Accountability as Accessibility: Technocratic, popular and populist conceptions of governance in Nigeria and beyond

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Abstract:

Elected representatives should be accountable, but what does accountability mean? Over almost three decades of governance reforms lead by international donor institutions accountability has become a buzzword in the good governance agenda. The underlying assumption of accountability as essentially a principal-agent interaction has been surprisingly resilient, withstanding waves of critique and reform to donor programming. Insights from in-depth qualitative fieldwork in southwest Nigeria suggest that actually existing conceptions of accountability – that is, the things that politicians do that render them accountable in the eyes of their constituents – differ radically from dominant donor ideas. Accountability as accessibility expresses the importance of a relationship between rulers and the ruled as one requiring visibility and direct communication, even in the absence of those in power delivering any tangible benefits. This article elucidates a new conceptual framework to make sense of accountability as accessibility. Combining African scholarship on the post-colonial state with work on 'conversational democracy' in the UK, accessibility emerges as a key means by which power is made accountable, not just in Nigeria but in a variety of non-African political contexts.

Keywords:

Accountability, accessibility, Peter Ekeh, good governance, two publics, Nigeria

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Introduction

A good government is an accountable one; this much is generally agreed. But what does accountability mean? Behind the bland universal appeal of the concept of accountability is a plurality of different conceptions which both lead governments in quite different directions in the pursuit of accountability, and can, at times, come into tension.

Accountability came to the fore with the good governance agenda promoted first by the World Bank (Bank 1992) and then a host of other international donor institutions (*Independent Commission for Aid Impact* 2013). However, the dominant intellectual and ideological leaning of the Bank led to the term becoming a hollowed out buzzword defined in exclusively technical and managerial ways (Leftwich 1994, 368; Polzer 2001). Reforms to strengthen this technocratic form of accountability in turn resulted in 'choiceless democracies' (Mkandawire 1998, 1999) where decisions on the most important and controversial national issues were unaccountable (Sousa 2002). Despite waves of critique and revisions to make accountability less technocratic (Goetz 2003; Goetz and Jenkins 2005), more 'pro-poor' (Hickey and Mohan 2008) and more sensitive to the cut and thrust of politics on the ground (Moncrieffe 1998), the core conception of accountability, and its normative underpinnings have endured through the last three decades of governance research. Whilst ever more attention is paid to the mechanics of government failure as a principal-agent problem (World Bank 2016) this work has for the most part ignored serious normative questions about what accountability actually means.

Empirical analysis of political contestation in Oyo state Nigeria reveals that popular conceptions of accountability depart from those prescribed by international donor institutions. They require that politicians make themselves accessible. Voters seek to engage their representatives in forms of communication that contain the possibility of holding them to account. I call this accountability as accessibility. Whilst accessibility may involve specific questions and sanctions related to concrete governmental performance, the sort of paradigmatic behaviour in the principal-agent model, but it goes beyond a narrow focus on outputs to encompass broader conceptions of legitimate leadership. Accessibility is intertwined with notions of visibility and communication, creating an overall picture of accountable leaders are those who are close and knowable.

The demand for accountability as accessibility is ubiquitous in Nigerian politics. Examples from across the country show it is explicitly demanded by citizens. The injunction to "be accessible" can be heard at local, state and national levels and the politicians of all stripes seek to demonstrate their accessibility. Though not in the same vocabulary, similar demands that politicians are visible, contactable and show a capacity to listen resonate in politics globally. Indeed, the Nigerian experience opens up new ways of thinking about the politics of accountability elsewhere, chiming with work on 'conversational democracy' (Coleman 2005) in the UK.

However, just as the Nigerian case exemplifies the potential for accountability to be articulated and enacted through alternative mechanisms, it also showcases the risks of ignoring the need for those in power to be accessible. Startling examples from Nigeria's recent political experience show that the demand for accountability as accessibility can come into tension with the more technocratic forms of accountable governance. This gives rise to a third conception of accountability as exaggerated accessibility, where politicians promise to make themselves accessible through exaggerated, almost pantomime performances of connection and communication. Thus, the case of accessibility in Nigeria provides a new angle for understanding the global rise of populism, as a response to the failings of a distant and unknowable technocracy. Moreover, it shows the importance of understanding the plural

and nuanced conceptions of good governance and normative politics more widely in developing countries.

This article starts by giving an account of the mainstream technocratic conception of accountability and the central role of principal-agent models. Section two picks up the question of what accountability actually means in political life in one state in southwest Nigeria. Drawing on 6 months of in-depth qualitative fieldwork in Ibadan, Oyo State between 2013 and 2015, the section uses the interviews with politicians, voters and activists to present the idea of accountability as accessibility. Section 3 points to experiences elsewhere in Nigeria as a warning of what happens when demands for accessibility are ignored in favour of dominant technocratic conceptions. Section 4 argues that the demand for accessibility should be understood as a desire to unify what Ekeh (1975) terms the two publics. Section 5 locates accessibility in wider conceptual frameworks of accountability and links it to debates over democracy in western countries.

1. The rise of technocratic accountability

Good governance represented both a renouncement of the excesses of the Washington Consensus (Toye 1987) and a resurrection of its core concerns whilst responding to the demand to 'bring the state back in' (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985). The World Bank and IMF located the source of the failure of structural adjustment policies in the corruption, lack of capacity and incompetence of many state bureaucracies (Bank 1989, 1991; Lancaster 1993, 9; Bank 1994, 8). At the same time, Western governments were increasingly interested in democratisation and human rights abroad (Leftwich 1994, 363). These combined to form a narrative that cast the state in developing countries as it presently existed as dysfunctional and corrupt but was highly ambitious about the normative values it could embody once reformed. A good government should be accountable and effective with strong, but pared down, state institutions were needed to build 'market-friendly' economies (Aoki, Murdock, and Okuno-Fujiwara 1995; Streeten 1996). Neo-classical economics, which had also provided the intellectual justification for Structural Adjustment, remained the core intellectual underpinning to this new agenda. The World Bank argued that the state would not be the "direct provider of growth but as a partner, catalyst, and facilitator" (Bank 1997, 1). At the same time, New Institutional Economics, and the work of Douglas North in particular, developed the models of neo-classical economics to include a central focus on institutions (North 1990b, 1990a, 2003; North et al. 2007; North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009). New institutional economists argued that 'getting the institutions right' was the most important factor in development (Rodrik 2004). The 'Post-Washington Consensus' paid attention to the institutional environment that 'makes markets work well' (J. E. Stiglitz 2005; Ahrens 1999; Serra and Stiglitz 2008). Good governance combined an institutionalist economic philosophy with an increasingly influential set of management principals, called the New Public Management (NPM), which helped to give shape to exactly what these 'good institutions' should be. Proven private-sector management techniques were to be applied to state and public-sector bodies (Hood 1991, 6; Pierre 2009, 596), as they had in Anglo-Saxon governments (USA, UK, Australia and New Zealand) in the 1970s and 1980s (Barberis 1998; Chang, Golden, and Hill 2010; Choup 2010; Fombad 2013; Hood 1991, 3–4).

New Public Management provided the groundwork for conceptualising accountability in the public sector and the role of the private sector in government. A core set of principles for good governance was effectiveness, the ability to achieve a defined result or implement a desired policy, and efficiency, the ability to achieve a defined output with minimal inputs of time and resources (Bank 1992, 1994, 1995; Dollar 1998; Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2007). Scholars in the Post-Washington Consensus argued that the role of accountability was as an instrument to effective public

administration. Ahrens (1999, 18) describes accountability as one of handful of qualities that are "required for the sound management of public resources, an enabling environment for the private sector and a productive partnership between the public and private sectors". Framed in a conception of the state where its primary role is to facilitate the delivery of services via 'agents', the Bank modelled accountability as a principal-agent problem. The primary function of accountability mechanisms is to ensure that there are minimal delegation costs when agents carry out these tasks on behalf of states (Bank 1992, 6, 13).

Making the state more accountable to citizens and society became synonymous with enhancing efficiency of public good provision (Maldonado 2010). Policy-making was to be insulated from representative institutions which might derail technocratic policies with "distributive claims of pressure groups", which needed to be 'locked in' to provide "stabilized expectations regarding a new set of incentive structures and the confidence that these cannot be arbitrarily altered" (Ahrens 1999, 27; Bank 1995). Good governance gave the public a role in facilitating accountability and efficiency at the "micro-level", not as citizens but "as recipients of public services" who could monitor service delivery through their interactions with services and give feedback (Bank 1992, 14, 2004). Transparency, defined as "the citizenry's right to know and access to information" (Kaufmann and Bellver 2005, 1), opens government activities to public scrutiny, resulting in public pressure on governments to perform better and reduce corruption (Rose-Ackerman 1996; J. Stiglitz 1998; J. E. Stiglitz 1999). Ordinary people needed "easy access to information on the workings of public programs intended for their benefit" to empower them to demand better services and monitor officials (Reinikka and Svensson 2003, 2; *Independent Commission for Aid Impact* 2013).

Critics of good governance questioned both the appropriateness of the donor community's technical approach to development and pointed towards its nonetheless political consequences. The good governance paradigm was "managerial" and guilty of the technicist fallacy: the belief that human affairs are susceptible to an administrative 'fix' (Leftwich 1994, 363). The World Bank is constrained by its Articles of Agreement from interfering in the "political affairs of its members" ("About Us - IBRD Articles of Agreement" 2012). Leftwich (1994, 368) argues that the focus on "apparently politically-neutral" recommendations was a "sleight of hand" as such changes would inevitably have profound political effects. Indeed, the World Bank espoused increasingly expansive visions of its capacity to change institutions (Grindle 2007, 571), with one influential report remarking that donors "need to get beyond projects and spur *systemic change in whole sectors and countries*." [italics added] (Dollar 1998, 103).

The risk of seeing governance and development as susceptible to technical fixes is not simply that it is reductive, but that it gives a false impression that the question of what the government should do is consensual and uncontroversial rendering choices and trade-offs unnecessary (Polzer 2001, 7; Newell and Bellour 2002, 9). The good governance agenda reflected "not just an economic vision but a political one" (Leftwich 1994, 368). By labelling important and controversial aspects of government action as 'technical', good governance reforms put them outside of democratic control (Sousa 2002). Mkandawire called this the "politics of insulation" and highlighted its anti-democratic implications(Mkandawire 1999, 338). The nature of the macro-economic reforms required by donors through-out the Good Governance era foreclosed many of the demands that governments faced from their populations (Moncrieffe 1998, 400), and cast the opposition of elites and the urban working class to reform as illegitimate and rent-seeking (Bangura 1994, 300). Critics argued that questions of economics and distribution, such as government spending, taxes and how government structures access economic opportunities and rents, were all key questions of politics and should not be "screened off" from the pressures of civil society and elected representatives (Mkandawire 1998;

Bangura 1999, 9). Good Governance "narrowed the policy agenda in most African countries" (Abrahamsen 2000, xiv) creating, in effect, 'choiceless democracies' (Mkandawire 1998, 1999, 2006). As the rhetoric of accountability grew in volume, the possibility for people to meaningfully hold those in power accountable for the most important decisions was severely restricted, resulting in a new generation of 'societies which can vote but cannot chose' (Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin 1999, 84).

Concerns over the impact of technocratic reforms was not limited to developing countries that were subject to donor conditionalities. The Africa-centric 'choiceless democracies' debate echoed wider concerns within the Anglo-Saxon public administration literature about the effects of New Public Management in Western democracies countries. There were fears that the profound changes in public service delivery including "devolution, privatisation, agencification, management reform, new forms of collaborative strategies and contracting out" (Pierre 2009, 592). had outstripped equivalent innovations in political accountability (Hood 1991; Mulgan 2000). As the state was remodelled according to market mechanisms, citizens came to play the role of customers, concerned primarily with their own individualised experience of the state, foregoing a capacity for collective consciousness or debates about distribution (Bozeman 2007; Pierre 2009, 593). What these parallel debates show is that the pursuit of accountability is not straightforward. Reforms aimed at enhancing accountability conceived of as a technocratic value had the effect of reducing accountability conceived of in a broader political sense. These are not typological variations but reflect substantive and competing differences in the underlying conceptions of what makes a government good. This idea of accountability as a way in to studying normative politics will be returned to later in the article.

Suffice to say, there have been ongoing efforts from within and outside of international donor institutions to re-orient accountability to better reflect the reality of political life. Largely based at the Institute of Development Studies some scholars responded to the thinness of good governance technical conceptions of accountability by advocating for a conception of accountability as people-power. The "New Accountability Agenda" argued that accountability should go beyond traditional formal liberal democratic mechanisms and get into "places it can't reach" (Goetz 2003; Goetz and Jenkins 2005). Using case studies of social movements, popular campaigns and grassroots victories this literature was undergirded by a radically different understanding of society, influenced by more anarchist and structuralist lines of thought. It saw underdevelopment as the result of an unequal distribution of power in society, and accountability was part of the wresting back of power by the poor. Whilst the poor are meant to be served by government policies for development, they often struggle to access or navigate formal channels such as judicial review, ombudsmen and scrutiny in national presses (Newell and Wheeler 2006b, 2006a). It was hoped that civil society, working outside of formal governmental channels could achieve a deeper level of democratic and public accountability than more technocratic forms of accountability (Hickey and Mohan 2008, 234; Benequista 2009). A related strand of thought sort to recalibrate the good governance aspirations for accountability in line with realities of state-making on the ground. Development practitioners lamented 'governance overload' (Grindle 2004) and urged a focus on what governance qualities actually work for development to achieve "good enough governance" (Grindle 2007) with limited resources (Kelsall 2013; Khan 2007). These scholars argue donors should "go with the grain" and build on "what works" in Africa and other developing countries (Booth 2011, 510; Kelsall 2011; Levy 2014), learning from successful case studies (Yanguas 2014).

The need to pay attention not only 'governance' but politics and elections has been at least superficially incorporated by leading donors. In response to the accusation that good governance accountability was too narrowly focused on state reforms (Newell and Wheeler 2006a, xv, 1) the World Bank developed the concepts of social accountability, involving mechanisms beyond just

voting, and demand-side governance (Bank 2005, 2, 5). They recognised a broader range of techniques such as protests, petitions, participatory budgeting and the participation of civil society in policy formation as ways to draw non-elites into formal governance structures, empowering marginalised groups (Bank 2000, 2003, 2016).

These critiques targeted the way diversity and perfectibility of mechanisms through which developing country states could be held to account for the provision of public goods and services. Yet, neither the New Accountability Agenda, the work on good enough governance nor donor's responses to these critiques questioned the core conception of accountability as a principal agent problem. The accommodations that took place within the Post-Post-Washington consensus were concessions to the practical reality of politics in developing countries, not to the larger challenge of normative pluralism.

Debates about accountability and its relationship to good governance are not merely relics of the good governance zeal of the 1990s. The core conception of accountability and its power to shape what government reforms should look like has endured and can be seen in the most recent iterations of World Bank thinking. As in the first articulations of the good governance agenda in the early, 1990s, the Bank's understanding of accountability is predicated on an explicit modelling of the relationship between citizens and leaders as a principal-agent problem (World Bank 2016, 101). The 2016 policy research paper *Making Politics Work for Development* (World Bank 2016, 1–2) explains that role of development scholars is to understand "how a variety of political actors … can harness political markets to serve the goals of economic development." Broadly speaking, politics has been incorporated into the World Bank's approach to development as a market imperfection (Fine 2009) – termed variously as principal-agent problems, adverse incentives, unhealthy political engagement – and subject to economic analysis using enduring rational choice models. It sees politics through the neo-classical lens as just another market, where the behaviour of representatives is governed by incentives. Of course, some things have changed since the emergence of the good governance agenda in the early 1990s: neo-classical modelling of politics has become ever more complex and nuanced. The model of accountability as a principal-agent problem has generated numerous empirical studies seeking to understand and optimise accountability mechanisms (Lindberg 2010; Harding 2015; Grossman and Michelitch 2018). In the world-view put forward in *Making Politics Work for Development* the normative basis of is straightforward: accountability exists where incentive structures appropriately sanction or rewards leaders, whether through elections or other means, for effective public goods provision. However, it is not clear that this normative assumption is empirically valid in different contexts. Is public goods provision the only relevant consideration when citizens hold their governments accountable?

One particular aspect of technocratic accountability is worth highlighting before considering the answers to these questions in Oyo state. In the 'politics of insulation' and the effort to seal off the technical core of governance from its distracting political elements, we see a vision of the good state as ideally cut off from its citizens. What is striking about models of government-citizen relationships as one between principals and agents is that they are oddly anonymous. Indeed, theorists from Austrian school of economics have long celebrated the market as an arena of non-discrimination through anonymity, where people interact solely as disembodied buyers and sellers (Friedman 1982). Von Hayek (1945) argued that the market was superior to the political realm because individuals were free from state control to pursue self-interest guided by the price signal. By transferring the same intellectual underpinnings to the study of democracy as a political market, the principal agent theorists import the same conception of the disembodied anonymous individual, no longer the buyer, but the voter. So long as the citizen principals receive information about the agent's performance, then they need not know who the agent is. The idea of a relationship between the leader and voters is reduced

solely to relevant information signals that helps the voters to predict whether the agent will perform well ex ante; for example, their qualifications, record and preferences. Trust is modelled as credibility. Where development policy and programming are increasingly results-based (Eyben 2013), the World Bank's conception of democracy could perhaps be stylised as vote-by-results. A faceless government, operating behind a screen of KPIs is a theme that runs through dominant ideas of accountability more generally. As the next section shows, it is this idea of the absent politician as an anonymous actor that is our point of departure for analysing the disjuncture between technocratic and popular conceptions of accountability.

2. Popular conceptions of accountability as accessibility

This section presents in-depth qualitative and ethnographic data on how accountability is conceived of by politicians and citizens in Oyo state, Nigeria. It centres on the experience of Adediran, a local politician in Ibadan, the capital city of Oyo state. He had been successful over almost 15 years in politics and had won elections to a variety of posts. Significantly, the NGO who put us in touch had a very low opinion of many of the politicians in Ibadan but regarded Adediran highly[1]. Adediran gave an account of his own political career and why he thought he'd been successful. He explained how his initial appointment to the Caretaker Committee laid the groundwork for his subsequent election to the role:

> "Within these 7 months you will have seen my ability to *carry people along*, you would have seen that charisma in me that I have people in mind, you will have seen that I have ability to run good governance." [2]

I asked him to tell me about the components of good governance. His answer focussed on the strategies for making himself accessible: "I make sure that I see my people often and often, so that they will have access to me."[3] As this quote shows, an accessible politician is one who is visible, who the people can see. Most of Adediran's efforts towards accessibility involved physical presence in social spaces, either at the level of city-wide civil society, or in his constituency. He had recently joined the committee for organising the Ibadan Day festival, with the Central Council of Ibadan Indigenes, an influential Ibadan Indigenes association. By being at the meetings where the issues that affected the city were discussed, he made sure he was "not far to the community"[4]. Mostly though, he achieved accessibility by being present and visible in his constituency: attending religious occasions, receiving visitors, maintaining a constituency office and generally delivering "human service"[5].

Once accessibility is achieved and people from the community have managed to find themselves face-to-face with their local politician, there are values that influence how good politicians should interact with their constituents in this private setting. I asked Adediran what would he do if someone came to his door right now, asking for N5,000 to pay their wife's hospital fees? His initial response was that this was "common, so common in politics" and for him "it's happening every day". [6] He believed it was because of poverty. "But not everything is money," he said, "Attend to such a person in a *polite* manner." [7] He explained how he would deal with requests that were too onerous. Rather than giving the N5,000 he would gently lower the man's expectations: "'Ah, sorry, I do not have that kind of

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[1]   Chairman of a Community Development Council and community leader, Ibadan 15/07/2015
[2]   Senior Elected State Level Office Holder, Ibadan 21/07/2015
[3]   Ibid
[4]   Ibid
[5]   Ibid
[6]   Ibid
[7]   Ibid

money. I have two naira, let's share it. Have this.' Then that will not be the end. I will then try to assist."[8] He might 'assist' by following up with the case and helping the man move his wife to a government hospital where the fees were lower. This didn't involve Adediran giving the man his own resources but enabled him to facilitate a solution to the constituent's problem. He concluded that this approach normally worked quite well: "The man, they will appreciate."[9]

Another story reinforced the point that treating people well could make up for lack of funds. He told me about someone who had come to visit him that morning. A man had visited his constituency office asking for several thousand naira to pay his daughter's termly school fees, so she could go back to school:

> "I made him happy. To make him happy is not to give him money! But I made him happy, with what he heard from my mouth. Yes! Encouragement!...
>
> I told him 'my brother, this [economic strife] is general [affecting many people]. With all this economic things ... it is general.' By the time I told him what has happened to some other people, he was saying 'Thank god!' That's just it.
>
> When he was going I said, 'what I have for transport.' [gestures offering something in his hand] I give him hope. I try raise their hope, don't darken their hope, so that they will soon know that oh, they will be encouraged."[10]

The 'transport' money would be a few small notes, perhaps N100, much less than the requested amount. He predicted that now, should someone ask his visitor for his opinion on Adediran, they would say 'Ah he is a nice person.' In contrast, had he responded by rejecting the request out of hand or explaining that he simply didn't have the money: "It's not the best." [11] Therefore, interpersonal interactions between patrons and clients matter, even when the material outcome of the interaction is the same, and the constituent goes home with far less money than he requested.

Of course, the conclusions to be drawn from this discussion are limited by the fact that it is the recounting of an interaction, not a direct observation, so Adediran's story may be embellished, edited or entirely false. Furthermore, it is only his perspective as a politician, not the constituent's. However, his emphasis on accessibility was repeated by other informants and in

One academic lamented how politicians had become unaccountable and undemocratic by hiding themselves away in Abuja during their terms. He told me about a radio phone in show he had been listening to, that he saw as perfectly encapsulating the problem:

> "They asked them: do you have any access to your government? They say no they're never here, and when they are there in their big house with guards all over and dogs. We can't visit him, we never hear from him again."[12]

The theme of leaders who are physically inaccessible also came up in a conversation with a long-time NGO activist, who worked in the same communities as Adediran. He identified physical distance, say between rich and poor areas, and barriers, like compound walls, as creating a "communication gap". He continued:

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[8]   Ibid
[9]   Ibid
[10]   Ibid
[11]   Ibid
[12]   Academic and progressive activist, University of Ibadan, Ibadan 07/05/2015

"That's the problem in this country, the communication gap is always there between the leaders and the people. When they want your vote they come down to you, but as soon as they get to the office, they imprison themselves. Ordinary people don't have access to them any longer"[13].

He later linked accessibility explicitly to the ability of local people to ask questions of their government. He listed the various services that the government did not provide – water and electricity - and how at the offices of the NGO where he worked he had to provide these services privately. And yet, he mused, he paid tax:

"We are not benefiting and yet they collect tax, what do you do with my money? [pause] And I want to ask you question and you are not accessible, what sort of society is that? What kind of democracy?"[14]

One informant, who worked selling babywares in a modern market near the ring-road explained her frustrations with politicians. Core to critique was their inaccessibility and blockages to communication once in power:

"[A]nytime you go there [to their office] for help they will not listen to you…they [their aides] may not allow them to see you. If you are a close friend, immediately the get there like this they will change their phone number or anytime you call them… [they say] 'Hello…hello…ha! We are in the meeting' and when you still call back tomorrow, 'Hello…we are in the meeting.' Is it every day they are in a meeting?"[15]

This idea of leaders remaining visible as they move from normal social life into government emphasises that it is not just one's connections whilst in office that matter, but full transparency and credibility require a deeper understanding of the person's character and social connections across their whole life course.

The following discussion of Adediran's social connections to his constituents shows the importance of ongoing connections. Talking to him, it became clear that the idea of transparency wasn't anchored in the relationship that the politician has with his voters when he is in office but in the politician's ongoing relationships with his local community. For instance, he occupied the post of Caretaker Chairman both through appointment and election. According to models of accountability that are entirely based on electoral relationships this should have fundamentally changed his accountability relationship with his constituency. However, he characterised his career progression as one of continuity and ongoing relationships. In the following quote Adediran talks about how he is tied to his constituency through a hypothetical scenario where he is held to account. He warns of the risks of being an absent politician, highlighting the importance of being visible and present:

"By the time you run back to them, in the past 3 years we voted for you, did you make yourself accessible to us? *Did we see you? We couldn't see you.* You were staying in Abuja all the way through, *we did not see you, you did not come.* If you now come and ask for their vote, they will not give you their vote. And they will collect your money! [Adediran and my research assistant laugh]. A good politician will not do that"[16] (italics my own).

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13   Director of active Ibadan-based NGO, Ibadan 15/05/2015
14   Ibid
15   Market woman, Ibadan 2/07/2015
16   Senior Elected State Level Office Holder, Ibadan 21/07/2015

Indeed, a failure to be accessible is seen as arrogant and an expression of contempt for one's supporters. Explaining why a Commissioner was sacked by the Governor in 2013, a reporter for ThisDay newspaper couched his unpopularity in the language of accessibility, and a disconnection from his supporters. In an article he explained that:

> "[His] 'sins' … are many even to those outside the government. He was reported to have allowed the office to get into his head as he ignored the calls of even his friends and made himself inaccessible." (T. Sanni 2013)

This quote highlights how accessibility concerns having the right sort of social connections between those in power and their clients and supporters, or more broadly the correct state-society relations. Being accessible means to keep yourself and your constituency in the same communicative space. To pose questions and receive answers you must be in the same conversation as your interlocutor. Being accessible includes elements of speaking and listening: you may need to persuade people for them to understand your answers, but you also need to be able to listen. This idea is echoed in the ubiquitous Nigerian idiom 'to carry along'. Rather than the movement implied in 'carry along' relating to people being moved, or propelled, by economic progress, it is a movement that maintains closeness or proximity. If you don't carry people along, then you risk ending up so far apart that you can no longer have a conversation.

3. Populists and the threat of exaggerated accessibility:

The case of Ekiti state, which sits almost next door to Oyo in southwest Nigeria, demonstrates how the loudest claims to accessibility came from populist politicians. First it is important to note that populism is infamously hard to define, and its meaning is contested (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2010). There is little ideological consistency across different populist movements (Cheeseman and Larmer 2015, 26). Resnick (2010, 1) focuses on the policy offerings of populists, characterising populist politics as "anti-elitist policy discourse that aims to rectify the exclusion of economically marginalized constituencies." Whilst there is evidence that populists in African countries do tend to pursue narratives of exclusion and economic grievance (Cheeseman and Larmer 2015, 23) it would seem that this is not their defining feature, nor separable from the more performative and identity based elements of populism. What unites populist politicians is a common thread of personality and style. These are not secondary superficial idioms but constitute mobilisation strategies in themselves. As Cheeseman and Larmer (2015, 26) write: "they present themselves as "one of the people", ready to use their common sense and lived experience to defend the "common man" against manipulative elites and "so-called" experts." The role and identity of the leader is paramount, leading to a highly personalistic politics. They are charismatic and claim an affinity with 'the people' (Conniff 1981; Canovan 1999; Weyland 2001, 14).

Crucially, this closeness is both manifested and constituted by direct communication or 'non-mediated rapport' between the leader and 'the people' (Mouzelis 1985, 334). They tend to reach out to voters directly, bypassing state and party institutions (Kay 1996). For example, in Zambia Michael Sata's team used a helicopter to transport him quickly around the country during the election campaign with the aim of making such a direct personal connection with as many people as possible (Cheeseman, Ford, and Simutanyi 2014, 340). Furthermore, the content of this communicative connection is emotive (Weyland 2001). Moffitt describes this as an "embodied and symbolically mediated performance" (Moffitt 2016, 3). Populist leaders portray themselves as outsiders who stand apart from the political elite (Barr 2009, 38) (Resnick 2010, 24) and their perceived international allies such as donors and investors (Knight 1998).

Ayo Fayose was Governor of Ekiti State from 2003 to 2007 and return to power by the ballot box in 2014. His technocratic rival, Dr Kayode Fayemi, had a doctorate from the University of London and a policy platform that focused on infrastructure and long-term development. In keeping with the characterisations of populism above, Fayose positioned himself as a common man who is standing against the Yoruba elite and direct communication between ruler and ruled. Previous research suggests that accessibility was a core element of Fayose's electoral appeal. Drawing on in-depth research with grassroots political mobilisers, Husaini (2015, 45) suggests that when grassroots political mobilisers commend the populist Fayose for being authentic, they are invoking a claim to trust based on familiarity.

Husaini's respondents complained that Fayemi was "always going to Lagos" (2015, 45–46). This was a sign of a lack of transparency as it connected Fayemi to unknown regional and national networks. Broader political discourse suggests that the idea of Fayemi as having untransparent social connections was an ongoing concern; for instance, the accusation that he secretly ran a university in Ghana where he was really from (*Premium Times Nigeria* 2014). Fayemi's technocratic government left certain popular conceptions of good governance unmet and was unable to balance long-term progress with more short-term economic benefits, leaving the door open to populists like Fayose to capitalise on the popular sense of disconnection from government elites.

On Fayose's election website the logic of accessibility is taken to the pantomime extreme. Not only is his phone number freely available, but it is "the commonest telephone number in Ekiti state today". People can, he claims, not only text but call directly and "he personally picks their calls", rather than fobbing of callers with aides and handlers. His website reduces accessibility to its most exaggerated literal terms: "the people can talk directly to the ears of their governor". (Fayose Campaign Website 2014) Ekeh's (1975) theory of the two publics, where citizens engage with the state via both the primordial public and the civic public, offers a way of thinking about the politics of connection and communication, which are expressed so vibrantly in Fayose's rhetoric.

4. Accessibility and connection: unifying the 'two publics'

Ekeh's work has been highly influential in the study of Nigeria and African politics more widely (Osaghae 2006, 233; Mustapha 2012, 4). Ekeh famously argued that the legacy of colonialism in Nigeria had led to the bifurcation of the public realm. The state existed in the civic public, the realm of amorality, whereas what could be thought of as the moral 'public good' existed in the primordial public. The primordial public is made up of the social spaces among associations, groups and communal units outside the state. Ekeh describes a strong contrast between citizens' amoral behaviour in the civic public and their moral and principled behaviour in the primordial public, such that one can 'rob' the civic public to serve the primordial one.

Ekeh's argument is that the state in Nigeria, which constitutes the civic public, has been so abusive and abused that how people act with relation to the state is totally disconnected from the values they use to moderate ethical behaviour in the primordial public realm. The importance of accessibility as shown in the discussion above suggests a subtler conception of the interrelationship between the formal and informal. State action and the civic realm is not so denigrated that it is 'amoral' (Omobowale and Olutayo 2010); there are clear popular demands for state office holders to engage with society in ways that abide with ethical norms. My respondents referred to a variety of different forms of communication between government leaders and constituents. Many of the channels of access exist outside of the formalised procedures described in good governance prescription for public

accountability. People complain of politicians not answering their calls, not being physically present in the community and locating their private residences in remote affluent areas. These are informal channels, in the sense that they are not codified in law. Moreover, the obligations of being accessible extend beyond the time of the official work day and space of the government office. This echoes wider work by anthropologists on where people base their judgements of what counts as a good governance on factors that fall outside of the public sphere, as traditionally conceived as the formal realm of the state (Rivkin-Fish 2005; Gupta 2009; Shah 2009). These norms are reliable and intelligible for ordinary people, in a context like Oyo State where for a long time the state has been exclusively a source of violence and privation, under prolonged military rule and punishing economic reforms (Ihonvbere 1993; Agbaje and Guyer 2002; Adebanwi and Obadare 2010).

Out of all my respondents, Comrade Mohammed[17] had the most visceral experience of the way that state violence had persisted into the democratic era. As the leader of a union he had directly experienced police brutality and fought in court cases for his members who had lost their lives and liberty as a result of state violence. Yet through his years lobbying the state for better pay deals and concessions, he knew its potential to be a source of benefits and that law could prevail. His interview touched on the idea of transparency as making the state knowable. He explicitly situated his understanding of what people want from government in juxtaposition with the military rule that had come before. Writing in 1999 Bolanle Awe, renowned Nigerian historian and women's rights activist, noted the pervasive sense of disjuncture at the heart of Nigerian society. She wrote, "There is no convergence in thoughts, objectives and actions between the rulers and the ruled" (Awe 1999, 13) Comrade Mohammed said, "those who first came, they came immediately after the military era, and the euphoria then was 'this our government, this our government.'" He explained that in this context people were not interested in "prudence" or "the deliverables"[18], which means the fiscal responsibility and high quality public goods that the international conception of good governance calls for. Instead, he explained, "they were more interested in having their men, their kiths and kin in government".[19]

On first sight this is a rehashing of the privatisation of the state argument, whereby a neopatrimonial state distributes resources and exercises authority along personal and patrimonial networks. Indeed, he thought that people were "interested in having a family member gain", which hampered government's ability to enact policy. However, material gain was only part of the reason: "So when they came, the first thing they had to do it was not tangible. It was intangible thing: repairing our psyche." The citizenry was "psychologically depressed" by the experience of "military terrorism".[20] He explained what it meant to have a civilian government which included "their men, their kiths and kin":

> "They brought in people into governance. At least, can you get into government without knowing at least one person, if you do not know anybody there. Somebody there will know somebody, who will know somebody there. That will be a relief that government cannot oppress me, I have somebody I can rush to!"[21]

This characterises democratisation as the slow process of rehabilitating the state in the popular imagination as something that was safe, intelligible and had a connection to them. Of course, Comrade Mohammed's example from the early days of the Fourth Republic gives an extreme case study of connecting the state to society through personal relationships.

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[17]   Pseudonym. Leader of Oyo State Branch of major national union, Ibadan 21/04/2015
[18]   Ibid
[19]   Ibid
[20]   Ibid
[21]   Ibid

What is interesting about the examples of accessibility described here is that the relationship is of value, for the affective and emotional security it brings. James Ferguson develops the idea that hierarchical but affective relationships may be valued, through his elaboration of the concept of dependence. Whilst dependence is, "to the liberal mind", dehumanising and the opposite of freedom, it has historical antecedents, for instance in followership, that in themselves become a mode of agency (Ferguson 2015, 145–46). Ferguson develops the concept of dependence as a means by which people can enter into distributive networks, albeit on different terms. He writes:

> "... the socially thick recognition that comes from being looked after by the local party-state is after all preferable (for many) to the frighteningly 'thin' recognition of the iris scan – if only because it implies a humanly social (rather than technocratically asocial) and actively affective bond between state and citizen." (Ferguson 2015, 160–61)

The idea of the 'frighteningly thin recognition of the iris scan' echoes the anonymity of the Friedman and Von Hayek inspired political market, discussed in Making Politics Work for Development in section one. On the technocratic conception of accountability, what matters is the delivery of public goods and responsiveness to the preferences of voters for such goods. In Comrade Mohammed's words, it is not only the 'tangible', the outputs that matter. Thinking about accessibility as unifying the two publics, it attests to the value of Ferguson's "humanly social … and actively affective bond between state and citizen".

Many scholars have taken these sorts of impulses as evidence that in African countries the state is linked to society through 'primordial' identities such as ethnicity, family and clan and that private connections outweigh public loyalties (Van de Walle 2003). In Nigeria this instrumentalization of the state for ethnic gain, or the promotion of individuals to office based on ethnic identity is known as 'tribalism' and its influence in politics is frequently decried by Nigerian commentators, including in later work by Ekeh himself (Ekeh 1990; Achebe 2000). Within the neo-patrimonialism framework, calls for accessibility could therefore be interpreted as calls for the informalisation of politics, where formal procedures are replaced by informal patrimonial ones (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Erdmann and Engel 2007). Indeed, some have interpreted Ekeh to mean that Nigeria must ape the implicit euro-centric norm of a unified public sphere, by strengthening the civic public and dismantling the primordial public dismantled so that the state can enjoy a normative supremacy (Osaghae 2006, 237).

Thus, these debates highlight the way that the mainstream international conception of good governance asserts the need to strengthen and police the boundary between public and private, and state and society. This raises questions about how changing conceptions of good governance re-draw the distinction between public and private in different ways to serve ascendant interests and draws our attention to the ways that everyday political action at the grass-roots may subvert that distinction. The examples of accountability as accessibility described above show how those who occupy public office should be connected to society not by personal or familial links but through observing values that broadly cultivate the sorts of relationship and behaviour that show that state officials are embedded in their wider community. These are social understandings of accountability but not personal ones. Moreover, the key nodes of similarity and difference are not ethnic but geographical and knowledge based. Geographically, leaders became untransparent when they moved away, adopted exclusive wealthy lifestyles and erected barriers of distance and fences between themselves and their constituency. Signifiers of otherness are not identity-based in the sense of being a 'son of the soil' but constituted by links to unknowable distant worlds. Adediran's emphasis on being 'not far from the

community' and 'being seen'[22] emphasises the importance of ties which are based on the possibilities and connections of sharing the same physical locale, not having the same ethnic identity.

These semi-public and informal channels of accessibility are demanded in addition to, not instead of, improvements in the reliability, honesty and effectiveness of formal government. Demands for accessibility show that ordinary people in Nigeria do have normative expectations of how state officials should behave in their role as state officials, and they seek some sort of unification of the civic and primordial public. Norms and obligations situated in the first instance in the primordial public draw on embedded social and communal norms that are prior to the contingent formal relationship that an individual politician enters with their constituents when they gain office for a term of a few years. The theme that emerges from the quotes is that ascendancy to formal office must not be allowed to sever or diminish the informal obligations of decency and sociality. It is where leaders take formal office and withdraw from informal channels, i.e. stop taking calls, disappear from the community and move far away, that people complain about the replacement of accessible informal institutions with restrictive and opaque formal ones.

5. Conceptualising technocratic, popular and populist accountability: Accessibility in the UK and Nigeria
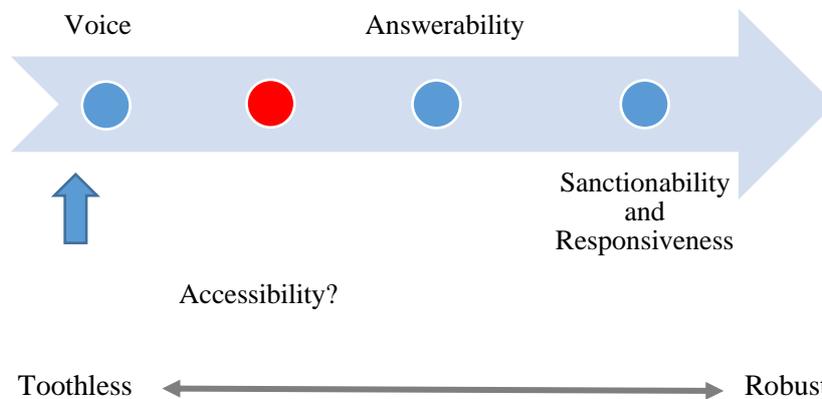
The normative conception of accountability that underpins much of donor thinking on governance reform represents only one of plural possible conceptions of accountability. The empirical material presented above alerts us to the accountability as foremost a relationship between people. In many contexts, leaders must be accessible if they are to be accountable. Accessibility highlights that there should be a fluidity of communication between government and the people, with ongoing opportunities for people to access their leaders. It remains however to fit accessibility into the wider conceptualisations of accountability and democratic representation. This section starts with locating accessibility within the development studies literature, identifying similarities and differences between accessibility and related concepts, before broadening the analysis to look at how accessibility shapes political engagement in Western liberal democracies, focussing on the UK as an example.

A typology of accountability that took the existing conceptions as a starting point would arrange them along a spectrum (as represented in table 1). I will go on to explain why this in fact misrepresents the differences between them. It would start with purely expressive but ultimately 'toothless' forms of accountability such as voice at one end and move to more robust outcome-based measures at the other. At one end is voice (Hirschman 2004) defined as "the expression of preferences, opinions and views" (Rocha Menoca and Sharma 2008, 5). The concept of voice is most relevant where it emphasises two-way communication, where people not only speak but are listened to. Would accessibility, as the demand to speak but also be heard, be somewhere in the middle as "voice plus"?

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[22]   Senior Elected State Level Office Holder, Ibadan 21/07/2015.

On this interpretation, moving up the table involves simply an incremental beefing up of accountability, to its ideal form where it 'has teeth'. Existing typologies of accountability tend to rank types of accountability according to "strength of control" (Lindberg 2009, 12), which at its strongest requires the right to sanction (Schedler 1999). In some situations, such as the right of the Ombudsman to demand information from the state (Lindberg 2009, 8), accountability may exist in a weaker form as 'answerability'. The right of the people to ask questions and get a response, and the obligation of leaders to provide one (Newell and Wheeler 2006a, 2) is thus seen as the lesser cousin of 'sanctionability'. It is valuable primarily as a *means* to exercising sanctioning power.

This sense of communication as simply a means to accountability is also seen in the concept of responsiveness. This is defined as the government responding in a timely and accurate way to the demands of citizens, and that its outputs reflect what people on the ground ask of it (Goetz 2003, 6; DFID 2015). The instrumental nature of communication in all these variations of accountability can be seen in the fact that they can be re-imagined, with no serious change in meaning, without communication as such. If the state developed especially adept mind-reading devices, say, it could fulfil the demands of responsiveness and sanctionability just as well via telepathy. So long as the state can gain knowledge of what the people want, and how they evaluate its performance, actual communication is unnecessary.

Yet, this diverges from the way that accountability was judged in reality by Adediran, the NGO activist and Comrade Mohammed. When it came to assessments of how accessible a politician was, my respondents did not refer to what the government had done in response to their requests. They described the distinct achievement of having been able to put their request to government and be heard. This distinction clarifies the nature of the relationship between accessibility and other conceptions of accountability. With accessibility, communication is not an instrumental concept - whereby the value is located in the outcomes it helps bring about - but is intrinsically valuable. There is value simply in being in a certain sort of communicative space. On this alternative line of thought, it does not make sense to theorise accountability as existing along a single spectrum: the different conceptions are predicated on separate beliefs about the value of communication in accountability. Within accessibility, communication is not an instrument to but, under certain conditions, is

constitutive of accountability. It is simply part of what makes it intrinsically valuable. This is summarised in the revised table below (table 2).

Table 2 Revised typology

Conception of accountability	Value of communication to accountability	Outcome defines whether politician is accountable
Sanctionability	instrumental	yes
Accessibility	constitutive	no

The principal-agent models seen in work like the World Bank's *Making Politics Work for the Poor* model the individual in such a way that leaves no room for the intrinsic value of communication. It is therefore not surprising that communication is seen in the dominant donor conceptions of accountability as a mere instrument to achieving good outcomes. The principal gets nothing from "having a chat" with the agent. The sort of individual is not one that can experience recognition or dignity as ends in themselves. Therefore, accessibility, and its manifest pertinence to discussions of accountability in Nigeria, helps us to see the limitations of dominant models of the relationship between the citizen and the state more broadly.

Indeed, Stephen Coleman (2005, 12) work on 'conversational democracy' uses a survey of British voters to highlight how they wanted their Member of Parliament to "listen, and to show that they have listened, to behave with integrity and account for themselves." He situates these communicative elements within debates over two rival conceptions of democracy. Theorists of Rousseauian 'representative democracy' emphasise its mimetic quality, whereby representatives should reproduce as closely as possible constituent's views and demands (2005, 8). This echoes the principal-agent model where accountability is measured by the gap between the principal's interests and what the agent delivers. By contrast, a more direct conception of representation emphasises instead its "communicative and affective dimension" (2005, 12). Therefore, by paying attention to what it is voters actually want from their representative in two very different contexts, a similar theme comes out. This strengthens the argument that direct communication and the sense of being listened to, summarised as accessibility, is not merely a tool towards accountability but as an intrinsic element of what makes it valuable.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between citizens and states is, in fact, a relationship. To bring this into conversation with the technocratic conception of accountability set out at the beginning of the article, how might one explain to the value of accessibility in and of itself to the abstracted individuals of principal-agent models? The experiences of Comrade Mohammed, understood as a desire to unify the two publics, gives some indication of why this is valuable in and of itself. It speaks to the value of being ruled over by leaders who are knowable, who can be seen, and who see you, the citizen, in return. By thinking of accessibility as the call to unify Ekeh's two publics, and not sever the social relations that make those in government knowable and reliable, we can interpret Fayose's victory in Ekiti in 2014 as that of accessibility over technocratic accountability. Fayose was perceived by his

constituents as close enough physically and intellectually to engage with them in meaningful communication, whereas Fayemi was not. In line with Ferguson's warning about the inadequacy of the state that registers its citizens presence solely via the 'iris-scanner', this reminds us that citizens are not nodes of information nor a summary of interests but people.

Whilst the empirical analysis in this article has focussed on Nigeria, many of the same themes surface in work conducted in very different political settings. Just as voters in Oyo and Ekiti states lamented politicians who whilst perhaps delivering the goods were distant and remote, Coleman finds too that British voters resented those traits that made them feel disconnected from their MPs. He identifies common complaints about the 'unknown', 'invisible' and 'alien' representative, with one respondent articulating this concern in almost identical language to Adediran and the NGO worker in Oyo: "*Even though he only lives up the road, I have never ever seen him.*" (2005, 4–5). Moreover Coleman notes that these markers of disconnection were exacerbated by "the perceived absence of politicians between elections." (2005, 12) Coleman (2005, 8–9) credits the rise of demands for a more direct, two-way relationship between citizens and representatives to the evolution of more "mature" democracies and British society becoming "less deferential". Yet, this article has shown that similar demands for accessibility can be seen across varied political contexts ranging from the highly institutionalised British political system to Nigeria's Fourth Republic where elections have been of varied quality since the return to democracy in 1999.

Just as accessibility helps explain what makes a good representative, whether in the UK or Nigeria, so to can troubling trends in world politics be traced to the neglect of accessibility. The rise of populism in Nigeria and elsewhere can be understood as a response to a blindness to many voters' desire for the relationship between leaders and citizens to be a 'humanly social and affective one' (Ferguson 2015). In an age where political leaders could do their job from anywhere in the world, the evidence put forward in this article suggests that there is enduring value in them being right here, face-to-face.

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