

**SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY, POWER, CORRUPTION AND
POVERTY**

**Colm Allan, Director, Centre for Social Accountability (and Public Service
Accountability Monitor), Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa**

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Introduction

In this paper I argue that continued poverty within African states needs to be situated and explained within the context of weak social accountability systems in these states.¹ The prevalence of corruption in African states is attributed to the weakness of these social accountability systems, rather than being attributable to the influence of irrational cultural or political beliefs, or the position of these states within the international economic order, as asserted by liberal and Marxist development theorists respectively.

I maintain that neither the prevailing neo-liberal nor Marxist approaches to poverty and development in Africa provide a feasible policy framework for realizing the social and economic needs of the poor. In particular, neither theoretical approach provides a coherent examination of the conditions necessary for the elimination of poverty or of the necessarily enabling role to be played by the state in this process. Both approaches are criticized for their negative conceptualization of the state as a mechanism of constraint rather than enablement. As a result, I maintain that neither of these theories provide social activists and the poor with a coherent strategy for ensuring the development of socially accountable states capable of managing their public resources in ways that result in the elimination of poverty. In this paper I offer a set of reasons for these limitations relating to the theoretical assumptions underpinning both approaches.

I maintain that neo-liberalism, with its exclusive emphasis on the rights and utilitarian powers of individuals, not only fails to recognise those structures responsible for reproducing poverty and inequality in African states, but also a weakening of the very state processes and institutions required to deliver public goods and services necessary to meet social and economic needs. For the poor, this approach to poverty alleviation hinges on little more than their right to choose the use of private service providers to meet their needs, which, given that by definition they cannot afford to exercise this 'choice', offers little by way of strategy to overcome their poverty.

Similarly, the exclusive emphasis on the unequal distribution of economic resources by determinist Marxists in explaining poverty (the most recent example of which is the focus on the unequal global distribution of material wealth by a vocal lobby of 'anti-globalisation' activists) overlooks the immediate needs and interests of the poor and, worse still, relieves the elites of African states of responsibility for the progressive realization of basic human rights within their available public resources. It also prevents civic actors from engaging with and strengthening the state in ways that are required to ensure the long term capacity to realize social and economic rights.

¹ This does not imply that weak social accountability systems are the sole source of poverty within African states. Clearly, the inequitable distribution of economic resources at an international level is also a crucial factor in explaining the *historical* prevalence of poverty in African states. This historical legacy aside, however, I maintain that the *current* failure to reproduce effective social accountability systems is the primary reason for the *continued* prevalence of poverty.

The argument advanced in this paper is based on a social realist explanatory methodology. I adopt an approach to social theory which recognizes the independent existence and causal powers of three key elements in any social formation: social agents (deemed to be reflexive and innovative); ideational social structures (defined by agents' access to theories and ideas); and material social structures (defined by agents access to material resources). All three of these elements are identified as having emergent properties (that is, giving rise to properties which cannot be reduced to their constituent parts) which serve to shape social interaction². Consistent with this realist approach, the concept of power adopted sees power itself as an emergent property arising from the interplay between the emergent properties of material structures, ideas and people.³

I also work on the explicit theoretical assumption that social structures are by definition concept, activity and time dependent⁴. It is for this reason that social structures (such as those which serve to reproduce poverty) can be transformed by reflexive and innovative social agents over time. However, the ability of agents to transform structures is seen to be dependent not only on their structural position, but on their access to ideational resources.

Material social structures are seen to be the results of the combined activities of previous generations of social agents and the unintended consequences of these activities. As the outcomes of previous generations' interactions they constitute 'structural' emergent properties which shape the resource distributions, roles, institutional structures and social systems which confront subsequent generations of agents.⁵ Similarly, ideational structures are made up of sets of propositional beliefs and theories⁶ formulated by previous generations of social agents and which serve to condition the theories and beliefs available to the current generation of social agents.

In this paper, therefore, power is seen as an inherently relational phenomenon and something that must be explained in relation to the emergent properties of material structures, ideational structures, and social agents. This includes both the 'power' of the state and the 'power' of social agents (including the poor) to transform the structures responsible for reproducing poverty.

The paper is structured as follows: Parts 1 and 2 provide a critique of the neo-liberal and determinist Marxist approaches to poverty and development by considering the following aspects of each theory: conceptualization of the state in relation to human rights and the economy; approach to poverty alleviation and development, and; conceptualization of

² See: Margaret Archer, 1995, *Realist social theory: the morphogenetic approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Roy Bhaskar, 1989a, *The possibility of naturalism, A philosophical critique of the contemporary human science (2nd edition)*, London, Harvester; 1986, *Scientific Realism and human emancipation*, London, Verso; 1989b, *Reclaiming reality, a critical introduction to contemporary philosophy*, London, Verso; Andrew Collier, 1994, *Critical Realism, An introduction to Roy Bhaskar's philosophy*, London, Verso.

³ Margaret Archer, 1995, p.325.

⁴ Roy Bhaskar, 1989a, p.38.

⁵ Margaret Archer, 1995, p.176.

⁶ By definition this limits these beliefs and theories to those that assert either truth or falsity (ie. are propositional in nature) and can thereby be contradicted. These beliefs and theories exclude matters of interpersonal influence such as tastes, preferences, animosities and affinities. See Archer, 1995, p.180.

(and strategy for achieving) social accountability. Part 2 also provides a review of recent theories of how to deepen democracy, which have either attempted to extend or transcend the traditional liberal representative and neo-liberal approaches to the state.

Part 3 offers an alternative to the above approaches. It attempts to re-theorise the relationship between structure, agency and ideas found within current approaches to the state and development in Africa and within the policy frameworks and practical activist strategies designed to eradicate poverty. It offers a rights-based definition of social accountability, sets out five key processes necessary for any viable social accountability system, and calls for a reconceptualisation of the relationship between civic actors and the state within this system. It also provides a practical illustration of how any given social accountability system can be monitored. It does so by evaluating the management of public resources within South Africa's poverty-stricken Eastern Cape province.

The paper concludes by calling for the establishment of a new research programme on the relationship between social accountability systems, the eradication of poverty, and the realization of social and economic rights in African states.

Part 1 : The failure of liberalism to theorise the state, development and social accountability

Liberation movements throughout Africa during the colonial era drew heavily on variants of Marxist political theory as the inspiration for their anti-colonial struggles. The influence of Marxist theory in post-liberation African states shaped the emergence of influential approaches such as 'dependency' theory, which dominated development thinking in Africa between the 1960s and the 1990s.

However, in the wake of the revolutions that swept Eastern and Central Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a widespread loss of confidence in Marxist social and political theory, and a global retreat on the part of those advocating for a socialist transformation of society.

With the collapse of the 'Eastern Bloc', influential proponents of western market capitalism triumphantly announced the demise of Marxism as a political ideology and called for an acceptance of the universal logic of liberal democracy and market-oriented thinking.⁷ As a result, the intellectual and policy-making environment internationally since the 1990s has been dominated by liberal democratic and neo-liberal economic theory, the assumptions of which have gone largely unchallenged. Policymakers and development activists, whether from the North or South (with the exception of the small, but vocal, core of anti-globalisation activists mentioned above), appear to have resigned themselves to an acceptance of a development framework shaped by the liberal model of democracy and its attendant approaches to the state and to social justice.

This triumphalism is ironic, given that neither the liberal nor the Marxist theoretical tradition has been able to develop an adequate account of the role of the state in relation to the most pressing developmental challenges of our time. These include the challenges of how to most effectively organise social resources in order to address pressing social needs, and how to ensure social accountability (as a set of structured

⁷ See Francis Fukuyama, 1989, 'The end of history', *The National Interest*, No 16.

social relationships in which those responsible for the management of public resources, whether private or public service providers, provide ongoing justifications for their decisions and performance in realising people's basic human rights and take steps to correct the ineffective use or abuse of resources) as the basis for ensuring social justice.

1.1 Neo-liberal economic theory and the conceptualisation of poverty

Liberal theories of the state have traditionally been preoccupied with the question of how to protect the rights of individuals and how to limit the state's capacity to intrude on individual 'freedoms'. Rights are conceived of as negative liberties, with citizens having fundamental entitlements which prohibit state interference in their activities. For this reason, liberals have traditionally advanced a minimalist conception of the state and have generally limited the concept of accountability to the rights of individual citizens to elect and recall their political representatives at regular intervals (i.e. to the political accountability of office bearers).

As Martha Nussbaum has noted, because of their concept of rights as negative liberties, in the absence of state interference liberals deem individual rights to have been secured. This methodologically individualist and atomistic approach to social explanation has wide ranging implications, not only for how liberals have viewed the state, but for their account of the relationship between the state and the free market economy.⁸

An article of faith of liberalism, as David Held notes, has been the insistence that the market provides an inherently rational mechanism for decision-making regarding economic matters, all of which are seen to fall outside of the formal political domain.⁹ Within the free-market economy individuals exercise their right to make choices and act on their preferences, for example by choosing what consumer goods to spend their money on. For this reason it is assumed that the organisation of society is best left to market forces. Competition between individuals and companies is held to stimulate innovation and efficiency.

At its foundation, the orthodox neo-classical (or 'marginalist') theory employed by neo-liberal economists rests on the idea of an economically rational actor or *homo economicus*, as Martin Hollis has shown.¹⁰ This rational actor is assumed to engage in calculative optimising behaviour in response to observable events and the measurable states of affairs making up his or her social environment. On this basis orthodox liberal economists have attempted to develop predictive models (including recent 'econometric' models) to identify the 'laws' linking the economic choices of the atomistic individuals making up any given society and their resulting behavioural patterns. Their self professed objective has been to predict the future economic behaviour of individuals and

⁸ Martha Nussbaum, 2001, *Capabilities as fundamental entitlements: Sen and social justice*, paper presented at conference on Sen's work, Bielefeld, Germany.

⁹ Held, D, 1993, Liberalism, Marxism and Democracy, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 22, No.2. April 1993.

¹⁰ Hollis defines *homo economicus* or 'rational economic man' as the 'primum mobile' of neo-classical economics. Hollis says 'He is neither tall nor short, fat nor thin, married nor single... We do not know what he wants. But we do know that, whatever it is, he will maximize ruthlessly to get it ... as producer he maximizes market-share or profit. As consumer he maximizes utility by omniscient and improbable comparison of, for instance, marginal strawberries with marginal cement'. Martin Hollis and Edward J Nell, 1975, *Rational economic man, a philosophical critique of neo-classical economics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

economic events. However, as the realist economist Tony Lawson points out, the entire theoretical approach rests on a sleight of hand. The liberal economist has to impute some commonly held objective (say, the utility of luxury motor vehicles) and a set of beliefs (the need to make rational choices between available luxury brands) to the rational agent and subsequently impose an ordering on the potential satisfiers responsible for satisfying the imputed objective.¹¹

The empiricist and atomistic assumptions underpinning this orthodox approach to economic theory have had a profound influence on how current policy makers have attempted to conceptualise poverty. Branwen Gruffydd-Jones has provided an analysis of the World Bank's measurement of poverty within its 1990 World Development Report. In this report poverty is defined as 'the inability to attain a minimum standard of living'¹². Through her analysis of the research methodology employed by the authors of this report, Gruffydd-Jones shows how poverty is reduced to a measurable condition (the lack of income) distributed among a proportion of the aggregate collection of individuals who make up society. The specific measures employed by World Bank economists to explain poverty include the geographic location of poor individuals, their types of physical environment, demographic characteristics, ownership of assets, social positions, occupations, sources of income, and spending of incomes.¹³

The same observations can be made in respect of the World Bank's 2004 Development Report (titled *Making services work for poor people*), in which the poor are defined on the basis of their consumption, wealth and income. In respect of consumption, poor people are defined as 'those living in households below a particular threshold of this measure of consumption, such as below \$1 or \$2 a day, or below a nationally defined level'. The difficulty, as the World Bank acknowledges, is that many surveys do not include consumption data for the poor, as this is difficult to collect. Consequently, it proposes that the poor be defined in terms of either 'asset' or 'wealth' quintiles. It says: 'one approach to assigning people to quintiles is to aggregate indicators of a household's asset, ownership and housing characteristics into an index, and then to rank households according to this index'.¹⁴

The problem with this definition of poverty, as Gruffydd-Jones notes, is that these empirically measurable characteristics used to describe poverty are simultaneously held to be the determinants of continued poverty.¹⁵ Consequently, the World Bank's solution to poverty is conceived of as a purely technical and economic matter. It consists of 'how to raise the income of poor persons to the level of the poverty line'. In other words, the solution to continued poverty has nothing to do with the structural position of the poor. It has to do with changing the 'income earning opportunities' of atomistic individuals. (By contrast, as I will argue later, the sustainable elimination of poverty requires something decidedly different from the redefinition of the status of atomistic individuals in terms economic indicators such as income and wealth. It involves the establishment of social

¹¹ Tony Lawson, 1997, *Economics and Reality*, London, Routledge, p.186.

¹² World Bank, 1990, World Development Report: *What do we know about the poor?* p.26, quoted in Branwen Gruffydd-Jones, 2000, *Explaining global poverty: a realist critique of the orthodox approach*, Journal of Critical Realism? date

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ World Bank, 2004, World Development Report: *Making services work for poor people*. p.20.

¹⁵ Branwen Gruffydd-Jones, 2000, p.3.

accountability structures and is inextricably linked to the realisation of human rights and capabilities).

The current tendency to reduce society to the conduct of atomistic individuals has also strongly influenced participatory approaches to development and poverty alleviation. As Subramaniyam points out, the participatory method of data collection, which doubles up as a bottom-up approach to local planning, claims to be sensitive to local and indigenous knowledge. This approach has the motto, coined by the development practitioner Robert Chambers, of 'putting the last first' and has gained considerable currency since the 1990s. The World Bank, for instance, has since the late 1990s encouraged the adoption of this approach at local level by development practitioners and has published a resource kit setting out a variety of participatory appraisal techniques. But, as Subramaniyam notes, this approach runs the risk of naively legitimising the validity of information provided by local informants as 'real information'.¹⁶

Subramaniyam argues, drawing on current development practices in India, that methods such as participatory rural appraisals, which claim to have tapped the 'real' knowledge of otherwise atomistic individuals by exercises like village map drawing and use of simple props to ask people to rank them in order of preference to decide what people 'really want', have oversimplified the whole issue of development. The proponents of this approach claim that 'sense experience' based information is 'real', thereby denying the possibility of probing deeper for the underlying reasons and processes which give rise to poverty.¹⁷

The problem, as Lawson observes, is the collapse within neo-liberal economics of the individual's needs and rights into their preferences, tastes and wants and the assumption that these can be measured by their purchases, etc. As a consequence, neo-liberal theorists are incapable of explaining the relationship between these preferences and people's deeper needs (as shaped by their structural positions)¹⁸. Neo-liberal attempts to measure (and in so doing assess) human 'well-being' are restricted, as in the case of the World Bank, to simple and superficial indices of poverty and levels of income. By contrast, as Lawson argues, people have real needs¹⁹ that can take the form of a number of historically contingent wants, and which may be met by any number of potential satisfiers. To assume that some of these satisfiers, such as the purchase of particular commodities, are defining of human needs is to reduce people's needs to their wants, and their wants to the conditions of their being satisfied.

The fundamental flaw in liberal economic theory, as Lawson and other realists have argued, is the tendency to substitute the economic analyst's own approach to social reality, premised on the theoretical construct of the 'instrumentally rational' actor, for reality itself. So, for instance, individuals are seen as driven by their instrumental interests to engage in preference formation by attempting to optimise their goals as 'rational choosers'. The assumption is that while individuals influence the world through their choices, the world (and the manner in which it is structured around access to resources) does not exert any influence back on them, except by attaching risks and

¹⁶ Venkatraman Subramaniyam, 2000, Critical realism and development programmes in rural South India, *Journal of Critical Realism*, Vol 4, No 1, p.19.

¹⁷ Venkatraman Subramaniyam, 2000, p.21.

¹⁸ Tony Lawson, 1997, p.278.

¹⁹ With regard to real needs see Martha Nussbaum, 2001.

costs to their choices.²⁰ This, as recent realist social theory has shown, overlooks the independent existence and causal influence of structures (including the state and economic structures), various interest groups, and prevailing ideational and belief systems, on any social formation (I return to elaborate on the importance of these points in Part 2).

1.2 The Liberal Account of Development - From the liberal modernisation thesis to neo-patrimonialism and New Public Management

Until the 1960s, development theory was premised on the belief that there was a single and uniform logic to social and economic development and that all societies would have to pass through the same developmental processes. It was assumed that Africa would inevitably follow the Western route to a modern industrial economy. During the process its traditional cultural values and political beliefs would be abandoned in favour of instrumentally rationalist values more appropriate to the modern free-market economy and the rational-legal state. This is the essence of the liberal modernisation thesis.

The thesis is strongly influenced by the work of the neo-classical economic and social theorist Max Weber. Weber argued that a crucial element in the expansion of capitalist manufacture is the rational organisation of business enterprise which enables profitability and, therefore, the accumulation and subsequent reinvestment of capital. For Weber this involved a number of features: an assessment of the most efficient use of capital; expansion through cost reduction and re-investment; and continual efforts to outperform competitors. He refers to this 'methodical, rational way of life' as the 'spirit of capitalism'.²¹

Weber drew a strong contrast between traditional and modern forms of society and linked modernity to the individual's ability to escape from the shackles of traditional cultural values. Similarly, modernisation theorists maintain that the continued underdevelopment of Third World societies is the result of the stranglehold of backward-looking traditional belief systems on these societies. Their explanations range from arguments about parochialism and patriarchalism, to clientelism and neo-patrimonialism.

The modernisation thesis rests on a number of important assumptions. Firstly, the ability of individual actors to change their values, norms and cultural and political beliefs is held to be the most important condition for social change and development (rather than change being conditional on the transformation of social structures). Secondly, the initial development of industrialisation in Western capitalist states, premised on instrumentally rational ideas and technologies associated with capitalist forms of economic organisation (epitomised by rational-legal bureaucracy at the level of the state), is held to be the blueprint for all development (consequently, the terms 'modernisation' and 'development' are treated as synonymous).²²

For the above reasons it was maintained that development would take the form of a diffusion – i.e. an increasing specialisation and division of labour – including some of the

²⁰ Margaret Archer, 2000, Realism and the problem of agency, *Journal of Critical Realism*, Vol 5, No1, p.12.

²¹ Max Weber, The Protestant sects and the spirit of capitalism, in HH Gerth and C Wright Mills, 1948, *From Max Weber, Essays in Sociology*, p.321.

²² Andrew Webster, 1984, *Introduction to the sociology of development*, London, Macmillan, p.54.

following features; urbanisation based on nuclear family households; educational growth; development of mass media; heightened political awareness and participation in a democratic system; increased business opportunity and entrepreneurialism; and the replacement of traditional authority with rational systems of law and representative government.²³

Unsurprisingly, given the continued preponderance of traditional political and cultural practices, by the 1980s, the proponents of this thesis had become increasingly frustrated with the failure of African states to follow their predictive model (premised on the assumption that individuals are universally rational utility maximisers). It became necessary to acknowledge that instead of adopting the impersonalised forms of public administration found within the Western world (characterised by a strict separation between public and private interests, and the impartial application of the law), Africa remained dominated by personalised forms of exchange. For instance, if the average African citizen needed to obtain a licence, register a piece of land, secure a place in school or a hospital bed, reliance would be placed on personal relationships to serve their needs. –Invariably this would involve obtaining favours from a relative, friend or member of the same ethnic or religious community.²⁴

This realisation led to a revision of the liberal modernisation thesis and the re-definition of the situation in sub-Saharan African countries as ‘neo-patrimonial’. According to these theorists traditional forms of exchange, deeply rooted in African culture, have prevented a separation between public and private spheres from emerging in Africa. This failure to separate the private and public spheres has led to failed African states marked by unaccountable one-party and military regimes and the flourishing of dishonesty and corruption.²⁵ More than 40 sub-Saharan African states are characterized as sharing the core features of presidentialism, clientelism and the use of state resources for political legitimization that are said to define neo-patrimonial states.

These three political features, which involve the ‘irrational’ interventions of the state into the otherwise instrumentally rational workings of the economy, are held responsible for the lack of economic development in neo-patrimonial regimes.²⁶ Public investment in the internal economy of these neo-patrimonial states is observed to be inadequate because most of the state’s money goes into paying the salary bills of members of the political class. As a result, public infrastructure is poorly maintained. Moreover, state departments often do little more than exist as there is no money available for operating funds. The net consequence of this situation, according to the neo-patrimonial theorists,

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Jackson, RH and Rosberg CG, 1982, *Personal rule in black Africa: prince, autocrat, prophet, tyrant*, Berkely, University of California Press. Christopher Clapham, 1895, *Third World politics, an introduction*, London, Croom Helm. Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, 1997, *Democratic Experiments in Africa, Regime transitions in comparative perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

²⁵ See Bratten and van de Walle, 1997

²⁶ See also: Richard Sandbrook, 1985, *The politics of Africa’s economic stagnation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Sandbrook asserts that neopatrimonialism or ‘personal rule’ introduces a variety of economic irrationalities in post colonial African states. He argues that the otherwise productive economy of these states is impeded by political instability, systemic corruption and maladministration.

is a state apparatus that is too big for the economy to sustain and too weak and inefficient to collect revenues.²⁷

At the same time, the combination of clientelism, rent-seeking and economic policy manipulation creates a climate of economic uncertainty and risk that scares long-term investors away. This leaves the economy in the hands of short-term speculators who wreak havoc on it. The standard neo-liberal antidote to this situation is to shrink the size of the state and privatise as much of the bloated public administration as is possible. This is precisely the approach which dominated international development policy during the 1980s and early 1990s.

During the 1980s a number of neo-liberal inspired attempts to reform public administration in the least developed countries were formulated under the direction of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) including the World Bank as part of what became known as 'structural adjustment programmes'. The objective of these programmes was to address the very real problems associated with bloated government administrations, shrinking public revenues and growing public debt by reducing public sector spending. The policy mechanisms for achieving this objective included a combination of reducing the size of the public sector and its wage bill and by privatising public assets. The net result of these structural adjustment programmes proved to be a deeply unpopular reduction in public spending and culminated, in most instances, in a decline in the scope and effectiveness of the state rather than the fiscal stability originally intended.²⁸

The assumptions underpinning these reforms were inspired by a model of public administration known as New Public Management (NPM). NPM involves the application of private sector management principles to government agencies with a focus on the principles of client focus, decentralisation, and the use of private partners for service delivery. Its standard tools include increased 'competition, autonomisation, disaggregation and deregulation'.²⁹ The World Bank continued to enthusiastically disseminate these tools during the 1990s, despite the unpopularity of their earlier structural adjustment programmes.

On the whole, the liberal approach to development can be seen to rest on the strengthening of the economy, and a corresponding shrinking of the responsibilities of the state. As I intend to argue now, however, one of the necessary consequences of the current neo-liberal approach to the state is the weakening of the structures and capacity of the constitutional state.

1.3 The neo-liberal approach to the state, governance and social accountability

²⁷ As a result of this state of affairs there has been a general decline in state revenues as a proportion of the economy throughout Sub-Saharan Africa in the post-colonial era according to Bratton and van de Walle. For the 23 countries (which have economic figures available) there was a dramatic decrease in revenue collection by the 1980's (18.3% of GNP compared to 30.5% in OECD countries). As a result most African countries have had to rely increasingly on foreign aid to pay for basic functions. In Zambia, for instance, aid was equivalent to 32.7% of GNP by 1993 with government revenues a mere 11.9% of GDP in 1991 (down from 27% in 1980). Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997, p67.

²⁸ See United Nations, 2006, *Governance for the Future: Democracy and Development in the Least Developed Countries*, UN-OHRLS and UNDP, p.54.

²⁹ Ibid.

As I have noted, neo-liberal economic theory stresses the primacy of free-market principles. As a result, it has also been referred to as 'market fundamentalism'. This is due to its underlying assumption that the market economy left to itself (free and unfettered by the state) will work perfectly. Its key assumption is that market forces, constituted by rational utility maximizing individuals, informed by the profit motive, will drive the economy to efficient outcomes. I have shown how this approach relies on a social philosophy of individual responsibility and, correspondingly, de-emphasizes the significance of structural social effects, such as those related to socio-economic class or poverty.

Neo-liberalism in this sense has been translated into a range of policy initiatives or, in many instances, retreats from existing government responsibilities. As Calhoun points out, it has broadly challenged the role of organized labor, pursued free trade policies to enhance capital mobility, sought the deregulation of industry and markets, privatized institutions that provide public goods (e.g., electricity, water, healthcare), cut funding for social services (while shifting responsibility from the community to individuals and voluntary associations), and sought a reduction in taxes.³⁰

In the context of the hegemony of neo-liberal ideas over policymaking, in recent years the focus of thinking on governance and corruption in developing countries has shifted from the size and institutional make-up of the state, to the concept of 'citizenship'. A growing body of literature has sought to emphasise the importance of direct citizen intervention in exercising control over state governance and in holding the state and other institutions accountable.³¹ (I return to this work in Part 2). In this context, it has been maintained that citizens as 'account-holders' have superior rights of authority over state officials ('accountors') and have the right to demand answers and impose sanctions on officials.³²

The emphasis on the powers and active agency of citizens within this body of thought may not be universally premised on the assumptions of neo-liberal economic theory for all of its proponents, but there is a strong synergy between the individualist, anti-determinist and voluntaristic assumptions informing this new 'citizen-centred' approach and the neo-liberal policy framework.³³

³⁰ Craig Calhoun (ed), 2002, *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, Oxford University Press: Oxford. and Joseph Stiglitz, 2002, *Globalisation and its discontents*, Allen Lane: London.

³¹ Jones, E and Gaventa, 2002, *The Concept of Citizenship, A Review*, IDS Development Bibliography, No. 19.

³² See Mulgan, R, 2000, *Accountability: An ever expanding concept*. Public Administration, Vol 78, No. 3, 2000 (555-573).

³³ It is worth noting that a number of current commentators who have criticised World Bank accountability initiatives still share the same social atomistic and voluntarist assumptions that inform the World Bank's approach. In particular, their focus remains fixed on the powers of individual citizens. The primary limitation of these citizen-centred approaches is that they fail to engage with the importance of developing social structures and enduring social relationships that would institutionalise accountability relations between social agents and the state. Their focus is on the lived experiences of citizens in communities seeking to campaign for accountability in the use of local public resources is premised for the most part on a notion of 'unconstrained' human agency. (See Newell, P and Wheeler, J, 2006, *Rights, Resources and the Politics of Accountability*, Zed Books: London,p.2)

The 'citizen-centred' concept of accountability and the language of 'civic empowerment' developed by this approach in the past decade has been actively co-opted by influential neo-liberal interest groups. The social development division within the World Bank, as a case in point, has drawn an explicit connection between accountability and what it calls 'civic engagement'. In its terms:

Accountability is defined as the ability to call public officials, private employers, or service providers to account, requiring that they be answerable for their policies, actions and use of funds.³⁴

What is significant about this definition is that it extends the concept of responsibility for service provision beyond the traditional liberal realm of political accountability, which has been concerned with the capacity of citizenry to hold government officials, and their elected political representatives, to account. The World Bank proceeds to argue that accountability involves both an *obligation* on public officials or corporations and a *right* of people or citizens. Further, these public/corporate officials can be held accountable for their conduct or adherence to rules, and performance.³⁵

The focus on the obligations of private service providers and corporations, in contrast to the traditional liberal focus on public officials and politicians, is what differentiates this concept of 'social' accountability from that of 'political' accountability.

The World Bank summarises its definition of social accountability in compelling terms as 'an approach towards building accountability':

- that relies on civic engagement,
- where ordinary citizens and/or their organisations participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability
- It is '*demand-driven*' or '*bottom-up*'
- and complements non-effective, formal accountability systems'.³⁶

As I will illustrate, however, this approach rests heavily on the same neo-liberal economic assumptions discussed above, which ironically, if successfully translated into policy practice, would serve to significantly weaken the capacity of the state and undermine its ability to manage public resources effectively. This is due to the impact of these assumptions in by-passing and undermining critical constitutional oversight and social accountability processes within the state.

1.4 The World Bank's 'short' and 'long' routes to accountability

For the World Bank the concept of accountability is inseparable from the rational logic of the 'free-market' economy. In a restatement of the traditional liberal article of faith it asserts that:

³⁴ Empowerment and Poverty Reduction Sourcebook, World Bank, 2002.

³⁵ Janmejay Singh, '*From shouting to counting*', *introducing the concept of social accountability*, Participation and Civic Engagement Group, Social Development Department, The World Bank, Powerpoint presentation, June 2004.

³⁶ Ibid.

'a competitive market automatically creates accountability of sellers to buyers. The key information is customer satisfaction, and the key enforceability is the customer's choice of supplier. Competitive markets have proved a remarkably robust institutional arrangement for meeting individual interests.'³⁷

The operative phrase in this quotation is *individual* interests. I have already noted how this approach rests on the methodological assumption that the economy is merely the aggregate of the utility maximizing and rational choices of the socially atomistic individuals. As a result, the 'market' is defined by the World Bank as 'an idealised set of relationships of accountability [that] relies more or less exclusively on client power - and only on that part of client power that is based on choice, backed by purchasing power'. It is by following this logic that 'customer power' is defined as the main relationship of accountability ('one of the strengths of the market is that customers will buy where they perceive the greatest satisfaction - so organisations have incentives to be responsive to clients').³⁸

The World Bank's World Development Report 2004, entitled *Making Services work for Poor People*, extends these methodological assumptions to offer an analytical and policymaking framework to address poor service delivery and poverty. Given that the starting point of this framework is the individual service transaction between the client and the provider, the poor too are defined as the 'clients' of services. In fact, whilst the poor are simultaneously 'clients' and 'citizens', it is as a result of their definition as clients that they are deemed to have an interest in accountability.³⁹

It is by generalising from this market transaction that the World Bank breaks any necessary linkage between the pursuit of accountability by the poor and the pursuit of their fundamental human rights. As a result, accountability is reduced to 'a relationship among actors that has five features: delegation, finance, performance, information on performance, enforceability'.⁴⁰ By combining these elements of a standard economic transaction the World Bank identifies two main approaches (or routes) to achieving accountability.⁴¹ These are the 'short' and the 'long' routes, and are illustrated in the diagram below:

³⁷ World Bank, 2004, World Development Report: *Making services work for poor people* p.52.

³⁸ Ibid, p.57.

³⁹ The World Bank offers the following justification for making accountability a property of client exchange-based transactions. It maintains that in a competitive -market transaction such as buying a sandwich, poor people would get the service that they require because they can hold the service provider accountable. 'The consumer pays the provider directly; he can observe whether or not he has received the sandwich; and if he is dissatisfied, he has the power over the provider with repeat business or, in the case of fraud, with legal or social sanctions'. Ibid, p.6.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.47.

⁴¹ See Janmejy Singh,, June 2004.

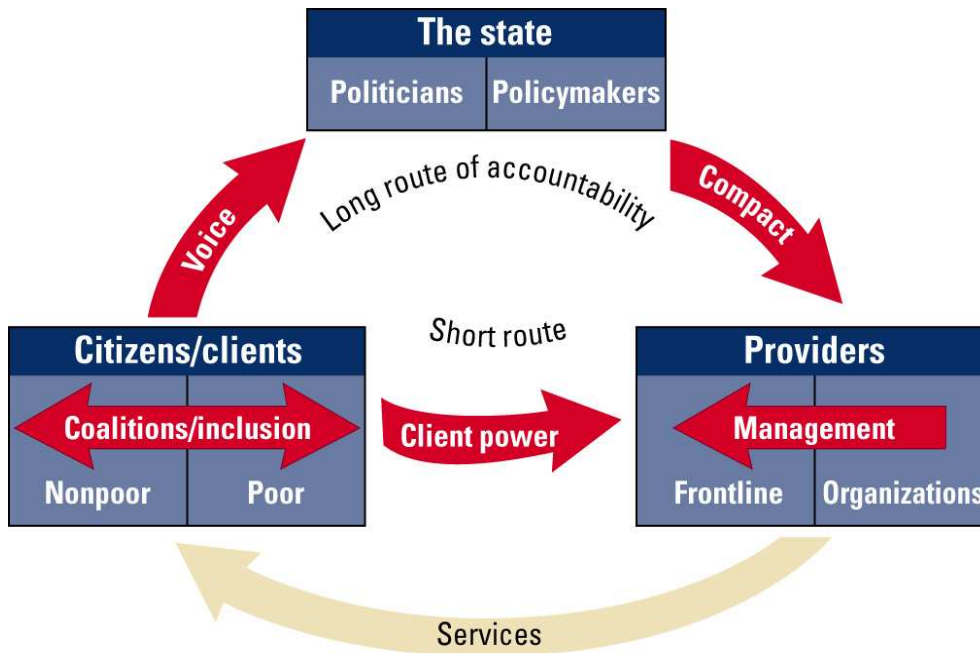


Figure 1: The long and the short routes to social accountability⁴²

The 'short route' of accountability involves clients/citizens interacting with service providers on the same basis as which they would enter into a market transaction. 'In a simple market transaction, the buyer holds the seller accountable for the product bought, rewards the seller by repeating business, or penalises the seller by choosing another provider. This accountability is 'short' because the client can hold the provider directly accountable, without any intermediaries. The 'long route' of accountability, by contrast, involves the state as an intermediary in the provision of services.⁴³

In the 'long route' the arrangements are no longer primarily between the client and the provider. New accountability relationships become important. These include *voice*, where citizens delegate to politicians the responsibility to ensure the provision of services they want. They also involve *compacts* between policymakers and providers to design the service delivery framework, choose providers, and ensure that providers meet citizen expectations. As the World Bank puts it "voice and compacts together become the 'long route' of accountability".⁴⁴

The 'short route' to accountability, it should be noted, rests on the undeniable assumption that in order to short circuit elements of the 'long route' - including the development of effective public administration systems and effective parliamentary and constitutional oversight institutions - citizens should use their power as consumers to ensure their service needs are met. It is on this 'transactional' basis that the World Bank advocates that citizens become involved in civic engagement (by, among other things, tracking public expenditure and monitoring the performance of service providers). By engaging in these activities individual citizens can collectively use their power as consumers, or their 'client power', to hold service providers to account.

⁴² Ibid. See also World Bank, 2004, p.249.

⁴³ World Bank, 2004, p.161.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.162.



Figure 2: Social engagement and social accountability⁴⁵

However, the 'client'-centered interpretation of civic engagement and social accountability advocated in the short route clearly presupposes the existence of a range of private service providers from which citizens can choose during the course of the exercise of their 'client power'. This stands to reason as, in competitive free market terms, the only real 'power' capable of being exercised by clients as the consumers of services is the power to procure one's services elsewhere. In the World Bank's own words 'When clients are given a choice among service providers, they reveal their demand by "voting with their feet".⁴⁶ However, in instances where there is no choice of providers, increased participation by poor people in service provision is reduced to the ability to monitor and discipline the provider (by which they mean the frontline service provider). So the real reason for involving citizens in accountability issues is that 'clients can play the role of monitors since they are present at the point of service'.⁴⁷

Whilst it maintains that it is not exclusively advocating the adoption of the 'short route' to accountability, the World Bank asserts that 'engaging poor clients in an active role - as purchasers, as monitors, and as co-producers (the "short route") - can improve performance tremendously'. It says that the way in which 'public policy can help poor people acquire better services through this route' includes: 'by expanding the influence of their own choices; by having the income of providers depend more on the demands of poor clients; by increasing the purchasing power of poor people; and by providing better information and a more competitive environment to improve the functioning of services'.⁴⁸

It is important to situate the World Bank's continuous references to the 'empowerment' of citizens within the same socially atomistic utility maximizing and transactional theoretical

⁴⁵ World Bank, 2003, Making Services Work for Poor People, The Role of Participatory Public Expenditure Management (PPEM), Social Development Notes, Note No. 81, March 2003.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.9.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.10.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.64.

frame of reference that underpins the remainder of its policy formulations. What it actually seeks to 'empower' poor people to do, within the terms of this model, is to enable them to exert an 'influence' on service providers. The standard formulas offered to help achieve this objective, it should be noted, have nothing to do with the transformation of oppressive and social structures, which constrain social agents and deprive them of access to the necessary resources or with efforts to realize their social and economic rights.

Rather, the rights and powers of the poor are reduced to their capacity to engage in transactions and their power to purchase goods. To quote the World Bank, the best way to 'empower' the poor (via the 'short route') is by: 'increasing their individual purchasing power', 'increasing their collective power over providers by organising in groups' and by 'increasing their "capacity to aspire" (which turns out to involve increased access 'to information needed to develop their personal sense of capability and entitlement')'.⁴⁹

Aside from depriving material social structures of any power to influence people's choices, this logically presupposes the privatisation of public services and the existence of a range of private service providers from whom citizens can choose to procure their services. Moreover, the emphasis on citizens as the clients of private service providers tends to be at odds with the need to build effective constitutional democracies and parliamentary institutions, as the need for these appears to be side-stepped within this model. In this way, the traditional liberal representative approach to democracy, with its focus on building the necessary constitutional oversight institutions, including strong parliamentary committees, can be differentiated from the neo-liberal approach to democracy and the state. Yet, arguably, this is because the neo-liberals have simply taken the underlying atomistic assumptions and individualist methodology of liberal theory to its logical conclusion.

1.5 The role of the state within neo-liberal theory

This brings us back to the problematic relationship between atomistic individuals, the state and the economy, which underpins both the liberal representative, and neo-liberal frameworks. That is the assumption that the absence of state interference constitutes sufficient basis for securing the rights of individuals. It is ultimately this assumption that has led liberal thinkers (of all hues) to adopt a negative conception of the state and to treat the structures of the state as forms of 'constraint'. These assumptions are evident in the World Bank's definition of the state: 'What distinguishes the sovereign state from all other institutions is its monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within its boundaries. From this monopoly, politicians derive the power to regulate, to legislate, to tax - to set the "rules of the game"'.⁵⁰ Interestingly, this definition of the state is almost identical to that offered originally by Max Weber as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory'.⁵¹

I have noted that what emerges is a preoccupation with 'rolling-back' the state. However, what also emerges is a picture of the state that has nothing to do with the pursuit of human rights or equality. As Held Maintains, liberal theorists entirely neglect the impact

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.64.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.49.

⁵¹ Max Weber, *Politics as a vocation* in HH Gerth and C Wright Mills, 1948, p.78.

of unequal market relations and skewed access to resources in constraining and limiting the democratic process. Liberal theory ultimately cannot explain how the liberty of some individuals to accumulate unlimited resources places constraints on the political liberty of many others to participate effectively in the democratic process.⁵²

The problem with the neo-liberal approach, as epitomised by the World Bank's conception of social accountability, is not merely that it fails to take into account the differential access of individuals to resources. Because it denies the independent existence of social structures, it also systematically undermines the potential role of the constitutional state as a mechanism for redressing the negative impact of concentrating control over material resources, and access to ideational resources, in the hands of a well organised minority of interest groups in society.

A theoretical precondition for the neo-liberal approach to have any explanatory or practical efficacy, as I have argued above, is the endowment of all individuals with equal access to material and ideational resources to exercise their preferences in ways that would maximise their personal utility. This would allow them to, amongst other things, choose freely between available providers of basic services (as in the example of the World Bank's 'short route' to accountability). However, such a state of equilibrium, as Marxists have traditionally argued, is not a property of the real world of inequality beset by deep social divisions that social agents (in particular, poor people) inhabit.

Part 2 : The failure of determinist Marxism to theorise the state, development and social accountability

2.1 The Marxist conceptions of the capitalist economy and the state

According to Marx, differential access to material resources gives rise to economic class divisions which shape the structure of capitalist society. This (class) structure explains the behaviour of social agents within capitalist or free-market economies. Far from expressing their freedom to exercise preferences and maximise their choices, agents' values and motivations reflect the needs of the underlying economic class structure.⁵³ Via its ownership of the means of production the dominant *capitalist class* is enabled to control the members of the subordinate *working class*.

The capitalist economy is viewed as inherently exploitative and rests on a fundamental contradiction. Workers' labour power is the sole source of value. The ability of capitalists to generate profits (surplus value) depends on their ability to pay wages to workers which are significantly below the value of the commodities which they produce. Yet, through voluntarily selling their labour-power for a wage, workers transfer any right to the surplus they have generated to the capitalist. This formal free exchange thereby constitutes the basis for the economic exploitation of the working class.⁵⁴

⁵² Held, D, 1993, op cit, p.258.

⁵³ In one rendition of economic determinism in *Capital* Marx asserts that '...individuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers [Träger] of particular class-relations and interests.' Karl Marx, 1976, *Capital Volume 1*, Preface to the First Edition, p.92. London: Penguin Books.

⁵⁴ Bob Jessop, Developments in Marxist theory in Kate Nash and Alan Scott, 2001 *The Blackwell companion to political sociology*, Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, p.8.

Bob Jessop identifies a number of interrelated themes which have traditionally characterised the Marxist analysis of power relations and the state. Firstly, (as noted) power relations are seen as a manifestation of class domination which must be situated in the deeper social structures of society, rather than an interpersonal phenomena. Although Marxists are usually aware of other types of domination and social antagonism they see these as 'overdetermined' by class domination. Secondly, Marxists have traditionally been concerned with the links between economic, political and ideological class domination over the state and social agents. Thirdly, they assume that because class domination can be explained in terms of its underlying structural 'contradictions' it is inherently fragile. Therefore, continuous efforts are required to reproduce class domination and inequality. Finally, Marxists are concerned to produce strategies and to engage in political debate about the most appropriate tactics for the dominated classes to adopt in order to challenge their position.⁵⁵

I believe that it is entirely possible to remain committed to addressing these concerns without having to endorse the economic determinism that has pervaded the history of Marxist social and political theory and its practice. Rightly or wrongly, the source of this economic determinism can be traced to Marx himself. Although Marx had maintained that the economic 'contradictions' underpinning capitalist society would inevitably result in class conflict and the replacement of capitalist social relations with a socialist society, this assertion was not borne out in his lifetime. Marx believed that one of the primary reasons for this outcome was the ability of the economic structure of capitalist society to systematically generate an ideology of 'false consciousness' among workers.

A number of Marxists subsequently drew on Marx's account of the dislocation between the surface appearance of the capitalist mode of production from its inner mechanisms, set out in *Capital* Vol 1, as the basis for explaining the mystifying abilities of the capitalist ruling class ideology. They argued that this dislocation derives from the fetishism of the commodity, where 'the relationships between the producers within which the social characteristics of their labours are manifested, take the form of a social relation between the products of labour'.⁵⁶

In *The German Ideology* Marx had also argued that 'if in all ideology men and their relations appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-processes as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process'.⁵⁷

This deterministic approach to ideology (in which the economic structure is endowed with the quasi-mystical ability to impose the ideas and beliefs necessary for its reproduction via a 'camera-obscura' onto the minds of social agents) was perpetuated and further elaborated by later Marxists who highlighted the role of the state in

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.7,8.

⁵⁶ Marx, 1976, p164. See Louis Althusser's concept of ideology developed on this theoretical basis in Althusser 1969, 1970. See also Norman Geras, 1972, p.286, who argues that Marx's theory of fetishism provides an analysis of 'the mechanisms by which capitalist society necessarily appears to its agents as something other than it really is', See also John Mephram, 1979.

⁵⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 1964, *The German Ideology*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, p.42. Marx continues to talk of 'ideological reflexes'. He says 'the phantoms formed in the brains of men are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises', *ibid*.

accounting for workers' lack of revolutionary activism. The state was seen as having responsibility for maintaining the overall structural integration and social cohesion of class domination. In these terms early Marxists such as Vladimir Lenin reduced the state to being an instrument of physical repression. Lenin's negative and constraint-based view of the state had a profound influence on his strategy for overcoming capitalist inequality and deprivations:

'if the state is the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, if it is a power standing above society and "alienating itself more and more from it", it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this "alienation"'.⁵⁸

With the emergence of an influential school of Western Marxists in the 1960s, however, the feature of ideological domination was added to the repressive functions of the state. The role of the state was now viewed as serving to 'legitimate' ruling ideas and to disguise the working class exploitation that lay at the foundation of capitalist society.⁵⁹ This gave rise to some interesting disagreements over how the state best serves the interests of the capitalist class with Ralph Milliband making the methodologically individualist assertion that the state is simply an aggregate of ruling class individuals. In opposition to this approach, Nicos Poulantzas contended that the state was a relatively autonomous set of institutional relationships structured to automatically serve the interests of the ruling class. Despite these differences, however, the Western Marxist combination of repression with ideological manipulation merely served to compound the negative and constraint-based view of the state advanced by orthodox Marxists.⁶⁰

I will return to the issue of the state shortly, however, in the interim it is important to note a second set of reasons advanced by Marxists in the 1960s for the durability and continued existence of capitalism. These turned on the ability of Western capitalism to exploit new markets in the less developed world.

2.2 Marxism and development: from imperialism to neo-colonialism and dependency

Marx had attributed part of the initial impetus for the development of European capitalism to the primitive accumulation of capital by wealthy European merchants between the 16th and 18th centuries. During this period, merchants built up huge fortunes in Western Europe by plundering raw materials and labour in the new world.⁶¹ The proposition that capitalist development in Western Europe had taken place at the expense of Africa and other regions came to underpin subsequent Marxist theories of underdevelopment.

⁵⁸ VI Lenin, 1917, *The State and Revolution*, in V.I Lenin, Selected Works, Vol 2, p.243. On this basis Lenin proceeds to argue for a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and maintains that 'the people need the state only to suppress the resistance of the exploiters, and only the proletariat can direct this suppression'. Ibid, p.254

⁵⁹ See among others, Lukacs, 1968, Althusser 1969, 1970.

⁶⁰ Ralph Milliband, 1969, *The state in capitalist society, the analysis of the western system of power*, London, Quartet books, Nicos Poulantzas, 1969, *The problem of the capitalist state*, New Left Review, No.58.

⁶¹ Marx, 1976, p.915 – 918.

Lenin, for instance, viewed the processes of colonial expansion and imperialism as the inevitable consequence of capitalism having reached its 'monopoly phase'. He argued that once capitalism had developed through the stages of mechanisation and industrialisation within Europe it had become increasingly harder to maintain its profit levels. One way in which it attempted to offset the effects of this decline in profit levels was through imperialist expansion. This allowed control over a global market, access to foreign labour, and a cheap supply of raw materials.⁶² Lenin appears to have agreed with Marx's view that capitalist expansion would have a progressive effect on the non-capitalist societies it had penetrated. It would lead to a more productive industrial capitalism in these 'backward' regions. As Marx put it 'the country that is more developed industrially only shows to the less developed the image of its own future'.⁶³

For Marx and Lenin, the working class in the advanced industrialised societies was seen as providing the main impetus for achieving socialist transformation. By acting as a revolutionary 'vanguard' it would help bring about the liberation of the less developed working class in the underdeveloped world. Like modernisation theory, Marx and Lenin both relied on an evolutionary understanding of economic and social development. It was only a matter of time before the lack of development in the third world would be transformed by the spread of the capitalist economy and its production techniques.

The view that the relationship between advanced and less developed countries would necessarily have progressive social results, however, was later to be rejected by a school of Marxist 'dependency' theorists. They maintained that poorer countries were neither immature, nor underdeveloped, but were destined to remain poor as long as their economic relations with, and subordination by, the 'West' continued.

In the 1960s the German economic historian Andre Gunder Frank began to refer to this situation as the 'development of underdevelopment'. He argued that merchant capitalism and colonialism had forced third-world countries into a position of producing only those products geared to meet the raw material needs of the colonial powers. Third world elites had been incorporated into this set of exploitative economic relations and could do little to establish more diverse forms of economic activity in their countries.⁶⁴

By virtue of their position these elites had become the intermediaries of the rich colonials and peasant producers. They were literally 'comprador' (interpreter) elites tied to the interests of their overlords in the 'metropolitan' centre. While the comprador elite enjoyed a high standard of living as a result of its relationship with the colonial metropole, the masses within dependent countries experience chronic deprivation and poverty. This led Gunder Frank to maintain that the only way of breaking out of their dependency was through a socialist revolution initiated by the third world working class in order to remove the comprador elite.

⁶² Webster, 1984 p.82.

⁶³ Marx, *Capital Vol 1*, p.91 as quoted in Webster, 1984, p.83.

⁶⁴ Andre Gunder Frank, 1978, *Dependent accumulation and underdevelopment*, London, Macmillan. See also: Webster, 1984, p.84; and Vicky Randall and Robin Thoebald, 1985, *Political change and underdevelopment, a critical introduction to third world politics*, London, Macmillan, Ch4.

For dependency theorists, as is evident, the economic and political structures of underdeveloped states in Africa are only explicable in terms of their relationship to advanced capitalist states. Ruling elites in underdeveloped states are viewed as little more than the agents of foreign domination. These elites take on the ideas, and act in terms, of the interests of their metropolitan masters, if not international capitalism. The post-colonial state is seen as the protector and guardian of foreign economic interests. Its role lies in connecting local capital to the 'system' of international capitalism. As the West Indian development theorist Walter Rodney put it in his book *How Europe underdeveloped Africa* in 1972:

The question of who and what is responsible for African underdevelopment can be answered at two levels. First, the answer is that the operation of the imperialist system bears major responsibility for African economic retardation by draining African wealth...Second, one has to deal with those who manipulate the system and those who are either agents or unwitting accomplices of the said system'.⁶⁵

This approach to the state is premised on a crude economic determinism. Because African economies are locked into the production of primary goods for export to the advanced world, they are almost entirely dependent on the regulation of trade as their source of revenue. For this reason, dependency theorists maintain that the primary function of the dependent state is the pursuit of revenue by regulating trade. This shapes the nature of politics and the administration to such an extent that some have referred to it as the 'neo-mercantilist' state. The post-colonial state in Africa is reduced to being little more than an import-export agency.

Consequently, for dependency theorists to talk about the capacity for independent action by state elites under conditions of their economic dependence is little more than an illusion. The local ruling elites, whether military or civilian, are held to be the prisoners of their circumstances.

2.3 Dependency, poverty and social accountability

I have noted how, given their determinist assumptions, dependency theorists deprive ruling elites and interest groups of any independent capacity for thought or action. Consequently, there is little point in investigating the lack of accountability of these state elites in respect of their management of local public resources.

Accountability as an issue, within this framework, is a *non-sequiter* given that the only accountability relationship countenanced is that between the local comprador elite and its western masters. Corruption is explained similarly. It is simply a by-product of the relationship between the 'comprador' elite and international capital. Those responsible for the regulation of trade with the advanced world - the 'mercantile administration' - are strategically placed to enrich themselves. It follows as a *fait accompli* that they will use their access to local political power and their control of the administration to collaborate with multinational corporations to siphon off huge amounts from public coffers.

⁶⁵ Walter Rodney, 1972, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, Washington, Howard University Press. P.27.

The point is that dependency theorists accord primacy within their explanations of development (including the extent of poverty, the lack of local accountability and prevalence of high levels of corruption) to structural economic factors. Because the economy is seen as determining the character of political and administrative activity there is little possibility of explaining the role played by competing African socio-cultural interest groups within their respective national economies in perpetuating poverty, corruption, or the failure of the state to provide effective public services within its available resources.

For instance, the continued prevalence of poverty in African states receives little by way of either analysis or explanation. As Frank puts it 'the nature and causes of poverty and the wealth of nations can only be explained with reference to their causes in the process of capital accumulation'.⁶⁶ Similarly, Rodney claims that poverty arose in Africa as a result of its interactions with Western Europe. Prior to capitalism, he maintains that African society was organized on the basis of what can only be treated as a highly romanticized principle of *communalism* in which there 'were no classes, and there was equal access to land, and equality in distribution'.⁶⁷ He claims that 'Western Europe and Africa had a relationship which ensured the transfer of wealth from Africa to Europe'.⁶⁸ Colonialism increased the dependence of Africa on Europe in terms of the numbers of persons brought into the money economy and in terms of the number of aspects of socio-economic life in Africa which derived their existence from the connection with the metropole.⁶⁹

It is similarly interesting to note that Marxist development theorists such as Colin Leys, under the sway of their economic determinist assumptions, initially denied that corruption in African states presented any kind of problem at all. In his article 'What is the problem about corruption?' Leys rejects the moralizing approach of those criticising the corrupt conduct of African public servants.⁷⁰

He argues that African officials may in fact see themselves as acting honourably according to their 'own standards'. They might also be 'men of two worlds' partly adhering to two incompatible standards and ending up 'exasperated and indifferent' to the moral implications of their acts at all.⁷¹

In these terms Leys sees African officials as caught between the 'inherited public morality of the western state' and the 'disappearing public morality of the tribe'. There is considerable cross-pressure which makes it unlikely that western state morality will emerge as the new public morality in African states. He notes that there is no previous experience of the roles of public office in relation to public interest in these countries. Consequently, there is no way in which the 'private exploitation of public office' can be rationalized in this context.⁷²

⁶⁶ Andre Gunder Frank, 1978, p.2.

⁶⁷ Walter Rodney, 1972, p.38.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.75.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.235.

⁷⁰ Colin Leys, 1965, What is the problem about corruption?, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 3, No2. p.215

⁷¹ Ibid, p.221.

⁷² Ibid, p.227.

By extension, we must assume that there is no point in criticising the corrupt use of public resources by elites or public officials within African states either.

As a result of his economic determinist assumptions, Leys ends up embracing a stance of cultural relativism which deprives the African ruling elites of the capacity of being able to comprehend the contradictions contained within their beliefs. Because western beliefs were imposed on them through colonialism, the responsibility for acting in terms of these beliefs is shifted from the ruling elite itself, to their colonial masters (and the international economic structure of colonialism more generally). Again, the relationship with the West as the source of all Africa's ills is the exclusive focus of this framework.

2.4 Marxism, globalisation and poverty in African states

There is a direct line of continuity between the economic determinist assumptions underpinning dependency theory and those informing the writings of contemporary anti-globalisation theorists. As one such theorist, Patrick Bond, puts it in his aptly titled book *Looting Africa, the economics of exploitation*: 'African rulers keep their people poor because they are tied into a system of global power' and capitalist accumulation.⁷³

Bond, following Rodney and Frank, argues that capitalism is responsible for producing poverty. He maintains that uneven and combined capitalist development, that is accumulation and underdevelopment, happen systematically with 'accumulation at one pole and poverty at another'.⁷⁴

Bond, bases the argument of his book on the assertion that 'Africa is getting progressively poorer, with per capita incomes in many countries below those of the 1950s-60s era of independence'.⁷⁵ What is interesting is that he adopts a similar aggregate statistical category (income) as the basis for his definition of poverty. He says 'If we consider even the most banal measure of poverty, most sub-Saharan African countries suffered an increase in the percentage of people with income of less than US\$1/day during the 1980s and 1990s', quoting the World Bank 2006 World Development Report as his source.⁷⁶

Significantly, both Bond and the World Bank share the assumption that the solution to poverty lies in the distribution of economic resources. Where they differ is in the World Bank's methodologically individualist assumption that poverty can be alleviated through increased income resulting in improved 'purchasing power'. Bond, by contrast, rests his argument on the methodologically collectivist assumption that poverty will be eradicated by eliminating economic classes, which will serve to ensure equal access to the 'means of production' (tools, technology, raw materials etc).

But this raises a number of very important questions: Is it the case that the elimination of economic class, any more than an improvement in the purchasing power of the poor, will result in the eradication of poverty? Does access to economic resources exhaust the definition of poverty (conceivably access to environmental and other resources are also important)? What about constraints on social agency (including gender constraints)? Or

⁷³ Patrick Bond, 2006, *Looting Africa, the economics of exploitation*, London, Zed Books, p.3.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.11

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.2

⁷⁶ Ibid.

access to ideational resources (including access to knowledge and skills)? Surely these and other conditions need to be met in order for humans to flourish.

Martha Nussbaum following Amartya Sen has argued against the use of economic indicators (such as income, wealth and economic growth) as a measure of people's quality of life. Sen also rejected approaches to measuring well-being in terms of utility (ie by asking people what they currently prefer and how satisfied they are). Instead of asking people about their spending power or access to economic resources Nussbaum suggests that we ask what people are actually able to do, that is their capabilities.

My argument, following Nussbaum and Sen, is that we can only have an adequate theory of poverty and of social justice if we are prepared to make claims about the fundamental entitlements that people have. These are often independent of their preferences, which are themselves often shaped by 'unjust background conditions'.⁷⁷

Nussbaum offers a list of capabilities as core requirements of a *life with human dignity*. These capabilities are taken to be general social goals and are held to form part of a minimal account of social justice. If a society does not guarantee these to all its citizens at an appropriate threshold level, 'it falls short of being a fully just society, whatever its level of opulence'.⁷⁸ My assertion is that the elimination of poverty through increased access to economic resources will prove meaningless unless tied to a set of similar needs and entitlements to those advanced by Nussbaum amongst her list of 'central human capabilities'. These include:

1. Life. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. Bodily Health. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
3. Bodily integrity. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
4. Senses, Imagination and Thought. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason ... in a 'truly human' way, a way informed and cultivated by adequate education.
5. Emotions. ... to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety.
6. Practical Reason. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.
7. Affiliation. Being able to live with others, to engage in various forms of social interaction. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others.⁷⁹

I return to set out some thoughts on the implementation of this approach to the realization of human needs and capabilities in Part 3. What Nussbaum's list serves to demonstrate is that the concept of human dignity (implied in which is the absence of poverty) entails far more than access to economic resources.

⁷⁷ Martha Nussbaum, 2001, p.1.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.10.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.11-12.

2.5 Anti-globalisation, the state and social accountability

Patrick Bond starts out his account of continued underdevelopment and poverty in Africa by providing yet another corrective to Marx's original determinist formulations in his bid to explain the continued existence of capitalism in the new millennium. He asserts that 'primitive accumulation' as initially identified by Marx should not be seen as a 'one-off event that allowed a critical mass of capital to be mobilised through theft at the outset of capitalism in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe'⁸⁰. Following Rosa Luxemburg, he maintains that primitive accumulation has become a 'permanent process of superexploitation at the world scale'.⁸¹ He maintains that capitalism continues in a state of 'uneven and combined development' (a turn of phrase borrowed from Leon Trotsky) and is in continual 'crisis'. This state of crisis is not, as Bond points out, a fully fledged breakdown. Rather it is the result of a generalised condition of excess production which is displaced to weaker territories as 'capital seeks ever more desperately to exploit competitive differences between locations, sectors and scales, as sites to rescue falling profits'.⁸²

For Bond the current features of volatility and unevenness built into the world economy are 'structured into economic interrelationships with the advanced capitalist world, and between the North and South'. He attributes the 'structuring' of Africa's ongoing underdevelopment to five 'components of capital accumulation and class formation', namely trade, finance, direct investment, uneven migration and comprador relations.⁸³

What is significant about Bond's analysis of continued poverty in Africa (and that of other anti-globalisation theorists) is the focus on economic class and capital accumulation as if these processes were completely independent of the actions of the various social agents involved, particularly those agents within African states. Although Bond recognises the existence of state elites who voluntarily sign up for aid packages with western donors and who wilfully incur crippling state debt, the individuals making up these elites are deprived of any independent agency. As with dependency theorists, any capacity for independent action on the part of state elites or local interest groups is unproblematically transferred to the international structure of economic relations and to a reified notion of capital accumulation (which takes on the form of an impersonal transnational economic 'force').

The reification of capital accumulation and the hypostatisation of economic structure in this way shifts the focus of anti-globalisation theorists from the actions and decisions of the state (in its relations with the interests of powerful African interest groups) onto the ineluctable logic and economic structures of global capitalism. As a result, the actual structure of the African state, and its institutional workings, including the structure and capacity of the public administration to manage public resources effectively and provide needed public services, is ignored. Consequently, the necessity of local civic actors and interest groups to hold their local political leaders and public officials socially accountable for their performance in managing local public resources is overlooked. For instance, Bond pours scorn on the idea of civic interest groups engaging with state officials or political leaders during the course of planning exercises such as the

⁸⁰ Patrick Bond, 2006, p.11.

⁸¹ Ibid, p.12.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid, p.26.

development of poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs), or of reviewing the performance of state officials as part of the African Peer Review Mechanism Process. This is because of the *a priori* assumption that these processes are necessarily pre-structured in such ways as to produce the outcomes required by international capital and neo-liberal policy makers.

Bond's book, *Looting Africa*, dedicates a full chapter to African elites entitled 'Global Apartheid's African Agents'⁸⁴. He starts off the chapter by acknowledging that 'no one can deny the orientation of so many African state elites towards parasitical, consumptive, unproductive activities'. However, in *Looting Africa*, the closest he comes to actually analysing the shape of the state (in any given African country), or the role that it has played in either enabling or constraining the realisation of the social and economic rights of ordinary Africans, consists of yet another deterministic account of how neo-liberal policies have been imposed on the African state in response to the needs of international capital. He asserts that 'the imposition of such policies generally requires a reshaped state; with a loyal police and army standing by to quell dissent, highly centralised power must be located in a neoliberal finance ministry and an increasingly independent central bank ... Finally, the neoliberal class configuration also requires a decline in direct democratic participation in government...'.⁸⁵

It is with some irony then, when advancing his proposed strategy for civil society resistance to neo-liberalism in the final chapter of his book, that Bond is forced to acknowledge 'the admittedly rancid and repressive national state apparatus' may in fact be the 'potential saviour' of African activists.⁸⁶ This, he maintains 'is not naivety, but instead reflects the concrete sense of so many movements, that their states – once democratised – are ultimately the only real site of countervailing power against market excesses'. For this reason, his list of options for a potential policy menu for progressive activists (which include such bold economic policy prescriptions as: the 'simple refusal of tied aid'; domestic reinvestment of pension and insurance funds; controlling capital flight; inward oriented trade strategies; and, the rejection of fiscal austerity, monetarism, privatisation and liberalisation) turns on activists' ability to 'take power' through 'progressive political parties'.⁸⁷

So, after neglecting, if not rejecting, constitutional democracy as a form of state (as this falls under his definition of the 'rancid and repressive national state apparatus'), Bond is ultimately forced to depend precisely on the democratic state as the vehicle for achieving his post-capitalist political objectives. These are articulated as the 'deep democratisation of all African societies' in order to 'rid the ruling circuits of corrupt comprador elements'.

Given the lack of accompanying detail we can only but assume that part of Bond's objective consists of the realising the social and economic rights of all Africans. What is alarming, however, given his strategic reliance on the democratic state and his (presumed) desire to use the state as a means for realising people's rights, is his complete lack of attention to the structure or constituent processes of this state. How, for instance, would it differ in form and process from the prevailing liberal state apparatus derided by Bond as repressive and rancid?

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.95.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.99.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 155.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.156.

2.6 Current approaches to deepening democracy

If, indeed Bond's assertion of the need for 'deep democratisation' constitutes anything other than calling for the standard liberal representative model of the state to work better in practice, then much more theoretical and political articulation is required to substantiate this. For instance, the liberal representative view of democracy has recently been extended by a body of work, said to have grown out of long traditions of participatory democracy, which has been referred to precisely as the 'deepening democracy' approach. Bond would need to clarify where his own conception of the state and of deep democratisation should be situated relative to this approach.

The traditional liberal representative approach to democracy, as previously noted, is based on the rights of individuals to freedom from interference from the state. For this reason, the primary preoccupation of liberal political theorists, as John Gaventa notes, has been focused on 'getting the institutions and procedures of democracy right, especially as measured through competitive, multi party electoral processes.'⁸⁸ At the level of the state, this resulted in a preoccupation with the existence of institutions and policies capable of exercising 'checks and balances' over the executive arm of state. These generally included the existence of a democratic constitution, an independent judiciary and the rule of law.

In recent years, however, partly in an effort to offset liberal elitism, some of those advancing the 'deepening democracy' approach (especially donors) have attempted to complement the liberal representative approach by arguing for a more robust civil society to act as an additional check on government. This has often been referred to as the need to balance the 'supply' and 'demand' sides of democracy.⁸⁹ Other supporters of this 'deepening democracy' approach have asserted the need for more 'participatory governance' or for 'co-governance'. In both instances civic actors are invited to participate in (and assume joint responsibility for) the core activities of the state. Examples include citizen fora, village assemblies, and participatory budgeting and health councils.⁹⁰

This raises the question of what democracy actually means in practice and what the implications are for the shape of the democratic state if we are to conceive of the state as anything other than repressive constraint on the freedom of individuals, or a tool for the manipulation of social agents. In particular, what are the conditions of possibility for an enabling state with the capacity to progressively realise the social and economic (as well as protect the political and civil) rights of individuals in line with its available resources. This is the issue to which I now turn.

⁸⁸ John Gaventa, 2006, *Triumph, deficit, or contestation? Deepening the 'deepening democracy' debate*. IDS working paper 264. Institute for development studies, Sussex. p.11.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.14.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.15.

Part 3: Social Accountability, eliminating poverty and the Enabling Democratic State

3.1 Marxism, Liberalism and the state as external constraint

In the foregoing discussion, whilst liberals were seen to overlook the impact of resource inequalities on participation in the democratic process, determinist Marxists were shown to be concerned with reducing the entire domain of politics to such inequalities. Specifically, inequalities in access to economic resources, and resulting class divisions, were deterministically held to explain all political phenomena. As a result, as Held has noted, a whole range of issues that cannot be reduced to, or explained in terms of, economic inequalities are excluded from the realm of Marxist political explanation.⁹¹ These include not only environmental and gender matters but, crucially, given our concerns with realising the social and economic rights of the poor, those matters relating to the effective management of public goods and resources.

As argued above, Marxist thinkers direct little or no attention to the processes of the state that are required to hold public bureaucrats accountable for their allocation and management of public resources. This, as I will argue, is a fundamental oversight given that the ability to deliver goods and services that are responsive to the needs of the poor forms the very rationale for the existence of the democratic state.

A flaw running through Marxist political theory, therefore, is its reduction of the state to being a primarily repressive apparatus, one whose dominant function is to legitimate class inequalities. As I indicated earlier, this approach to the state emerged as a by-product of Marx's initial economic deterministic assumption that internal 'class contradictions' would inevitably result in the demise of capitalism. Subsequent Marxists relied heavily on the role of the state in explaining capitalism's survival. But, because the state is conceived as a form of constraint (initially seen as a blunt instrument of coercion, but later taking the form of ideological manipulation), Marxists have subsequently seen little point in addressing the question of how the structures and institutions of the state could be used for purposes other than physical repression or ideational control.⁹² The idea that the state might in fact constitute a mechanism for enabling ordinary people to articulate their civil, political and socio-economic needs, let alone the best available means to realise these needs, is absent in classical Marxist literature.

What is significant about both the classical Marxist and liberal schools of thought is their mutual inability to theorise the state as anything other than a means for constraining social agents. As a result, albeit for very different reasons, neither Marxist nor liberal thinkers have applied their minds to the configuration of state processes required to transform public resources into effective goods and services which address people's needs. This requires a very different concept of the relationship between civic actors/interest groups and the processes of public resource management to that within either the Marxist or liberal schools of thought. It also requires social agents to be mobilized behind a rallying call other than economic class or individual greed. (A discussion of the enabling democratic state follows shortly).

⁹¹ Held, D, 1993, op cit, p.262.

⁹² This interpretation is borne out by Lenin's assertion that the state should be 'smashed' and his attendant assumption that public resources could be effectively managed in the absence of the structures and institutions of the state.

3.2 Mobilising on the basis of social accountability as a fundamental human right

The efforts of social activists and civic interest groups to eradicate poverty and bring about social justice need to be directed at establishing socially accountable states, which simultaneously enable social agents to exercise their civil and political rights and to realise their social and economic rights. This is only possible, I will maintain, if we treat social accountability as a fundamental human right. But how does this approach to social accountability differ from current 'rights-based' approaches to development and governance?

The rights-based approach to governance is a conceptual framework for human development that is based on international human rights standards. In essence, the rights-based approach integrates the standards and principles of the international human rights system into governance processes and sees the rights of citizens as legally enforceable entitlements.⁹³

This has led to a focus on raising levels of accountability in the development process by identifying rights-holders (and their entitlements) and corresponding duty-bearers (and their obligations). Those employing a rights-based approach look at both the positive obligations of duty-bearers (to protect, promote and provide) and their negative obligations (to abstain from violations).⁹⁴

In terms of this approach, by virtue of calling themselves democratic, and by virtue of being signatories to the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, states are legally and constitutionally committed to the progressive realisation of, among others, political and civil rights and socio-economic rights to health-care, education and social welfare within their available resources. The International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, signed by over 150 states, commits signatories to the progressive realisation, within available resources, of the rights to health, education, and social security, as well as the right to an adequate standard of living (food clothing and housing) and the continuous improvement of living conditions. This opens up the potential for civic organisations and development activists to monitor compliance with the progressive realisation of this broad range of political, civil and socio-economic rights.⁹⁵

The UNDP, one of the key proponents of this approach, defines accountability as 'an essential principle for securing an enabling environment for development'.⁹⁶ From this point of view, states are seen to 'have the primary responsibility to create an enabling environment in which all people may enjoy human rights, and have the obligation to ensure that respect for human rights norms and principles is integrated into all levels of governance and policy making'.⁹⁷ The limitation of this approach is its tendency to reduce social accountability to the level of an organising principle.

⁹³ See UNDP, 2000, *A Human Rights-based Approach to Development Programming* in UNDP – Adding the Missing Link, p.2.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ See www.ohchr.org/english/law/index.htm

⁹⁶ UNDP, 2000, *A Human Rights-based Approach to Development Programming* in UNDP – Adding the Missing Link, p.8.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

The efforts of rights-based institutions such as the UNDP, and those of social movements and civic groups, to eradicate poverty would be strengthened immeasurably if their approach were to be extended to include social accountability as a distinct human right.

My proposal is that social accountability be defined as the right to obtain justifications and explanations for the use of public resources from those entrusted with responsibility for their management, whether government officials or private service providers, in progressively realising the human rights of those they serve. Officials and service providers have the corresponding duty not only to produce such justifications but to take corrective action in instances where public resources are not effectively used to realise citizens' socio-economic rights, whether due to the ineffective use or abuse of these resources.

To demonstrate its generalisability, a universal right to social accountability could be articulated as follows:

Every person shall have a right to obtain justifications and explanations for the use of public goods and resources –

- a) from those involved in making decisions on the allocation of such goods and resources as may affect his or her rights;
- b) from those responsible for the management of such goods and resources as may affect his or her rights; and
- c) from those responsible for exercising oversight of the effective use of such resources as may affect his or her rights.

Such explanations and justifications should provide a clear indication of how available resources were, and are intended to be, utilised for the purposes of progressively realising human rights.

In these terms, it should be noted that the realisation of the right to social accountability entails considerably more than the right to obtain access to information held by the state, or the right to be given written reasons for administrative decisions. The right to information, per se, as with the right to obtain reasons for administrative decisions, does little to address the quality of the information or the reasons why rights-holders are entitled to it. By contrast, a distinct right to social accountability requires that such information and such reasons should amount to a justification for decisions taken regarding the allocation of resources and a candid account of whether the use of available resources resulted in the progressive realisation of human rights.

Among other things, a right to social accountability would place an explicit duty on members of the Executive arm of governments, public officials and private service providers to justify their decisions and performance regarding the manner in which their use of public goods and resources has (either positively or negatively) affected the progressive realisation of socio-economic rights.

As it stands, however, the definition of accountability as a loose political principle - whilst consistent with constitutional undertakings to uphold rights to adequate housing, basic education, sufficient food and water, and to social welfare - does not explicitly guarantee the right to obtain justifications from the state for its efforts to realise these rights. While

there is a duty imposed by international law and many domestic constitutions to progressively realise the above rights, there is no corresponding duty placed on governments to justify the steps taken to ensure their realisation.

A likely reaction to any proposed establishment of a separate right to social accountability may be to question how this right could be operationalised in legal practice or rendered justiciable. The question is what criteria or standards would need to be met in order to render decisions about the use of public resources 'justifiable'?

Following the South African legal and constitutional theorist Ettiene Mureinik, my proposal is that the following criteria be considered:

- a) decision-makers should consider all serious objections to the decision taken and have plausible answers to these objections;
- b) decision-makers should consider all serious alternatives to the decision taken and have plausible reasons for discarding these;
- c) decision-makers should be able to demonstrate a rational connection between the premises and conclusion informing the decision (i.e. between the information, including evidence and argument used by the decision-maker), and the decision taken.⁹⁸

The advantage of articulating a separate right to social accountability in this manner lies in the fact that it explicitly imposes 'an ethic of justification' on those responsible for taking decisions affecting the use and management of public resources. Decision-makers, who are conscious of the fact that their decisions may be reviewed against these criteria (particularly under conditions where the right to social accountability becomes justiciable, and where decisions can be reviewed by the courts), will be under significant pressure to deploy a rigorous and disciplined decision-making process.⁹⁹

In the absence of being made aware of their right to obtain justifications and explanations for the effective use of their resources (in addressing their needs), ordinary people are unlikely to be convinced to participate more effectively in the processes of governance. Without the wide acceptance of the right to social accountability, the pursuit of increased civic engagement between people and the enabling state institutions required to ensure the responsiveness of public goods and services to people's needs, will remain a well-intentioned, but unachievable, goal. The widespread acceptance of a fundamental right to social accountability, by contrast, will form the necessary advocacy basis for encouraging civic empowerment and the establishment of a social movement akin to previous civil rights, environmental or gender equality movements.

3.3 Social accountability and the enabling democratic state

At the outset, it should be recognised that the purpose of the democratic state, as I have conceptualised it here, is not primarily to provide citizens with a forum for deliberation, participation or co-governance. Rather, it is to provide a mechanism for ensuring the

⁹⁸ These criteria are amended from a set of standards proposed by the South African Constitutional law authority Ettiene Mureinik for the justification of administrative decisions. See Mureinik, E, 1994, *A bridge to where? Introducing the interim Bill of Rights*, South African Journal on Human Rights, Vol 31, p. 41.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

accountable use of public resources for purposes of progressively realising peoples' human rights. In particular, if it is accepted that the primary role of the state is to ensure the progressive realisation of peoples' human rights, and that these include social and economic rights to adequate healthcare, housing, education and social welfare, then we must acknowledge that the state must, at least in part, act as a mechanism for ensuring that public and private service providers justify their performance in managing public resources. In addition, it must be recognised that the state is a mechanism for ensuring corrective action in instances where public resources are either ineffectively used or abused.

However, if the state is to give effect to the right to social accountability, through the continuous production of justifications and timeous effecting of corrective actions, this presupposes the prior existence of a set of accountability processes and an accountability system capable of producing these outputs.

In particular, it assumes that strong democratic state institutions are not only necessary, but indispensable, to the realisation of social and economic rights. These include an efficient and technically competent public administration, rigorous constitutional audit and oversight bodies, a vigilant parliament, an independent judiciary, and a responsive and competent executive. These institutions are necessary, not only for purposes of managing public resources efficiently and effectively, but in order to produce the necessary information to justify their own performance in progressively realising social and economic rights.

This conceptualization of the role of the state is premised on the assumption that social agents have a vested interest in establishing what practical steps have been taken by state institutions and officials in order to give effect to their rights via the delivery of public goods and services.

Yet, if social agents are to be able to pursue their vested interests a number of minimum information requirements must be met in order for them to reach an informed judgment about the effective management of public services and the realisation of their socio-economic rights. These requirements include the ability to find information on:

- What resources are available to public service providers (government departments or contracted private companies) to address social and economic needs, and what do they plan to do with these resources?
- Are public funds effectively spent?
- How do officials/service providers perform in implementing their plans? Do they produce needed services?
- What corrective action is taken in response to the misallocation or abuse of public resources?
- Do officials/service providers account effectively to oversight bodies for their realisation of social and economic needs; what recommendations do these bodies make to improve officials'/service providers' performance; and are these recommendations implemented?

It is by obtaining answers to these practical questions from government departments, or private service providers that social agents are enabled to meaningfully participate in public decision-making processes. However, the ability to answer these questions is

determined by a number of important factors. Firstly, it depends on the existence and effective functioning of social accountability processes within government service delivery departments. Secondly, it requires civic interest groups who can articulate social accountability as their strategic objectives, and who can organize themselves for purposes of advancing social accountability as a realizable objective. Thirdly, it requires the existence of a set of interlinked theories and beliefs articulating the conceptual basis for treating social accountability as a fundamental human right, and an understanding of the conditions necessary for giving effect to this right.

I have already made an effort to address the second and third factors through my discussion in the preceding section of the need to conceptualise and mobilise social actors around social accountability as a fundamental human right. In respect of the first factor, a number of social accountability processes are clearly identifiable at different points in the annual public resource management cycle in any given democratic state (albeit only nominally democratic).

These social accountability processes include:

- Process 1 - planning and resource allocation;
- Process 2 - expenditure management;
- Process 3 - performance management;
- Process 4 – public integrity management, and;
- Process 5 - oversight.

These processes are analytically distinct despite their reliance (in many instances) on the same officials and state institutions (service delivery departments/agencies) to give effect to them. The most important point to be made in respect of these processes is that when effectively implemented and successfully combined, they constitute an integrated social accountability system.

Because each process forms part of a chronological sequence, the successful implementation of antecedent processes is required in order to ensure the accountable delivery of public services. The central element of each process consists in recording and analysing vital information required for the effective internal management of public resources. It should be pointed out that at each step in the public resource management cycle, a range of official documents are routinely produced by government departments and service delivery agencies for internal management purposes.¹⁰⁰ What has been traditionally overlooked by rights-based interest groups, however, is the fact that these documents provide a ready source of information, not only for internal managers, but for external evaluators of public administrator's performance. Such evaluators include

¹⁰⁰ For instance, budgets are drawn up for each public service delivery programme at the beginning of each financial year. These budgets should be based on a clear account of the activities which the department intends to undertake during the year, as set out in its strategic plan. As the year progresses, government ministers require information on the implementation of these plans in order to, among other things, track the spending of the programme's budget (and avoid over- or under-expenditure). For this reason, senior managers are required to produce financial and performance reports on a quarterly, if not monthly, basis. These reports are necessary for the department's minister to report to audit institutions. In turn, these institutions table their own reports in parliaments and make written recommendations on how to improve the provision of services and the management of resources.

constitutional and parliamentary oversight bodies or civic interest groups seeking to assess the social accountability of public and private service providers.

For this reason, in order to make an informed judgement about the level of socially accountable governance that exists in response to pressing social and economic needs, interest groups need to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of each individual process and their impact on each other over a period of time (that is, across financial years). This can only be achieved by civic interest groups, as opposed to individual actors, and through the use of a set of evidence-based tools designed to monitor the information outputs produced during each process.

In this regard, I am again following Archer's analysis of social agency. She maintains that differential access to resources should not be limited to liquid assets, but must be seen to include the use of political sanctions and expertise.¹⁰¹ So, instead of automatically producing economic classes, resource inequalities in any given society must be seen to result in the separation of organized interest groups from disorganized collectivities.

It should be pointed out that disorganised collectivities, such as the poor, neither articulate their interests clearly nor are they organized for the strategic pursuit of their interests. As a result, they are incapable of challenging existing resource distributions or of instigating structural change.¹⁰² This is generally left to organized interest groups who are aware of what they want, can articulate their strategic objectives to themselves and to others, and have organized themselves for purposes of realizing their objectives. Such groups include any number of self-conscious vested interest groups, promotive interest groups, social movements or defensive organizations.¹⁰³ The unfortunate reality is that unorganized collectivities constitute the targets of organized interest groups who continuously seek to mobilize and manipulate them in order to advance their own interests.

It is for this reason that the monitoring of effective public resource management must fall to specialised social accountability interest groups. The specific evidence-based tools available to these interest groups to monitor the outputs of each system include the following:

- Process 1: Budget analysis and strategic plan evaluation – where the responsiveness (and internal coherence) of strategic plans and budget allocations are monitored
- Process 2: Expenditure tracking – where financial reports are monitored relative to budget allocations
- Process 3: Performance monitoring – where service delivery is monitored against expenditure and internal audit reports, and service delivery reports and financial controls are monitored
- Process 4: Tracking corrective action in response to misuse/abuse of resources – where disciplinary systems and reports on the handling of cases of the misuse/abuse of resources are monitored

¹⁰¹ Margaret Archer, 1995, p.297.

¹⁰² Ibid, p.259.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p.258.

- Process 5: Monitoring accountability to oversight institutions – where the implementation of recommendations contained in external audit reports produced by supreme audit institutions and the resolutions of parliamentary oversight bodies are monitored.

These evidence-based monitoring tools need to make routine use of official budgeting, planning and reporting documents, which make up the outputs of the above social accountability processes. The effective monitoring of these processes will require the adoption of new skills, competencies and strategies by promotive interest groups. These skills are premised on social activists and civic interest groups having a clear understanding of the five processes making up the public resource management framework and social accountability system, and involve the systematic collection and evaluation of official information.

3.4 Failed social accountability systems as the cause of ongoing poverty – a case study of South Africa’s Eastern Cape Province

The definition of social accountability proposed above has been adopted by the Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM), an independent research and monitoring institute attached to Rhodes University in South Africa’s impoverished Eastern Cape Province. Despite improvements in access to basic services, including housing, water and electricity, for the majority of its population after the demise of apartheid state in 1994, the province continues to experience a number of serious social and economic challenges. According to recent studies, 72 percent of the province’s population lives in poverty and 42 percent of its citizens remain illiterate.¹⁰⁴ With respect to the right to healthcare, indicators show a deterioration in the health of people in the province with an increase in the infant mortality rate from 61 deaths per 1000 live births in 1998, to 72 deaths per 1000 live births in 2002.¹⁰⁵

The PSAM has sought to implement a number of the above evidence-based tools in order to conduct detailed monitoring of the performance and realisation of rights by the Eastern Cape Departments of Health, Education, Welfare and Housing. Taken together, the budget allocations of these four departments account for around 81 percent of the total budget of the entire Eastern Cape Provincial Government.¹⁰⁶

It should be recognised that the primary site of public service delivery in South Africa is via its nine provincial administrations. Fifty eight percent of budgeted expenditure is administered by these provincial administrations, with 38 percent administered through national government departments.¹⁰⁷ In addition, it is important to note that (citing 2004

¹⁰⁴ See HSRC Review, Vol. 2, No. 3, Sep. 2004, *Poor Households sink deeper into poverty*. http://www.hsrb.ac.za/about/HSRCReview/Vol2No3/index.html?news_roundup.html-content. See also *Budget, Eastern Cape Provincial Administration*, 2005, Ch 2 Budget Overview, Sect 3.6.1.

¹⁰⁵ Health Systems Trust, 2002, *Health Services Review 2002*, Ch 21, p.438. This same data also indicates that life expectancy at birth has declined in the Eastern Cape from 60.4 years in 1996 to 53.5 years in 2002.

¹⁰⁶ National Treasury, 2006, *Provincial Budgets and Expenditure Review 2002/03 – 2008/09*.

¹⁰⁷ National Treasury, *Budget Review*, 2005, p. 127. These figures are for the 2004/2005 financial-year. The remaining 4 percent of the national budget is allocated to local government to supplement its locally raised revenues. See also National Treasury, *Provincial Budgets and Expenditure Reviews: 2001/02 – 2007/08*, Sep. 2005, Chapter 8, p. 123.

figures) 47 percent of all public officials (or 743 646 public servants) in South Africa are employed by its provinces. A disproportionate number of these officials (119 281) are employed by the Eastern Cape Provincial Administration.¹⁰⁸ Almost half of national budgeted expenditure is allocated to the payment of the salaries of South Africa's public officials.¹⁰⁹ For this reason, the focus of inquiries into the effectiveness of public resource management and service delivery in South Africa should be directed primarily toward its provincial administrations and the performance of provincial officials. National government departments play the more limited role of seeking to coordinate policy implementation and overseeing the delivery of public services in provinces and at local government level.

An evaluation of the effective implementation of the social accountability processes identified above in the Eastern Cape departments of Health, Education, Welfare and Housing between 2000 and 2006 provides a compelling set of reasons for the continued failure to address social and economic rights, and for the ongoing high level of poverty in the province.

Process 1: Planning and resource allocation

In the period between 2000 and 2006 none of the departments' strategic plans or budget documents included an accurate analysis of citizens' needs (including epidemiological trends, number of people without housing, access to clinics, schools, nutrition, social grants etc). Nor were these documents found to contain accurate information on the departments' own organisational challenges and operational capacity. For instance, the Department of Health failed to produce business plans for almost 40 percent of its HIV/AIDS budget between 2000-2004. Similarly the Department of Housing failed to identify the number and location of citizens requiring housing between 1996 and 2006. Finally, the Department of Education failed to plan for the salaries of its excess staff (of an average of 11 000, mostly teachers) between 2000-2005.¹¹⁰

Process 2: Expenditure management

The lack of effective planning evidenced within these departments' planning and resource allocation processes resulted in their inability to report effectively against plans. As a result, their managers, provincial Treasury officials and oversight bodies were unable to monitor their spending effectively. This resulted in a consistent and predictable pattern of either over or under-spending of departmental budgets. For instance, the Department of Health failed to account for 73 percent of its (provincial) HIV/AIDS budget between 2000 and 2003 (R90.2 million), while 26 percent of the budget was unspent (R33 million). Taken together this means that the Department could not account for the effective use of 99 percent of its (provincially) allocated funds for tackling the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Similarly, the Department of Housing failed to spend R928 million or 29 percent of its housing budget between 2000 and 2004. This underspending occurred in a context in which there were widespread social protests over the failure to deliver adequate housing in the province. Finally, the Department of Education overspent its budget by R1.1 billion between 2000 and 2004. This overspending was the result of its continued employment of 11 000 excess staff, allegedly due to political pressure

¹⁰⁸ National Treasury, *Provincial Budgets and Expenditure Reviews: 2001/02 – 2007/08*, Sep. 2005, Chapter 8, p. 119 and 125 respectively.

¹⁰⁹ In 2004/2005 R87.8 billion (or 47.4 percent) of the national budget was allocated to expenditure on personnel. See National Treasury, *Provincial Budgets and Expenditure Reviews: 2001/02 – 2007/08*, Sep. 2005, Chapter 8, p. 123.

¹¹⁰ See PSAM, 2006, *Submission to the Commission of Inquiry into the Finances of the Eastern Cape Provincial Administration*, PSAM Report.

from public sector unions. The overspending of the department's salaries line item was offset by sustained underspending of its infrastructure line item, which resulted in the failure to maintain existing infrastructure and the continued existence of over 500 mud structure schools in the province which, by the department's own admission, pose a threat to the safety of learners in the province.¹¹¹

Process 3: Performance management

All four departments failed to maintain proper risk management and internal audit systems. As a result, they were incapable of timeously identifying instances of failed service delivery or the misuse of public resources in the province. For instance, the Eastern Cape Department of Housing consistently failed to monitor the quality of new houses built in the period between 1996 and 2006. The Auditor-General found in 2002/2003 that 90 percent of houses inspected did not conform to national norms and standards.¹¹²

Process 4: Public integrity Management

These departments were found to lack effective systems to monitor and enforce disciplinary proceedings. This included the failure to create dedicated disciplinary units, the inability to appoint appropriately skilled presiding officers to chair disciplinary hearings and the failure to establish and maintain disciplinary databases.

Process 5: Oversight

All four departments displayed an inability and/or unwillingness to address problems raised by the Auditor-General. Each year between 1996 and 2006 the Auditor-General raised the same issues relating to poor financial controls. Disturbingly, in 2002 the Auditor-General revealed that not a single resolution passed by the provincial Legislature's Public Accounts Committee had actually been implemented between 1995 and 2002. Moreover, by tabulating the cumulative amounts of the provincial budget that had been issued with 'disclaimer' audit opinion at the conclusion of annual financial audits by the Auditor-General it emerged that the equivalent of 77 percent of the total provincial government budget between 1996 and 2006 could not be adequately accounted for.¹¹³

It should be noted that audit 'disclaimers' indicate a lack of accurate financial record keeping and a failure to properly record all financial transactions. Whilst these audit opinions do not mean that the corresponding budgetary amounts were either lost or stolen this demonstrates that the provincial government could not provide the necessary supporting documentation to financially account for the use of R174 billion out of a total budget allocation of R225 billion over this ten year period. In this context it is impossible to establish whether these funds were translated by officials and service providers into effective service delivery in ways that met the needs and rights of the poor in the Eastern Cape.¹¹⁴

It is my contention, given the above, that the failure to ensure the effective implementation of the above social accountability processes, and the resulting failure of the social

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Overy, N, 2005, *The Housing Crisis in the Eastern Cape 2000-2005*, PSAM report.

¹¹³ PSAM, 2006, *Submission to the African Peer Review Mechanism, South Africa Country Review*.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

accountability system, must be held directly responsible for the continued reproduction of poverty in South Africa.

One of the primary challenges for giving effect to the realization of social and economic rights in developing countries lies in the establishment of practical mechanisms in the form of the above social accountability processes, to ensure accountability to citizens for the allocation and use of limited local resources. The very essence of development is the ability to manage resources (whether derived from local or donor sources) to address pressing needs. Contrary to the assertions of dependency and anti-globalisation theorists, in the absence of the accountable management of domestic resources there can be no basis for sustainable development.

What the example of the Eastern Cape illustrates is that in order to ensure that those responsible for managing public resources progressively realize socio-economic rights within their available resources, civic interest groups and parliamentarians in developing countries require two things: firstly, they need to internalize the right to social accountability; secondly, to give effect to this right, they require the skills and evidence-based tools to be able to monitor the use of public resources.

For this reason, international CSOs need to balance their advocacy for more ethical globalisation at the international level, and for more responsive policy making at the national level in African states, with efforts to facilitate the development of practical tools to monitor the effective use of public resources and the delivery of public services at the local and sub-national level. These tools are required in order to bring sufficient pressure to bear on the developing country states to strengthen the implementation of their social accountability systems. It must be recognized that strong and efficient states are required not only to deliver effective public services but to defend the economic interests of developing countries in the face of global markets and potentially unreasonable demands imposed by international financial institutions.

3.5 Conclusion – the need for a new research programme into the relationship between social accountability systems and continued poverty in African states

In this paper I have argued that the strategies for addressing poverty advanced by liberal and determinist Marxist theorists should be rejected on the basis of their untenable underlying assumptions. These assumptions, it has been argued, have resulted in an unsustainable conceptualization of the state as a form of constraint, and have prevented an analysis of the social accountability processes required to eliminate poverty and realize human rights.

Unlike determinist Marxists who view social agents (whether capitalists, the comprador elite, or workers) as the passive pawns of economic structures, I have asserted that we must recognize that social agents have the properties of being reflective, purposive, promotive and innovative as a precondition for being able to account for the possibility of social change. However, this does not mean that social agents are completely unconstrained, as in the voluntarist and social atomistic utility maximizing conceptualization of the individual in neo-classical (and neo-liberal) economic theory. Social structures (both in the shape of material and ideational structures) must be treated as real, and capable of exerting either a constraining or enabling influence on social agents in any given context, depending on their social positioning.

For this reason, following Archer, we must recognise that the assumption underwriting determinist Marxism to the effect that economic and social structures are necessarily constraining in relation to social agents is mistaken. As Archer has argued, structures influence agents by shaping the situations in which they find themselves and by distributing vested interests in the maintenance or transformation of the prevailing social order to different interest groups. These situations and vested interests, however, do not compel individual agents to act in any particular way. The best way to understand how social structures actually work in practice, as Archer points out, is by seeing them as supplying good reasons for various courses of action. Whether or not agents decide to adopt or act on structures depends on how these reasons are received by reflective agents, who have the capacity to evaluate them.¹¹⁵

What is critical in differentiating Archer's argument for the existence and causal influence of social structures from that of determinist Marxism, is her identification of ideational structures (which possess the causal powers of either enablement or constraint by shaping the ideas open to agents) in addition to material structures. Determinist Marxists recognize only material structures, and even then these are restricted in their definition to the relations between social agents and economic resources alone.

Archer's concept of structure rests on an important analytical distinction between the 'parts' of a social system and the 'people' making up this system. This enables her to theorise the interplay between the (orderly or conflictual) relations between social agents and interest groups as well as the (orderly or contradictory) sets of relations between the parts of the social structure. It also allows for a much more complex analysis of the conditions and prospect for bringing about social change than that on offer within the classical liberal or Marxist traditions. For instance, when analysing any given society, there may be weak integration between the structures constituting the parts of the social system, but unless groups of actors actually exploit these structural tensions the structures in question will remain unchanged. Similarly, whilst the level of antagonism between groups in a society might be very high, if this is not related to the existence of structural contradictions within the social system then the basic shape of the society will be unchanged.

Archer complements this analysis of the conditions for structural change with an evaluation of the conditions for ideational change. She draws a similar distinction between the (orderly or conflictual) relations between social agents and the degree of (orderly or contradictory) fit between the various beliefs and theories making up the ideational system within any society at a given point in time.¹¹⁶ Because the ideas that people hold exist in logical relationships with the ideas held by other people, Archer asserts that these ideational relationships serve to shape the situational logics and the action contexts of their holders. They place their holders in action contexts governed by a particular situational logic which influences the courses of action open to social agents to engage in.

It is by making the distinction between the variety of ideas open to actors and the situational logics shaping these actors that Archer establishes a solid theoretical foundation for explaining the role of ideas in bringing about social change. In this paper I

¹¹⁵ Margaret Archer, 1995, p.249.

¹¹⁶ Margaret Archer, 1996 (revised edition), *Culture and Agency, The Place of culture in social theory*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

have attempted to show how the relationship between the dominant sets of ideas about the rights of individuals, the nature of the democratic state, and strategies for alleviating poverty, have exerted a causal influence on the continued existence of poverty. It is my view that the ineffectual sets of theoretical, methodological, political, and social ideas emanating from neo-liberal and determinist Marxism, and the strategic and policy implications of these ideas, have played a considerable role in ensuring the continuation of poverty.

For this reason I believe that a new research programme is required within the cross-cutting academic fields of development studies, social policy, philosophy and social science more generally (including sociology, politics and economics), to interrogate the theoretical implications of defining social accountability as a fundamental human right and to assess the conditions and practical processes required to give effect to this right. Interlinked with the above call for a new research programme, I believe that new forms of social activism and social movements are now desperately needed, whose activism needs to be based on rigorous evidence-based monitoring by dedicated interest groups. Such new forms of activism are required in order to ensure the operationalisation of effective social accountability systems (at the interface between the state and civic actors), to successfully eliminate poverty and to progressively realise social and economic rights.