

Origin, Belonging and Meaning. The Role of Accountability for Local Development.

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The consolidation process of young democracies in African countries is shaped by questions on decentralization. It is expected that at the local level democratic understanding and practice will be unfold beyond elections. Capturing the scene at the local level, a fragmented character of politics is obvious: The so-called traditional structure coexists with a formalized democratic structure, and actors who are linked to the international donor community, since Development Aid has become an integral part of the political economy of contemporary Africa. How these actors in young democracies translate political participation and representation on the local level is mainly interpreted as neo-patrimonial. Without going to deep into that consideration, which is leading all too frequent in african pessimism, it shows that the access to a social position or define meaning in a society can be tracked by exploring the conditions and features of accountability.

How do local political actors fulfill appropriation of a democratic process within fragmented politics? This paper wants to discuss political practice of a “development arena” on a municipal level, considering that development (aid) is a field of political practice and a constitutive policy element of African societies. On the basis of a long-term research fieldwork of nine months in the northern part of Malawi, I argue that the historical process becomes relevant to understand the cultural resources, which are shaping political practice in municipal politics. On a case study I determined the Cultural Museum Center Karonga (CMCK) being connected to development issues in local politics and simultaneously refer to local identities for the two reasons that the artifacts in the exhibition symbolizing the achievement of the (local) society and chiefs, as well as elderly people, negotiate these findings. Furthermore, a museum provides a blueprint of socio-cultural and socio-political features, due to its actors, location, institution and historical and socio-political processes, which it is decisively entangled with. So this promises an insight to the existing cultural repertoire which again interprets democratic practice. The Centre raises questions on how politics of belonging become relevant for politics. Firstly, due to the individuals involved, most of them are retired civil servants, and secondly, as an institution itself referring to local history and cultural identity. Therefore, I want to discuss questions between the poles of tradition & authority and democracy & power along the understanding of accountability.