AID(S) Politics and Power: A Critique of Global Governance

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ABSTRACT: This article provides a case study of AIDS aid to South African civil society, in order to analyse how power is exercised and resisted in the context of international aid. It is argued that governance theory tends to underestimate power inequalities in the context of policy networks. The case is instead related to the theoretical debate on whether current global power structures can be analysed in terms of a (US led) neo-imperialism, or whether they rather should be understood in terms of post-imperialist power constellations based on ‘regulation of self-regulation’ through market-mechanisms; and with an emphasis on ‘civil society participation’. While the case shows how US aid under the Bush administrations to certain extent involved a ‘civilising mission’, it is argued that ‘regulation of self-regulation’ was the more significant form of governing AIDS aid networks, contributing to a development through which AIDS activism went through a process of ‘NGO:ization’, de-politicising the AIDS issue.

Introduction: the politicization and de-politicization of AIDS

During the last decade, a number of analyses of politics in a global context have used the concept of ‘governance’ in order to grasp new developments (Held and Koenig-Archibugi 2005). ‘Governance’ is an increasingly popular concept not only in the social sciences, but also in the context of policy-making – and particularly so in global policy networks focusing on aid to countries in the Global South. While policy discourses often define these networks, composed of state agencies, NGOs, private foundations, and corporations, in terms of ‘good governance’ and ‘partnership’, this article will focus on the impact of power relations in these networks through the case of global AIDS aid governance.

Governance research often has a somewhat celebratory tone, arguing that the inclusion of civil society actors enhances democratic legitimacy and represents relatively democratic structures of co-operation between the ‘partners’ involved. For example Sørensen and Torfing (2007, p. 9-10) argue that ‘since participation is voluntary and the actors are free to leave the network, and since the actors are mutually dependent on each other, nobody can use their power to exert hierarchical control over anybody without risking to ruin the network’. The case presented in this article does not confirm this. While aid recipient NGOs in theory are ‘free’ to leave networks if donors attach too many strings to their aid, they are not inclined to do so since they may be deeply dependent on the aid for their existence. Further, I will argue that the emergence of a major strategy of global AIDS governance since the turn of the Millennium has involved a de-politicization and de-democratization of an important sector of global civil society.

Nearly three decades after the first case of HIV/AIDS was reported, the disease is today an issue high on the global political agenda. A clear indication of this is that the total resources made available for HIV/AIDS globally increased from US$1.6 billion in 2001 to US$10 billion in 2007 (UNAIDS 2008) and is expected to continue to grow. The reasons for this may seem obvious. According to UNAIDS (2008), approximately 33 million people are living with HIV.

It is however important to emphasize that HIV/AIDS, initially being narrowly defined in medical terms as a ‘health issue’, and socially being stigmatized as a ‘gay disease’, became
politically largely through the actions of social movements in countries such as Brazil and the US in the 1980s, and in the context of global civil society in the 1990s (Follér & Thörn eds. 2008). As HIV/AIDS spread quickly in poor countries of the South, it became an issue closely related to poverty and social inequalities with global implications (Barnett and Whiteside 2006). The fact that the poorest countries in the Global South, particularly in the region of sub-Saharan Africa, carries a disproportionate burden of the epidemic made the issue of medical corporation’s patent rights and their pricing of medicines a hotly contested issue. An important moment in the politicization of the AIDS issue in a global context occurred in 1998 when 38 pharmaceutical companies brought charges against the South African state for suspected breaches of the WTO agreement, motivated by a planned import of medicines from Brazil. In response to this, the South African social movement organization Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), in co-operation with Médecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) and Oxfam, launched an extensive global campaign, which subsequently pressured the pharmaceutical industry to drop its charges because of negative publicity (Olesen 2006).

In this article, I will argue that in the 2000s, this wave of global AIDS activism was largely succeeded by a process of ‘NGO:ization’ or ‘quangoization’ of activism (Kaldor 2003; Miller & Rose 2008), as NGOs have come to play a central role in global AIDS governance. Locally and nationally, NGOs have served as recipients and distributors of aid. Transnationally, INGOs have functioned as links between donors – funds, international institutions, and Western states - and NGOs and authorities at the local and national level. Mike Davis (2006, p. 76) has argued that this emphasis on NGOs and civil society in global development politics started in the mid 1990s under the leadership of the World Bank, and that it could be understood as representing a “soft imperialism,” with the major NGOs captive of the agenda of the international donors, and grassroots groups similarly dependent on the international NGOs’. I will argue that AIDS aid governance is a relevant case to shed light on the contested issue of ‘imperialism’ in contemporary global politics.

According to Alex de Waal (2006, p. 113), contemporary AIDS aid means that ‘we are on the brink of an unparalleled life-controlling intrusion into African societies, and we just don’t know what it will look like’. This article discusses how this situation is played out in the context of South Africa. The case study is used as a springboard to address some more general questions with relevance for theories of global politics, power and activism: What are the strategies of the global donor community in relation to local AIDS activism in the context of civil society in the Global South? What are the functions of these strategies and what are their effects on local AIDS work? And how are power relations articulated, reproduced and resisted in governance networks?

**Critique of ‘governance’**

As an analytical approach, ‘governance’ often emphasize the transformation of boundaries between the state, the market and civil society (Sørensen and Torfing 2008). In the context of globalization theory, ‘governance’ represents practices that ‘can extend beyond the state and substate institutions to include supra-state (macro-regional and global) regimes’ (Scholte 2006, p. 140-1). I argue that governance theory often under-estimate power imbalances between actors in political networks. While governance theory argues that the political power of the nation state is weakened as governance networks move in, our case shows that particular states continue to constitute ‘power centres’ - largely based on material resources - within global governance networks.

Considering that ‘governance’ is a term frequently used by the donor organizations and political networks studied here, I will not use ‘governance’ as a theoretical tool. In this article ‘governance’ instead refers to an empirical practice/discourse, which is the object of critical
analysis. As aid discourses often define the operations of global policy networks in terms of ‘partnership’, there is a need to analyse these discourses critically – with a focus on the power relations they may (mis)represent.

In order to analyse how power is exercised in ‘governance networks’, I depart from the framework of governmentality theory developed to analyze and understand ‘governing at a distance’ in the context of ‘advanced liberalism’. As emphasized by Miller and Rose (2008), it is mistaken to understand advanced liberalism simply in terms of a reduction of state power. Rather, advanced liberalism means a transformation of the role of the state and its mode of regulation towards mechanisms of self-regulation. According to Miller and Rose (2008, p. 215), then, this transformation:

‘is not merely the vicissitudes of a single political ideology – that of neo-liberal conservatism – but something with a more general salience, which underpins mentalities of government from all parts of the political spectrum, and which justifies all of these new attempts to “reinvent government” as “advanced liberal”’.

The strength of governmentality theory is that it offers tools for a sophisticated analysis of the dynamics of global power not just on a macro-level, but also on a micro-level. Departing from the late work of Foucault (1991), Miller and Rose (2008, p. 16) distinguish between two dimensions of exercising power through government: 1) rationalities or programs, ‘ways of rendering reality thinkable in such a way that it was amenable to calculation and programming’; and 2) technologies or techniques, meaning ‘instruments for the conducting of conduct’. Further, programs and techniques are linked to problematizations, a process through which something is constituted as a ‘problem’ to address and act upon.

An important concept emerging from governmentality analyses of advanced liberalism is responsibilization as a mode of governing. This strategy involves a contradiction as it constitutes organizations, communities and individuals (and also, in the case of aid, the recipient state) as independent, self-regulating actors while at the same time leading and controlling them - since there are always rules of regulation for the ‘self-regulating’ actors - without being responsible for them.

The key features of responsibilization of AIDS governance aid can be understood as a globalization of the process through which the Northern welfare state has been increasingly displaced by the regulatory state through the ‘reinvention of governance around audit processes’ (Power 1997, p. 68). These changes have taken place in the context of so-called New Public Management, as depicted in Michael Power’s influential book *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*. This mode of regulation is not an external form of control in a direct sense, as it is presented as a demand on organizations to ‘acquire responsibility to internal control systems’ (Power, p. xviii). In later writings, Power (2003) makes a strong argument that the boundaries in contemporary public management between auditing, consulting, assessment and evaluation, activities which has increased dramatically during the last decade, are not clear, and that all of these practices serve the basic function to legitimate organizational behaviour, while appearing to support rational decision making. A fundamental aspect of this process is that organizations should be reformed in order to make them ‘auditable subjects’. As we will see in connection with the South African case, this essentially means demanding that auditee organizations make their activities quantifiable.

I will use the case study to engage in a critical dialogue with governmentality theory. Governmentality studies have, with a few exceptions (Larner and Walter 2004; Lipschutz 2005), tended to focus on practices within nation states in the Global North, and have also
been criticized for taking the nation state as their pre-given ‘analytical mode’ (Larner and Walters 2004, p.5). Further, I will address the criticism made by Dale (2004, p.184), who argues that governmentality ‘often seems to come over as a process without agency, contexts, conditions, or contradictions’. In connection with the issue of agency, I would like to add that while governmentality theory does not as such preclude resistance, governmentality studies most often leave resistance aside. I will show that the process of development-cooperation is not a case of the ‘simple’ re-production of power. Receivers of aid are not passive objects of Northern charity but also agents who can be expected to resist conditions offered by donors and to create a space for independent interpretation and action. The issue of agency is also related to the broader theoretical issue of context. Network theories generally oppose the idea of power as a resource or possession and instead argue that agency, and power, are constructed as a relation within the network (Sørensen and Torfing 2008). I argue that while power must always be seen as relational, this view nevertheless risks neglecting the structural context of a network, and the fact that actors enter into networks with different material power resources acquired outside of the network (such as money, technology and other material resources). This does not mean that an actor’s identity and power within a network is pre-given or completely determined by these material resources. Rather, the position and power within a network is the result of the articulation of the relations within the network and the material resources that an actor brings into the network.

For example, the position, role, functions and power resources of USAID’s involvement in global AIDS governance networks are not completely determined by its status as a US government agency. However, its actual position and power resources in the context of global governance networks are clearly dependent on, and draw upon, its position as a government agency based in a state with a dominant position in world politics.

Context and agency point us toward the issue of how the role of the state in governance networks should be conceptualized. Governmentality theory does not assume that an increasing importance of governance networks necessarily means a decreasing importance of the state, but rather implies that while the state on the one hand should not be regarded as the power centre, it is on the other hand not just ‘one level among others’ (Fraser 2003, p.167). It is however also necessary to point out that the generalized discussion of the role and power of the state has a fundamental flaw, as it obscures the unequal power resources among nation states. This does inevitably invoke the debate on whether global power structures represent a US-led imperialism (Harvey 2003), or if the current era rather represents a ‘post-imperial liberalism’ in which ‘the old imperial instruments… have been replaced by a greatly expanded use of markets, empowerment and self-government as regulatory devices’ (Hindess 2004, p. 36) (this question is dealt with in more detail below).

Critique of ‘civil society’

As a ‘hurrah-word’ in contemporary global politics, it could be argued that ‘civil society’ is as problematic as an analytical tool as ‘governance’ is. I would however argue that ‘civil society’ has a critical potential if interpreted in the context of the Gramscian tradition. According to the standard narrative, the dividing line in classical social theory concerned whether civil society included the market or not (Lipschutz 2005). Today there is a relatively broad consensus that civil society is a distinct sphere in relation to market and state. It is nevertheless still a hotly contested concept. I argue that the most significant dividing line concerns whether civil society is conceptualized as functional or conflictual. The dominant view of civil society, in both the social sciences and in policy discourses, is clearly a functionalist one, emphasising the role and importance of ‘social capital’ (Putnam 2001) as vital for social and political cohesion. According to the functionalist conception, civil society first and foremost has a complementary role in relation to the state and market: civil society is
the sphere of social integration (producing and maintaining ethical codes, norms and values) that ‘embeds’ market mechanisms; and NGOs function as ‘watchdogs and ‘schools of democracy’ in relation to the state. In contrast to functionalist theories, the Gramscian tradition emphasizes that civil society is a space of conflict that involves a struggle for hegemony (Cox 1999). It points to the role of discursive struggles in politics over the *legitimacy* of political and economic power. I use ‘civil society’ as an analytical concept that denotes a space of struggle and conflict – over the values, norms, rules and strategies of legitimacy that govern social space(s) – and ultimately over the control of material resources and institutions (Thörn 2007a, b).

It is necessary to distinguish between national and global civil society; the two levels not only differ in terms of territoriality, but also with respect to prevailing rules, norms, institutions and regulations (Lipschutz 2004). The globally hegemonic ideal of parliamentary democracy does in a large number of states correspond with a set of existing institutions and arrangements for representation and participation. Whatever the substance of their democratic claims, these institutions represent well-established and widely accepted structures of legitimacy and accountability. The endless repetition of concepts such as ‘democracy’, ‘accountability’ and ‘ownership’ in the context of global governance discourse are ultimately signs of the lack of legitimacy of global power structures. Lipschutz (2005, p. 3) has argued that it is precisely ‘this lack of legitimacy, and the absence of the *political*, that are being protested by the global justice movement and addressed by campaigns for global social policy and regulation’. My argument is that the relevance of the notion of a *global* civil society is that it may serve as a tool to conceptualize a new political space that has emerged from the play of conflicting transnational forces in the absence of a global state. Governance networks are actually the sites in which a global political space today is constructed by conflicting actors. One of the key issues in this regard is the *legitimacy* of global power structures and dominant actors.

**The emergence of governance networks**

After the turn of the Millennium we have seen a steadily increasing activity on a number of political levels as various actors, including states, NGOs, supra-national bodies, private foundations and corporations are engaging in a variety of networks. Two events have been particularly important: First, as a response to calls made at two African conferences in 2000 (de Waal 2005), and an appeal from UN General Secretary Kofi Annan, a decision was taken at the G8 Meeting in Genoa in 2001 to set up the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GF) in order to increase global funding for interventions against the three diseases. The GF was set up in 2002 with a formal status as a Foundation under Swiss law and is, in line with governance discourse, defined as a public-private partnership. Seven years later, it has committed 15,6 billion US dollars to AIDS activities in 140 countries (Global Fund 2009).

Second, in 2003 the US President George W. Bush launched the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a five year 15 billion dollar initiative to fight HIV/AIDS. PEPFAR has been called the largest initiative ever undertaken by one country to address a disease – and because of the amount of resources provided USAID strengthened its position as a major funder of AIDS activities in the Global South. By the end of 2008, the programme had provided treatment to 2 million people in 15 ‘focus countries’ (out of which 14 were African) (PEPFAR 2009). However, PEPFAR has also been severely criticized for the strings attached to its aid, particularly in relation to NGOs. While condom use programs have been a crucial and successful part of AIDS prevention policies all over the world, PEPFAR has put heavy restrictions regarding condom policies on NGOs receiving funding, emphasising the so called AB-activities (‘Abstinence’ and ‘Be Faithful’).
These two major donors in the field of AIDS aid governance, PEPFAR and the GF, both take part in, and promote, governance networks. This means that activities funded by the organizations should preferably involve not just government agencies but also NGOs and private actors.

**AIDS aid: Neo-imperialism and/or advanced liberalism?**

While the widespread use of the concepts of ‘partnership/ownership’ in aid governance networks claims to represent an equal relationship between donor and receiver, it has been argued that beneath the surface of such declarations, old imperialist perceptions about development still prevail among donors (de Waal 2006; Eriksson-Baaz 2005; Escobar 1995). For example, Jones (2004) has shown that AIDS aid to South Africa in some cases has been based on a discourse including racist notions about ‘African sexuality’. Further, in her brief history of development aid, Rojas (2004, p.111) argues that the turn of the Millennium marked the beginning of a US-led ‘neo-imperialist phase’, defined by ‘a governmentality that calls for a return to bilateral aid’.

USAID/PEPFAR’s AIDS prevention policy under President George W. Bush, intended to educate populations in the Global South about sexual behaviour and morals grounded in an Evangelist Christian worldview, is clearly a case of classic US/European cultural imperialism, supported by missionary presence. In its 2009 Annual Report PEPFAR claims to have reached more than 30 million people, or to be precise, 31,512,600 individuals (p. 39) with its Abstinence-Be Faithful education programme. This is in many cases carried out by channelling government funding to faith-based NGOs. For example, the faith-based World Vision, one of PEPFAR’s ‘partners’, reported that they had ‘provided 267,000 youth with HIV-prevention education based on biblical values’ in Africa in 2006 (World Vision 2006, p. 16).

It should further be noted that PEPFAR was launched the same year as the US embarked on war in Iraq; at this particular moment of global tension the programme thus sent a message to the international community that the US was not just sending soldiers and arms to the Global South, but also medicines and health care.

The case under study here confirms that Northern states, and particularly the US, through their development agencies, still deploy strategies resembling those of classic cultural imperialism. This has been an issue of great concern in South African civil society. For example the social movement organisation Sonke Gender Justice Network has published a research report on the consequences of PEPFAR aid which concluded that it increases ‘the role of faith-based organizations, stress abstinence until marriage strategies and limit the government’s promotion of condoms’ (Alexander et. al. 2007, p. 3). These experiences of the consequences of PEPFAR’s conditions are also confirmed by reports from Uganda (Kirumira 2007).

However, in what follows, I will emphasise that in our case study, we also found a strong concern about donor strategies of social control and legitimacy, which are not exclusively, or even predominantly, about cultural imperialism in new clothes: donor’s emphasis on short-term project based (rather than core) funding for measurable activities; including heavy requirements of auditing and evaluation, which demanded the engagement of particular external expertise. I argue that these particular techniques, and how they are linked with donor’s programmatic notions about ‘the importance of civil society’, are key to understand the new governmentality emerging in aid politics during the last decade. According to interviewees, as well as reports that we studied, these strategies represented a deeper form of control, than PEPFAR’s ‘cultural imperialist conditionality’.
For example, one of our informants, Mandisa Mbali, an AIDS activist, who is also doing academic research on activism, argued that:

‘The (PEPFAR) conditions, in terms of ‘abstinence’, is the tip of the ice berg...I think that the much deeper thing is that the agenda is ultimately to do with neoliberalism’ (Interview 1).

This is supported by the above cited Sonke research report. While it states that South African NGOs, ‘appear to have found ways to take PEPFAR money and continue with condom promotion’ (Alexander 2007, p. 2), it clearly indicates as the new strategies of donor control are more difficult to resist, as it reports that ‘PEPFAR’s emphasis on quantitative reporting’, the ‘pressure to “get the numbers right”’, as well as the ‘one year funding cycles’ are ‘steering NGOs away from ‘more intensive interventions’ (Alexander 2007, p. 3).

**Problematizations and programs: The civil society solution**

What then, are the ‘problems’ to which ‘governance’, ‘civil society’ and ‘responsibility’ are regarded as the proper solutions in AIDS aid programs? In the context of development discourse, the concept of ‘civil society’ rose to prominence in the 1990s (Hydén 2006). Although the focus on involving NGOs was often motivated with reference to the failures of aid programs administered by weak, corrupt or authoritarian states in the Global South, the new emphasis on ‘civil society’ was nevertheless in this context also part of the more general neo-liberal critique of state intervention. From this perspective, an important function of NGOs were that of *service-providers* (Birdsall and Kelly 2007), who, through sub-contracting, should perform functions not taken care of by neither the market nor the state.

The notion that civil society is the solution to the many problems of the state is clearly expressed in the policy documents of major donor agencies. For example, the Global Funds’ evaluation of ‘the performance of civil society groups…confirmed the necessity of involving civil society in all levels of its processes’ (Global Fund 2006, p. 24). The GF does not just regard civil society as a complement, but in certain respects also as an alternative to, the state. For example, while the GF states that important ‘obstacles to successful prevention and treatment programs include low access to education and health care’ (Global Fund 2006, p. 13), i. e. the failure of public health and education, its prescribed solution is not to provide resources for strengthening the public sector. Instead, this problematization is followed by an argument about the importance of community/civil society: ‘For this reason, community involvement is critical, and mobilizing civil society to increase participation is the goal of a growing number of non governmental and faith-based organizations’ (Global Fund 2005, p.13).

Further, where states according to the GF fail in sensitivity to the needs of populations and in capacity to act and reach out, CSOs provide ‘insight into the need and experiences of communities’, are ‘effective’ in working with ‘hard-to-reach communities’ and more importantly, are *efficient* as implementers of GF grants, as they ‘performed equally as well, if not better, than all other types of implementing agencies’ and are ‘improving the financial absorptive capacity and implementation speed of prevention and treatment programs supported by the GF’ (Global Fund 2006, p. 24). These statements underline that the GF ‘is not an implementing entity; it is a financial instrument…with funds allocated on strict performance criteria’ (Global Fund 2006, p. 33) and that its emphasis on civil society represents a strategy of marketization in terms of language, methods and working models. Accordingly, the GFs mode of working is by its Executive Director termed a ‘unique business model’ (Global Fund 2005, p. 7). Contrary to this rhetoric, the model nevertheless has an explicit political dimension, as it is based on ‘the principle of country ownership’ as a key instance of accountability (Global Fund 2005, p. 33). This means that in order that an
organization or institution in any part of the world could receive GF funding, a multisectoral Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM), representing public, private and civil society actors, must be set up. According to the GF homepage, the CCM’s should be regarded as ‘country-level multi-stakeholder partnerships ‘ central to the Global Fund's 'commitment to local ownership and participatory decision-making’ (Global Fund 2009). However, ‘A Beginner’s Guide to the Global Fund’ (Garmaise 2009), produced by the Kenyan NGO AIDSPAN, and available as a link at the GF homepage, makes it clear that the CCM is not only, or perhaps even predominantly, an instance ensuring democratic participation, but rather an instrument for responsibilisation:

Structure of the Global Fund In-Country, most proposals to the Global Fund are submitted by Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs), established specifically for this purpose and to carry out certain other responsibilities (Garmaise 2009, p.41).

It is also made explicitly clear that although the CCM is packaged as a self-regulating body, it is nevertheless subjected to regulations imposed by the GF:

‘CCMs are independent entities; they are not formally part of the Global Fund. Nevertheless, the Global Fund has developed guidance on how CCMs should be structured and how they should function. Some of this guidance is in the form of requirements – i.e., conditions that the CCM has to meet before the Global Fund will accept proposals from the CCM ’ (Garmaise 2009, p. 41).

In a similar vein as the GF, PEPFAR frames the emphasis on civil society in the context of ‘public-private partnerships’. For example, under the headline ‘Community, Business and U.S. Government Build Rural Health Clinic’, the 2006 Annual Report states that PEPFAR ‘has joined hands with South Africa’s government and private enterprise to bring vital health service to undeserved people’ (PEPFAR 2006, p. 24). However, just as important, PEPFARs’ emphasis on civil society is also about being able to educate the population in the recipient country about certain values and norms, as local NGOs such as CBOs and FBOs according to PEPFAR (2006, p.7) ‘are best equipped to reach local communities and influence values and norms’.

The arguments of the donor programs presented in this section are basically about making international aid policies legitimate. They point to the link between the two most important concepts on the programmatic level of current AIDS aid discourse: the obvious inequality between partners is supposed to be compensated by the (weaker) recipient’s ownership of the issue. Further, emphasising the role of civil society involves a claim to legitimacy for methods of marketization (since the market itself does not have mechanisms for the construction of legitimacy). In the case of PEPFAR, support for local NGOs also served the function to make its programmatic demands on ‘Christian values’ in connection with AIDS work look less ‘from above’ or simply ‘neo-imperialist’. As we will see in the next section however, the differences between the two donor agencies become even less clearly defined when looking at their actual practices. This is related to the fact that AIDS aid governance networks, in most cases, use the same techniques in connection with the implementation of their funds.

**Techniques of responsibilization: Legitimacy and social control**

From the case material it is evident that techniques of responsibilization aiming to construct self-regulating actors at different levels of the receiving end of aid flows, are the crucial methods of implementing, or channelling, global AIDS aid. I argue that responsibilization has the integrated functions of creating ‘social control at a distance’ and to make donor policies appear legitimate and accountable. Regarding state agencies’ aid policies, social control,
legitimacy and accountability are closely interlinked; in order to make aid to foreign countries legitimate, donor agencies must appear to have guarantees that the money is used for the intended purposes. It could be argued that current techniques of aid implementation and control, which are largely based on business models for selection, self-evaluation, and audit, a mode of regulation which I will call the package of responsibilization, are largely the result of donors’ attempt to appear legitimate, both in relation to domestic publics (tax payers) and to publics in the receiving countries.

As part of the package of responsibilization donors ‘choose’ their partners on the recipient end through processes of selectivity. For example, the Global Fund has prescribed a formalized process of ‘competitive tendering’, as the Fund asks CCMs to submit a coordinated proposal. These proposals are often based on a number of separate proposals from various AIDS-actors in the country; it has been the case in South Africa, where the CCM, lacking capacity, hired a consultant in order to produce a proposal that appeared professional and coherent (interview 5). Further, a crucial part of the ‘aid package’ embraced by the whole donor community is that aid comes in the form of grants to project-based activities. In the case of the GF, its mission statement explicitly states that ‘Proposals to the Fund shall not have capacity building as their main focus’ (Global Fund 2003, p. 8).

As a donor-receiver ‘partnership’ is established, certain prescribed methods for evaluation and audit, with a heavy emphasis on quantitative measures of performance, become a fundamental aspect of the process. The language and practices of auditing/quantitative measuring and evaluation has a strong presence in donor policy documents. The GF states that it has recognized ‘weaknesses in national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems’ and therefore introduced certain tools, including ‘The Independent Data Quality Audits’ (Global Fund 2006, p. 43-4). The quantitative approach to assessment, evaluation and knowledge production includes an emphasis on evidence-based methods, which are embraced not just by state agencies like the GF and PEPFAR, but also by foundations like Bill and Melissa Gates Foundation and an NGO like MSF. Emerging from the medical field, the discourse of ‘evidence based methods’, its core feature being an emphasis on the need to make various practices evaluable by its ‘definition, measurement and enumeration’ (Winch et. al. 2002), has quickly spread to a number of policy areas, including international aid.

The ‘audit explosion’ has created a demand for a certain kind of expertise, and an increasing importance and influence for a few large global firms, such as KPMG and Ernst & Young. These accounting firms are currently creating an image of themselves as ‘knowledge firms’ offering various services in connection with consulting, evaluation and assessment. While the private foundations and INGOs (including MSF) in this case study study used one of these two firms, most NGOs in the Global South neither have the competence to produce glossy annual reports, leaflets and power-point presentations, nor have the resources to hire professional expertise to meet the heavy requirements for formalised audit. As a consequence, there is an emerging field of ‘intermediary NGOs’, who have the sole function to channel funding from international donors to local NGOs (often community based organisations), taking responsibility for applications, audit, evaluation and reporting. A representative of the South African AIDS Foundation, an NGO that in 2005 channelled funding from 19 international aid agencies, accounts for the contradictions of this intermediary position:

‘The rules and regulations regarding the administration of the money can be quite challenging so it makes it very difficult for a weaker civil society organization to be able to comply with those rules… Our grantees are having a problem in demonstrating impact. …All they (the donors; author’s remark) give us are indicators they would like us to use, or tools to measure. For example, we’ve got one donor who gives us money specifically for children’s programs. Now, they give us a questionnaire and a monitoring tool, and
you’ve got to say: ‘does the child smile a lot?’ – ‘yes’… So, to gather the data that they are expecting is not really practical because the people who are working in those communities are solid women who… have been working in the community doing… burial societies, women’s groups, church groups…home based care…work with orphans, but they are not highly trained specialists being able to say that so many children were traumatized but now they have moved from that stage and they are at that stage of rehabilitation’ (interview 5).

The importance of quantitative methods in the donor community was also emphasized in an interview with PEPFAR’s Senior Advisor for HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Asked about what she considered as major challenges and difficulties in relation to AIDS work in South Africa, she stated ‘measurement…it is very hard to measure outcomes’. In response to what kind of developments she would like to see in the field of AIDS aid she continued to talk about measurability:

‘I wish that somebody would like to look at how you measure very nebulous sorts of things. I mean it’s easy if we talk about things like prosecution for rape. I mean you know what your success rate is in terms of prosecutions… you have an incident that is reportable, you can provide the tests to confirm whether the individual’s been raped…but things like male involvement in discussions on social norms is really hard’ (interview 11).

While the PEPFAR representative confirmed the dominant discourse of ‘partnership/ownership’, stating that ‘we don’t tell people what to do, we work with them’, the de-politicising consequences of the donor community’s emphasis on measurability were made clear in an interview with a South African activist previously active in the INGO EngenderHealth. Stating how he would have liked to see his organization do more political work in the sense of mobilizing public opinion, both nationally and globally, to link the HIV/AIDS issue to social change, he explains that they instead focused on workshops as their sole strategy for educating men about gender equality rather than focusing on government responsibility to implement existing legislation or holding government leaders to account for sexist public statements and actions, because it is a reportable, quantifiable activity:

But instead we run workshops, you know why? Because that’s what donors fund. Donor’s say you got to reach 800 men the next six months and you know, here’s your impact evaluation, here are the indicators and it’s very technocratic’ (interview 8).

As this quote makes clear, the techniques of responsibilization tend to de-politicize AIDS activities in civil society. Selectivity, the emphasis on short term projects, with its package of heavy demands of evaluation and reporting of auditable, meaning quantifiable, activities, is an approach to aid that is not only incompatible with, but undermine, political activities such as mobilising public opinion, putting pressure on governments and international institutions, and working for structural change. As a response, an over-arching aim of civil society resistance has been to re-politicize the AIDS issue.

Resistance as re-politicization

The leading social movement organization in South Africa in connection with AIDS politics is the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), which in 2003 launched a successful campaign of civil disobedience to support a framework agreement on a government HIV/AIDS policy (Mbali 2006). TAC is a broad social movement organization, which has functioned as a node in the national network of civic HIV/AIDS initiatives. A key aspect of its overall strategy is making strong efforts to mobilize and link up with other NGOs/SMOs regionally (Southern Africa) and globally (as in the campaign against the pharmaceutical industry mentioned earlier). With its roots in the anti-apartheid struggle and its links to the ANC, the TAC has in
the 2000s achieved a position strong enough to refuse to take any aid that restricts its work. As we have seen in this article, this is however not the case with weaker NGOs.

Nevertheless, the power techniques of AIDS aid governance also open up spaces for resistance, which can be appropriated for counter-mobilization. In the South African case, it possible to discern the following political strategies, which have all emerged as resistance to major programs/strategies of AIDS aid governance:

1) **Counter knowledge production**: Responding to the demands of reporting by framing the issue of evaluation as critical analysis. For example, the above cited report on the consequences of PEPFAR’s work on prevention in Southern Africa (Alexander et. al. 2007) was produced by Sonke Gender Justice Network with support from researchers at Columbia University and UCLA.

2) **Collectivising ‘ownership’**: While the strategies of responsibilization, with their emphasis on the self-monitoring, internal reflexivity of the individual organization, could be seen as a form of ‘individualization’ on the organizational level, the space opened up by these practices has also been used to mobilize collectively. For example, when donors as part of the ‘ownership’ discourse invited NGOs to round-table discussions, a movement organisation organized NGO-meetings in advance. The purpose of these meetings in advance was to form a common NGO strategy in order to be able to use the round-table to put collective pressure on donors.

3) **Selectivity**: The network approach of AIDS aid governance means that a great variety of actors exist in the field, not just on the recipient side, but also on the donor side. This means that there is certain, although limited, space for NGOs to approach donors that allow relatively high autonomy for NGOs, through for example funding for capacity building. Regarding state agencies, many NGOs working in Southern Africa NGOs have preferred to work with a family of ‘like minded donors’ including Holland, Canada and the Nordic countries. The donor agencies of these countries have a particular history in Southern Africa, as they funded the liberation movements in their struggle for independence. This aid had few strings attached and was largely based on political analysis and individual and organizational networks that involved a certain amount of trust (Thörn 2006). It should also be emphasized that only relatively few and strong NGOs (often social movement organisations such as TAC) can afford to take money only from donors who let them do what they want to do.

According to the informants in this case study, the strategy of ‘counter-selectivity’ has, however, tended to underline competition for funding among NGOs, potentially undermining the possibilities for mobilization. Further, at an AIDS conference in Uppsala in 2009, a concern was expressed that the widely celebrated 2003 Paris Declaration, with its emphasis on co-ordination and streamlining of aid, means a general call for adjustment to dominant techniques and a narrowing of the space for collaboration with donors with ‘alternative approaches’. The pressure is also on donors to conform to the dominant standards for evaluation. For example, the Swedish national development agency SIDA has been the object heavy domestic critique for funding too many activities that are not ‘evaluable’ in accordance with evidence based methods (Fölster and Iwarsson 2009).

**Conclusion**

On the most general level, this article related the case of global AIDS aid governance to the debate on whether the current global power structure can be analysed in terms of a US led neo-imperialism, or whether it rather should be understood in terms of a post-imperialist power constellation based on regulation through market-mechanisms and self-regulation, with an emphasis on ‘civil society participation’. The case to some extent supports Rojas’ (2004)
argument in the sense that aid politics of the 2000s has meant a return of bilateral aid and a ‘new imperialism’ in which the dominant state has used aid to legitimize its foreign policy in a manner resembling ‘the civilising mission’ of classical cultural imperialism.

However, more important, there are currently many indications that the US administration under Obama is taking a different approach to foreign policy and aid than the Bush administration. Relating this to our case, one of Obama’s first decisions after taking office was to lift the restrictions for condom use in the PEPFAR program (PEPFAR 2009). There is however nothing that indicates that its policies go against the ‘deep structures’ of advanced liberalism, implying a change regarding the emphasis on market-mechanisms and ‘self-regulation’ in the context of aid. Further, when locating the most important tensions, conflicts, and consequences of aid policies, as well as accounting for the perceptions of those who are at the receiving end, the case clearly indicates that it is the power strategies of governance networks, emphasising ‘regulation through self-regulation’, rather than those of the classical imperialist ‘civilising mission’, that seems to be most significant.

This does not, however, imply that the state is just one level among many, as argued by Fraser (2006). The governance discourse implies a transformation of the functions of states and their modes of regulation, re-defining the roles of the donor state and the recipient state in different ways. The techniques of responsibilization, with their emphasis on partnership/ownership, are not only applied to actors in civil society, but also in relation to the aid recipient state. Barry Hindess (2004, p. 35) quotes Joseph Stiglitz who, in the capacity of Vice-President of the World Bank, stated that the country, not just the government, should be ‘in the drivers seat’. This approach is clearly visible in the Global Fund’s emphasis on the CCM as the key instance for the accountability of AIDS aid, as it emphasises the role of the nation state in aid while at the same time prescribes participation by representatives not just from the government, but also for private business and civil society. The weight given to the CCM by the Global Fund indicates that the state is thus not just one level among many. However, the character of the CCM (with representatives from corporations and civil society) indicates a rearticulation of the role of the state level in aid.

While governance discourses in most cases stick to some variant of the UN definition of civil society, which define it as a sphere separate from the market (and the state), a consequence of the emphasis on civil society is nevertheless tendencies towards marketization and privatization of the sector of AIDS aid; and even of wider sectors of the recipient societies. There are several aspects of this. First, the mechanisms of audit have spread the techniques of ‘calculative practices’ (Rose and Miller 2008, p.11), of financial calculation, cost-reduction and budgetary obligations to new areas, transformed the definitions of ‘accountability’ and ‘legitimacy’ and created new markets for business consultants and accountants. The quantitative logic of the techniques of responsibilization means a commodification of civil society, which affects not only language and reporting procedures, but how organizations, communities and individuals perceive themselves, their activities and their relations with society.

Second, in connection with my argument that power struggles about legitimacy in the context of civil society is ultimately about the control of material resources and institutions, aids aid to civil society has in some cases also been a mode of legitimization of private health sector initiatives in the recipient countries, as in the case of the above mentioned construction of a health clinic organized by PEPFAR. Several of our respondents argued that considering the amount of money invested in aid projects like this, there are reasons to believe that they may represent a ‘tacit’ privatization of the health sector in Southern African countries. As it has been argued that the health sectors in countries of the Global South need to be strengthened in order for the provision of medication to have an effect, the issue of public health sector
privatization points to the close links between aid to AIDS prevention, which has been the focus of this article, and programs providing AIDS medicines (ARVs). Research on AIDS governance in connection with the provision of ARVs to the Global South, supports this article’s argument regarding the importance of public-private partnerships; in 2004 there were 18 AIDS-related global governance networks that included multi-national drug companies, with 60% of the 250 million US dollars funding to support these networks provided by the Bill and Melissa Gates Foundation (compared to 16% from governments, Wogart 2007).

As AIDS aid programs exercise social control at a distance, and seek to legitimize power relations in governance networks through strategies of responsibilization, the re-definition of the concept of ‘accountability’ is crucial. While the original political meaning of ‘accountability’ referred to a practice where the sovereign (the king) held his subjects to account, modern democracy reversed the process by making authorities accountable to their citizens. In a sense, governance discourse presents a new reversal, as ‘accountability’ to a large extent means the practice by which powerful actors in governance networks hold their subjects (the aid recipients) to account.

This article has put its main emphasis on analysing the exercise of power of influential actors in governance networks, and much less on highlighting global activism. Rather than a starting point for the research project presented here, this is a consequence of the ‘logic of the facts’ of our empirical material. Nevertheless, AIDS aid has been a site of collective struggles by civil society actors in South African civil society. As accounted for in this article, the resistance strategies emerging from these struggles were however highly conditioned by donors’ power strategies.

Looking back at nearly three decades of AIDS politics, there is hardly any doubt that AIDS activism in many respects is a story of social movement success, at least until the turn of the Millennium. After emerging as one of the new social movements in the 1980s in countries such as Brazil and the USA, where governments were pressured to a more pro-active response to the disease, equally successful global campaigns were launched in the 1990s. However, the fact that success also meant being invited to co-operate with powerful institutions in the context of governance networks did seem to have negative consequences for activism. In his study of the Canadian government’s response to AIDS-activism, Gary Kinsman (1996) showed that Canada’s 1990 national ‘partnership’ strategy steered the activities of activist groups from advocacy to service provision. Our case indicates that this to a large extent has also happened to global and local AIDS activism in the 2000s. During this period, AIDS-activism has been rather re-active, in contradistinction to the pro-active phases of AIDS activism in the 1980s and 1990s. The governance of AIDS aid in the 2000s thus seems mainly to be a story of de-politicization and de-democratization of an important sector of national and global civil societies.

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Interviews (Interviewee/organisation/place/date)9

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No. 2: Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala/University of Kwa-Zulu Natal/Gothenburg/19 May 2006

No. 3: Alan Whiteside/HERD, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal/Durban/31 July 2006

No 4: Sindi Blose/Treatment Action Campaign/Durban/2 August 2006

No 5: Anonymous/AIDS Foundation/Durban/3 August 2006
No 6: Anonymous/AIDS Foundation/Durban/3 August 2006
No 7: Suzanne Wilkonson-Maposa/Building community Philantropy Project/ Cape Town/9 August
No 8: Dean Peacock/Sonke Gender Justice Network/ Cape Town/24 October 2007*
No. 9: Anne Ljung/SIDA/Pretoria/29 October 2007*
No 10: Delphine Serumaga/POWA/Johannesburg/29 October 2007*
No 11: Anonymous/USAID, PEPFAR/Pretoria/1 November 2007*

NOTES

1 This article is by kind permission from Routledge a re-publication of my chapter (Thörn, 2011) in Olesen (2011).
2 Today 67 percent of the infected live in this part of the world (UNAIDS, 2008: 32), a region where more than 40 percent live on less than one dollar per day (UNAIDS 2008, p. 88).
3 In this chapter, I use NGO as a broad term for a wide range of organisations that partake in civil society activities, such as social movement organizations (SMOs), community based organizations (CBOs) and faith based organizations (FBOs). In other contexts (for example in some of the documents I quote) the term civil society organization (CSO) is used synonymously with NGO. Although I use such a broad definition of ‘NGO’, I regard the criticism against ‘NGOization or ‘quangoization’ of politics and activism (Kinsman, 1996; Ottaway and Carothers, 2000, Kaldor, 2003; Miller & Rose, 2008) as valid, as it first and foremost refers to a proliferation of professionalized types of NGOs, who can not be considered as activist organizations (SMOs), but more or less function as complements, or service providers, in relation to official or private institutions.
4 The research project was carried out between 2006-2009, studying state agencies (US AID/PEPFAR, SIDA), foundations (The Global Fund, Bill and Melissa Gates Foundation), international NGOs (Medicins sans frontières, World Vision) and South African NGOs (Treatment Action Campaign, AIDS Foundation, Sonke Gender Justice Network). In addition to discourse analysis of policy documents of donor organisations, 11 interviews with key informants (including donor representatives working in South Africa, South African NGO representatives and South African researchers) were carried out. The interviews and selection of donor documents that this chapter is based on was made in 2006/7 by Agnes Dahné, Christoph Haug and the author. Additional material was collected in 2009 by Tim Bomanson (2009). In addition to our own material, we have also closely studied two research reports by South African NGOs on the consequences of AIDS aid to civil society in Southern Africa (Alexander et. al. 2007; Birdsall and Kelly 2007). The author would like to thank Agnes Dahné, Christoph Haug, Tim Bomanson, and Ingemar Bohlin, for productive discussions in connection with the analysis of the material.
5 The report is based on 40 key informant interviews (conducted July-November 2006, with assistance from UCLA’s program in Global Health) with representatives of South African NGOs, international NGOs and US Government officials (Alexander et. al. 2007:1).
6 This report (and the fact that it is available through GF’s homepage and thus could be considered as ‘authorized’ by the GF), produced by an NGO ‘whose mission is to reinforce the effectiveness of the Global Fund’ (www.aidspan.org), is an example of the symbiotic and technocratic relationship between funders and NGOs that sometimes exist in the context of governance networks. Although AIDSPAN presents itself ‘as an independent watchdog of the Global Fund’ (www.aidspan.org), the “Beginner’s Guide…” quoted above, which is produced in order to ‘provide a broad introduction to the Global Fund for people who have little or no prior experience of the Fund’ (Garmaise, 2009, p. 7), is not a critical evaluation of the GF, but rather a descriptive user’s guide.
7 The Paris Declaration, which came about as a response to widespread criticism about the ineffectiveness and fragmentation of international aid, meant that the leading international donor agencies committed to work with developing countries to better coordinate and streamline their activities at country level.
8 TAC also criticized the state agencies for using donor money to purchase ARVs from medical corporations based in their own countries, which are much more expensive than those imported from Brazil (interview 4).
9 All interviews made by the author except *made by Agnes Dahné.