PAN-AFRICAN CONFERENCE ON INEQUALITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION
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POLITICAL INEQUALITIES: DEFINITIONS, SOURCES AND MANAGEMENT

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Inequalities

1. “Politics is Coercive.”
   Ronald Dworkin, in *Justice for Hedgehogs*

2. “Equality, literally defined, is an ideal ripe for betrayal”
   Michael Walzer, in *Spheres of Justice*
Foundations: What Inequality?

- Two approaches: Since we self-evidently not equal, two issues arise:
  - Why should Equality have political priority? What equality? Why equality but not other political values? (*Justice and Liberty*, for instance?)
  - What is it we want to equalize? Equality-of-What?
Why Equality?

● Is equality the most important political value? Why not justice or liberty? Moral and political egalitarians argue that justice and equality are united values;

● Others argue that political values are independent of each other—sometimes justice requires us to ignore equality and vice versa.
Equality of What?

- What the goods are being distributed- Material resources, or capabilities (Rights to make claims, equality of opportunity?)
- What standards/criteria shall we use to distribute the goods? (identity; gender; region etc)
  - Ronald Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs* - The basic political values- justice, liberty, dignity and equality are unified.
Inequality: Economic or Political?

• Most unequal societies unequal both economically (how material goods are shared) and politically (how power and claims are distributed).

• Two competing views:
  - Economic inequalities morph into political inequalities (a variant of Marxist sociology - the primacy of the material base)
  - The economic and the political are autonomous even though they interact in ways re-inforce each other.
The Historical Experience

- The historical experience underlines the autonomy of each sphere:
  - Some societies tend to be economically equal but politically unequal - in relative terms, the Africa of the 1970s. (Power was exercised by the same narrow cabal)
  - Others politically equal but economically unequal, the Mauritius of the 1970s/early 1980s. (Economic inequality can be – and historically has been in some countries- ideologically legitimated).
How has inequality arisen historically?

- Historically, inequality has arisen from the growing complexity of societies- agricultural revolution - 8000-7000 years ago.
- ‘Counsel of fatalism’- inequality embedded in the very DNA of civilization- specialization; the emergence and sedimentation of the state etc.
- Focus on political inequality and the modern state in Africa. (Colonialism and after...)
The Impacts of Colonialism

1. On the Economic side: Structure of colonial economic policies and infrastructure dev’t- The Political economy of the railway line; divide the country into ‘Useful’ and ‘Useless’ (Whether these were labour reserve colonies or settler colonies)

2. Destruction of social capital: Tools of colonial rule- Force, chicanery, legal instrument. and (prefectural rule)- undermined the reciprocity and egalitarianism embedded in many traditional societies. Racialization of inequality

3. Divide and rule policies (martial tribes; loyal tribes and trouble-some tribes)- Defining and type-casting the ethnic and sharpening group cleavage
The Example of the Railway

- Resource exploitation: Railways were built resource to- port- South Africa, Congo, Angola.

- Strategy: Others were constructed to transport troops to make conquest and control an easier task (Kenya- Uganda railway).

- Effect: Concentration of economic and social infrastructure along the railway (Differential impact on ethnic groups/regions along the railway versus those away from the railway line- Group inequalities.

  - Rail density in SSA - 3.1 kms/1000 sq km- cf Germany 95 kms/1000sq km and Czech Rep. 120 km/1000 sq km.
Post-Colonial Developments-1

- Two forces have shaped the deepening inequalities in Africa—(*Colonial Continuities and Economic Liberalization*)

- **Colonial Continuities**
  - **Path dependence:** Many post-independence governments re-invested along the infrastructure corridors built by colonialism.
  
  - **Impact**
    - Compounding the original group and regional inequalities. The ethnicization of inequalities.
    - Creation of a power gradient – From Powerful infrast. corridors to powerless, insecure frontiers.
Economic liberalization

- Decrease in per capita investment in the software that drives equality - access to education, health and other social investments (systematic decline in quality of public services)

- Impacts on inequality:
  - Middle class (group) flight from public services - Lowered political incentives to improve those services - (private security; private schools; private hospitals; private roads)
  - Evidence: No teachers and doctors strikes in the 1970s and the 1990s and their explosion from the mid-1990s and 2000s.
  - Immiseration of those dependent on public services.
Addressing Political Inequalities

- Interventions must pursue both economic and political dimensions.
- On the political side: Institutional and legal measures must focus on democratic equality.
- Has two basic principles
  - Gov’t must show equal concern for everyone over whom it claims power.
  - Government must respect fully the responsibility and right of every person to decide for himself what it is to have and live a meaningful life.
- Challenge: “People are not responsible for much of what determines their place in the economy and politics of their country”.
The Two Principles Elaborated

- In practice the two principles mean:
  - Gov’t has a duty to remove constraints on people’s autonomy and capacities to live meaningful lives and to make decisions about their own lives.
  - Each citizen participates as an equal partner, which means more than just having an equal vote.
  - Also means that the citizen has an equal voice and a equal stake in the result.
- These elements have a substantive and procedural dimension.
Substantive Elements: The Individual

- Removing constraints- geographical, institutional and cultural- that limit autonomy, voice and or those erode the citizens stakes in policy outcomes.
  - Instit’l design-architecture of political institutions.
  - Socio-economic rights- (right to education; right to health; right to work; right to join economic associations- (Building personal capabilities)
  - Right to participate in the policy processes; (Enhancing responsiveness)
  - Principles of state policy (Some are non-prescriptive and others are prescriptive (Linking policies to outcomes)
Substantive Elements: The Group

- At the group level relevant measures:
  - Equalization principles (affirmative action; earmarks and special allocations)
  - Decentralization policies (to enhance voice; fiscal accountability);
  - Transparency guarantees (to allow evaluation of available options);
  - Inter-generational equity (both in fiscal policies - current benefits should be based on current burdens) and in natural resource and environmental management.
Procedural Justice

- Access to representative institutions: voting for and access to committees of local government electoral bodies and national assemblies;
- Control of the political agenda: Expressive rights-enforcing accountability by protest; speech; assembly and right to demand explanations and reasons for policy.
- Right to petition and get remedies from oversight institutions- adjudicatory rights- Judiciary, Ombudsmen, National Human Rights Institutions; Anti-Corruption Agencies.