and to expand into other fields.

Examples with one dominant non-state actor are by far less often documented than the usual state-dominated figuration. They could include the overpowering presence of MNCs in certain regions (e.g. Bucheli 2005), or established warlords in others (e.g. Giustozzi 2009).

In the following section, we seek to apply some of the heuristic tools developed so far to a small case study of urban governance. The case study is by no means exhaustive. However, it serves to profile and illuminate the concept of politics of governance, and indicate preliminary insights that this as yet tentative framework may yield.

Korhogo: A Case Study

Our example is a study of a small urban neighbourhood in Korhogo, Northern Côte d'Ivoire. Korhogo is a city of some 170,000 inhabitants and, since 2002, when an insurgency split the country into two halves, under rebel governance. Despite attempts to re-establish state administration after the signature of the Ouagadougou peace treaty in March 2007, most quarters still rely on segmentary governance in 2010. So-called traditional hunter associations supervise the inner parts of the city, which are separated by a tarmac ring road from the suburban quarters. The rebels control the access to the city centre, which also includes the overland bus terminals, the main market, the business and (former) administrative areas. They erected checkpoints at the four major roads leading to neighbouring cities and to Mali and Burkina Faso. The UN peacekeeping forces settled in a former secondary school, which they transformed into barracks while the rebels occupy the barracks of the former gendarmerie nationale and police. Each party recognises more or less the position and claims of the others. New institutions guaranteeing a regular exchange between the different actors emerged, for instance meetings of the rebels and the hunters and also of rebels and civilians. Incidents happen, but they are comparatively rare. Most inhabitants state that the city is now safer than under state domination. That is, in very brief words, the social and political framework that all actors in Korhogo have to cope with.

Cocody is a suburban settlement at the northern margins of the city. Despite its name, it has nothing to do with the trendy Beverly Hills of Abidjan. It is mainly inhabited by ordinary people that belong to the middle and lower strata of society. Belonging to the commune, i.e. the city administration, the land was measured and plots were registered and sold by the urban council already since the 1980s. However, the infrastructure did not keep up with the fast growing population. When the rebellion started in 2002, electricity was only available in a few streets, and there was no running water except where the plots were situated close to a neighbouring, better off quarter. The streets were in a state of decay, and it was difficult to get access to most courtyards without a 4WD.

A descendant from the lineage of the first settlers, Djoungolo Coulibaly, still heads Cocody. He belongs to the clan that also founded the village that would later become the centre of Korhogo. Members of the clan once had a dominant position in the city because of the intermediary rulers under colonial domination that were also Coulibalys and their descendants. In the post-colonial state, they often served as ministers and were close allies of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the founding father of the nation and first president of Côte d'Ivoire. However, the clan has no corporate identity, and does not act as a group either. Though the chief of Cocody is a descendant of the first settlers, he cannot build his political power on such 'traditional' claims. The majority of the inhabitants of the quarter comes from elsewhere and many of them are citizens of neighbouring Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea. Cocody's population is highly heterogeneous and would not recognise simple claims to traditional authority.

As quarter headman, Djoungolo Coulibaly is mostly addressed by the French term *chef*. Though a chief, he does not insist on 'traditional' privileges. Being a former blue-collar worker, he says, he is as ordinary as any other inhabitant of the quarter. However, he did not act as most other headmen, for he shares his authority with others in the quarter. He appointed an advisory committee – a novelty in the local social and political landscape that could not claim any 'traditional' ancestry. It is composed of four members, two women and two men, who come from the main ethnic groups living in Cocody. He himself is a Senufo and hence belongs to the most numerous group in the

region. Through the committee, the various groups were invited to articulate their needs and interests, conferring to the chief the position of a superior mediator.

As quarter headman, he had dealt repeatedly with the rebels and the other actors in Korhogo, trying to improve his own neighbourhood and his own position, too. When the rebels had taken over from the former urban council in 2002, there was a considerable shortage of plots in many parts of the city. In Cocody, this shortage was badly felt because the fast growing suburban quarter did not have a local market as most other outlying parts of the city. The inhabitants had to walk more than half an hour to the next market in neighbouring Haoussabougou. As headman, Coulibaly saw the need for a local market and, together with the local rebels, aimed at identifying a space just outside the already settled area and close to one of the major checkpoints on the main westbound road. What would become Cocody's market was a barren spot of land, which had, however, already been surveyed before 2002. After the beginning of the rebellion, the nearly defunct urban council no longer looked after such places.

Youssouf Soro, a land surveyor and former employee of the council, had assembled a small team of surveying technicians and offered its service on a private basis. He had negotiated with the rebels and closely worked together with them as superior authority of the city, providing them with new and free plots for their own construction



Djougolo Coulibaly (left), the quarter headman of Cocody, together with his advisory committee (Jan. 2009).

plans. This team approved building lots in areas that were once prohibited, for instance in possible flooding areas close to a dam. Both rebels and the team profited from these activities. Youssouf Soro later built a huge new villa in one of the lots that his team had measured under his leadership.

In the case of the Cocody market, this team closely cooperated with Djoungolo Coulibaly, the quarter headman. The plots on the later market were split up into smaller ones, too small for residential houses. There were designated for market shacks and small-sized market buildings as retail shops and storage facilities. Every plot was sold at 70,000 CFA francs (106 Euros) of which 50% were given to the land surveying team and the other 50% to Coulibaly as quarter headman. The first half was seen as a purely commercial payment to Soro and his team. Coulibaly, however, had promised to use the money to improve the infrastructure of his quarter. He pledged to clear and maintain the new pathways between the market shacks and to set up a football ground for the youth of the quarter. In addition, he contributed to the construction of the new mosque because, he said, the majority of the quarter was Muslim. Though there were allegations that Coulibaly did not use all the money as he said he did, it was visible that he had achieved at least something for his quarter. The football ground was ceremonially opened by a match of the Cocody youth against that of another quarter, and the market quickly showed the bustling life of other markets in the city.

In late 2009, Coulibaly started another initiative to renew the streets of his quarter, assisted by the four members of his advisory committee. He walked through the neighbourhood and spoke to the elders of almost all courtyards, urging them to contribute by voluntary donations to the rehabilitation of the streets that he had planned for the early dry season. This new initiative to some extent took the older one as an example that he, as head of the quarter, was actually able to achieve his goals. Coulibaly initially asked for cash, but he also accepted in kind contributions when it was obvious that the inhabitants of a particular courtyard could not afford to pay. Surprisingly, he was able to raise enough resources to hire the caterpillars that once belonged to the génie civil of the Ministry of Construction, Urbanism and Housing. The former employees and drivers now controlled them and rented them out for money. By January 2010, the streets were graded and levelled, and most of the garbage that had piled up at many places and corners had disappeared. Yet some patches were still dirty and bumpy. The drivers of the grading caterpillars had been told to bypass the plots whose owners had not contributed.

Of course, this initiative did not pass unnoticed. The visibility of the quarter as a social and later as a political entity was significantly enhanced by such initiatives. First, the activities immediately stimulated echoes in other quarters. In nearby Hausabougou, also a popular quarter but, as the name already says, more inhabited by immigrants from the Sahelian neighbours of Côte d'Ivoire, many raised their voice and claimed that their *chef* should do something similar for their own quarter. Even in *Petit Paris*, a suburb at the other end of the city, the initiative was discussed in bars and other meeting points where public debates often emerge. Second, some so-called traditional chiefs from other parts of the city also reacted to what had been done in Cocody – or, probably more appropriately, they reacted to the positive comments of their own inhabitants. They claimed that Cocody's chief had a hidden political agenda and that he was not doing all this for the ordinary inhabitants but only for himself to improve his own position in the complex political network of alliances and oppositions that penetrated the entire city.

The chief of Cocody, however, denied that he had ever thought of any wider implication and claimed that he had done it for the inhabitants of his quarter only. Remarkably, the rebel movement which was in charge of security in the suburbs (though not in the centre of the city) showed no reaction, neither to the activities themselves nor to the various comments and statements that flourished in the weeks after Cocody

had become visible as a space where a new kind of governance had emerged. The UN peacekeeping forces were also silent on the issue.

In the formation of the discourse, however, their silence was as much a statement as the pronounced utterances in the public sphere. Many understood it as a hint that the rebels would tolerate the initiatives if not welcome them. Yet, it was not easy to map the various comments, statements and positions in this debate. For instance, the comments of the Muslim traders, who are very influential in Korhogo, were ambivalent and often contradictory at first sight. It is evident that the initiative and what followed it can be analysed as a three-step process: The first step was, of course, the initiative by the chief. It built to a considerable degree on his experience as a local mediator who, already through his advisory committee, had been able to mediate between the various fractions of the inhabitants of his quarter. Carving out Cocody as a social space where a particular public good was provided also made it visible as a distinct entity – both literally when you were driving into it and in a political sense as separate from the other quarters of the city. This second step then led into a discursive formation, which, on the one hand, resumed the already existing urban discourse about governance, power and domination. On the other hand, it introduced a new element.

Precisely because of the novelty of what Cocody's chief had achieved, he rightly could have claimed that his quarter would now maintain a more autonomous position in the cityscape. Why he did not do so, is not completely clear. But what is clear is that his counterparts in other quarters wanted to rebuff his possible claims and relegate him to the subordinate position that a chief of a suburban quarter would usually hold. Coulibaly did not try to claim a higher political position and indeed literally confirmed his subordinate rank in the urban political landscape.

Another incident may help to clarify the social, political and personal advantages of such a position. By the end of 2010, when the presidential elections had led into the impasse of having two presidents and two governments at a time, many if not most rebel soldiers had left Korhogo for Bouaké, where the headquarter of the rebellion was situated, and the former frontline between the two halves of the country further south. In a situation of no-peace no-war, the suburban quarters of Korhogo were mostly left to their own devices. Coulibaly had an intimate knowledge of the youth of his quarter and also knew who was still hiding weapons and ammunition from the 2002/03 civil war. He had repeatedly told us about the danger that former rebel soldiers would make use of such weapons for their own agenda. Coulibaly knew who these young men were and what weapons they had.

Shortly after it became clear that the political competition between the two presidential candidates Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara would lead into a dead end, i.e. after December 4 when they both had themselves sworn in office, Djoungolo Coulibaly told everybody that he wanted to re-establish the self-defence group that had already existed in the quarter during the most violent phase of the civil war in 2002 and 2003. Coulibaly did not simply invite the same old people to set up a new self-defence force; he said that a larger basis would be needed to protect the quarter against criminals and "intruders from outside". The advisory committee played a decisive role because they knew who of their own guys would be a possible danger to the segmentary balance of actors in the quarter. As headman, Coulibaly then asked the *dozo*, the hunters, and the youth of the quarter to work together.¹³ Similar to the politics of the rebels at a larger scale, he then identified spots in and around Cocody where the members of the newly erected self-defence groups should hold night watches. This meant that older and younger, hunters and others would have to work closely together, thus neutralising to some extent the possibly violent potential of one or the other. By the end of 2010, the quarter was calm and safe, and many inhabitants said that they were lucky to live in this place.

13 On the *dozo* hunters in northern Côte d'Ivoire, see Hellweg (ed.) 2004, Hellweg 2006, Förster 2009, 2010.



A young hunter policing at a public gathering (Korhogo, Jan. 2009).

An analysis of the political figuration shows that Djoungolo Coulibaly and his advisory committee were aiming at stabilizing the particular segmentary modes of governance that his quarter had developed over the past eight years since the beginning of the insurgency in Côte d'Ivoire. Creating a joint mission for social actors with possibly diverging agendas binds them to the norms and values that are first kept up by the hunters but sufficiently shared by the other social actors to turn them into a reliable basis for joint activities. Societal creativity grows out of iterated practices and the imagination of the actors, in which Djoungolo Coulibaly plays a key role. In the first case, he built on the already established practice of collecting fees for public services, which the rebels and their 'private' partners had introduced previously. In the second case, he bound potentially violent actors to an already existing institution, the *dozoya*, thus creating a new kind of institutional framework. For two reasons, he could not have done so if he would have displayed political ambitions himself. First, it would have provoked resistance and reactions by other actors in the urban political landscape, making it impossible to maintain his own position as a mediator in his own quarter. Second, it would have become very difficult to maintain a hold over the different actors and their diverging agendas. The way he acted carried a segmentary figuration that existed with other actors at a larger scale, i.e. in the city as an emerging political entity, forward to a lower level, in this case a suburban quarter. In the course of the crisis, Cocody emancipated to some degree from the higher level and its segmentary figuration of governance adapted to the particular local setup of social actors – but it remained a segmentary figuration of governance. Together with his advisory committee, Coulibaly and his team managed to respond to a major societal problem, that of security. Governance in Cocody did not address all fields, but it was provided to all inhabitants and also to those who came there either as visitors or as traders to the newly established market. It was generalised governance in a social sense but not in a spatial sense.

The Politics of Governance: A Research Agenda

Research on the politics of governance is a necessity in all social settings, as the outline of the four figurations has shown. None should be taken for granted. We must not take for granted that the state will always emerge as the dominant actor in processes of political transformation, nor is it certain that it will always remain dominant if it has acquired such a position once. We are convinced that much more systematic research on the politics of governance is needed. It has to avoid any normative understanding of governance. Presuming that a particular mode of governance or, in our words, a specific figuration is 'better' than the others is a mistake. It does not take into account that governance in many parts of the world relies on a specific interaction of actors that will not follow the usual Western models. Politics may take different forms, and with them, other modes of governance are likely to emerge.

Research on the politics of governance has to start from an analysis of its basic premises, namely a thorough knowledge of the actors and their agency, a comprehensive inquiry into the content and scope of governance and an examination of how it transforms over time. If set up as an empirical research program, it would have to start from the following two points:

- A comprehensive mapping of the actors with regard to their organisation, their agency, their motivation and intentions.
- A tracking of their interactions in terms of economic, social and cultural exchange.

This is an essential basis for further inquiries. It should lead into an analysis of discursive formations which would immediately allow us to trace the social and political relations between the different actors. However, the politics of governance with its particular focus on how problems are identified and handled by society remain underexplored if one would limit research to social relations only. It requires a more focused approach that addresses the following questions:

Apparently, specific social figurations are linked to particular modes of governance. To what degree and how do the former shape or even determine the latter? There is a need for more research on such dynamics, in particular for non-normative perspectives. They call for a neutral heuristic toolkit, which we have sketched out above.

A second research strand will have to focus on how the figurations relate to each other. This perspective has two objectives. One is how different figurations overlap and influence others in a particular social space. This research has to address questions of scale, in particular politics of scale. The state, for instance, may be dominant at the national level but may leave much freedom for other figurations at lower levels.

The other objective is to analyse how the figurations of governance may transform over time. This perspective is closely linked to the former. A case as Cocody in Korhogo may generate more effective and sustainable modes of segmentary governance. But to what degree will it stimulate similar transformations elsewhere in the city? Or at more general levels, say the region or even the nation state? The fact that it exists already contradicts the usual assumption that such translations mainly work top-down. As we have tried to show, the other way round is an option that may be as open as the first – and maybe more promising.

Last but not least, we have to look at these processes as possibilities for social actors to emancipate from the constraints that others want to impose on them. Again, the very small case study proves that such transformations are possible, and that they may lead to better, more liberating or democratic modes of governance than what is usually taken for granted by state actors or development agencies. It is this creative potential of society that we are ultimately interested in.

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