Maintaining Independence: The Moral Ambiguities of Personal Relations amongst Ghanaian Development Workers

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Lucas and I are on our way to the headquarters of the NGO he has just set-up in one of the rapidly expanding suburbs of Ghana's capital, Accra[i]. We pick our way slowly along the heavily rutted road in his large red pick-up and he starts to tell me more about his new NGO. For some time now the New Patriotic Party has been pursuing a policy of water privatization. His NGO is going to protest against this policy. With a steely sense of purpose he outlines the inequities that will result from the "neoliberal travesty" this will unleash, and the measures his organization will take to try to stop the policy. Lucas, in his early fifties, is dressed in a local batik smock that seems purposefully chosen to understate the power and influence he wealds as a public figure of considerable repute. Like many others in Ghana's NGO movement, he spent much of his youth engaged in socialist political movements – activities that led him into exile and subsequently prison. The ideological legacy of these engagements is clear in the orientation of the NGO he now runs. What I have also come to realize through over a year of ethnographic research amongst Ghanaian NGO workersis the ongoing significance of the personal relations that developed alongside these political engagements. As Lucas explicitly puts it to me "The mobilization we did in the eighties remains relevant to Ghanaian politics today. There's hardly any town I've been to where I am not able to identify somebody who was a student during those days and that took part in those actions." For Lucas, as for many Ghanaian NGO workers, personal relationships were thus seen as the very means by which civil society could function effectively, enabling consensus to be built and allowing resources to be effectively marshaled so as to hold the government, donors and powerful organizations to account.

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Lucas's story is a personal one, yet it highlights wider themes. For Rudolf, as for other NGO workers, personal relations were imagined as a resource to be tapped: they provided the basis for formal collaborations between organizations with the NGO sector and enabled NGO workers to enlist the help of people outside of it. Similarly they were important in enabling access to funds and resources. In this sense being an effective NGO worker depended on being "connected"; pursuing a particular set of aims or ideas depended on knowing the people who can make this happen – and knowing how and when to use them. NGO workers at times acknowledge that such connections can work against the common good, leading to charges of "nepotism" and "corruption". Yet my argument in this paper is that by contrast to prevailing donor discourses of "good governance", Ghanaian NGO workers understandings of "personal relations" foreground the importance of relations that are not formally transparent or accountable. Seen in this light, personal relations provided a key means by which NGOs were able to enact the values for which they stood. Rather than compromising the independence of organizations, as prevailing arguments might lead us to believe, personal relations were key to upholding the ideological autonomy of NGOs in the face of various threats from government and donors. My suggestion is not that such informal relations constitute an alternative to formal institutional procedure but rather that these are mutually implicated forms of practice, and that the existence of the former need not undermine the latter.

Whilst the relations I focus on originate in the historically specific context of activism in Ghana, the tensions articulated in relation to these find wider resonance both in Africa (e.g. Pommerolle, 2005) and further afield (e.g. Abelmann, 1996).My broader argument is that whilst personal relations may indeed compromise organizational processes and public interest, the fact such relations are not *formally* accountable does not mean that these are not

accountable. Indeed the moral and ethical debates that arise in relation to such relations themselves constitute informal checks and balances.

Whilst the paper draws selectively from existing anthropological accounts of development, it departs from the central tenets of the post-development impulse in certain key respects. In the wake of landmark works by Ferguson (1994) and Escobar (1995), anthropologists have broadly imagined development practice to be driven by disguise and have correspondingly imagined their task to be the critical unmasking of the processes that underlie the surface representations of various development discourses. Through rendering development as 'discourse', anthropologists, have tended to focus on these issues at an abstract level, portraying development as an ethically problematic enterprise (Hobart, 1993, Crush, 1995, Escobar, 1995). By contrast this account attempts to move beyond these abstract critiques (cf. Quarles Van Ufford and Giri, 2003), by foregrounding development worker's own discussions of the various dilemmas they face. The chapter builds on recent work suggesting that the prevailing forms of deconstructive critique that have framed social scientific understandings of development over the past two decades (e.g. Sachs, 1992, Grillo and Stirrat, 1997, Hobart, 1993, Escobar, 1995, Wright, 1994, Crush, 1995) have tended to preclude a more nuanced account of the ideologies and actions of particular development practitioners (Yarrow, 2008b, Yarrow, 2008c, Yarrow and Venkatesan, forthcoming, Lewis and Mosse, 2006, Mosse, 2005, Mosse and Lewis, 2005, Li Murray, 2007, Olivier de Sardan, 2005)

<A> Personal Relations and Social Aspirations

During the last three decades, increasing donor funding has led to the proliferation of Non-Governmental Organizations claiming to speak in the name of the public good. In 1988 Africa as a whole had between 8,000 and 9,000 formally recognized NGOs; by 2006 there

were 98,928 in South Africa alone (Igoe and Kelsall, 2005). In 1960 the number of officially registered NGOs in Ghana was estimated at around ten (Amanor et al., 1993). By 1991 this figure had increased to 350 and by 1999, when the last official count was made, the figure had grown to over 1300 (GAPVOD/ISODEC, 1999). As in the world more generally, the proliferation of NGOshas taken place as a response to state-retrenchment that has accompanied the neo-liberal reforms of the last three decades, as well as through international donor policies aimed at promoting "good governance" through the strengthening of "civil society". Explicitly drawing on the work of Habermas, such discourses frame civil society as a space between kinship and the state. As components of civil society the legitimacy of NGOs is therefore seen as a matter of the independence from both these domains. Promotion of the public good is seen to involve detachment from narrow self- interest.   Against these idealized visions of civil society, recent critiques have highlighted how in practice ideas of "civil society" are often used to legitimate the selfish pursuit of economic and political gain. In Africa, the persistence of various forms of "neo-patrimonial" relationships have been widely imagined as antithetical to the development of an independent civil society (Bayart, 1993, Bayart, 1986, Chabal and Daloz, 1999, Ekeh, 1975). In particular it has been argued that the articulation of common concerns and interests is compromised by personal interests pursued through informal networks of personal relations (e.g. Gyimah-Boadi, 1994). In a related way scholars have highlighted the role of informal relationships in undermining NGO independence from the state (e.g. Fowler, 1991).

Although this critique forms an important corrective to normative donor narratives it unhelpfully assumes an antipathy between personal relations and public interest. As DuGay (2000) has argued, this view is based on a number of foundational Western separations that oppose, amongst other things, reason and emotion, pleasure and duty, public

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and private. Against this, he suggests the need for a contextual understanding of the way in which people negotiate different relations:

> Rather than requiring the eradication of all personal feelings and their replacement with "soulless instrumentalism", bureaucratic conduct only engenders a specific antipathy towards those relations that open up the possibility of corruption, through…the improper exercise of personal patronage...indulging incompetence or by betraying confidences. (2000: 56)

In this vein my own analysis looks at how particular "personal relations" are seen to uphold or compromise various forms of ideological and organizational detachment (Dorman, 2005, Pommerolle, 2005). Whilst "personal relations" have tended to be afforded a self-evident analytic and empirical status, this is unsettled by an ethnographic consideration of ways in which actors variously define and understand this concept. Thus my analysis does not afford these relationships a reality beyond the terms in which people explicitly talk about them. My argument is not simply that people debate the role of "personal relations" but that these debates challenge the status of such relations as objectively existing entities. In most of the contexts to which I refer, however, the "personal" status of such relations emerges through a broad contrast to formally defined practices (Riles, 2001, Lea, 2002).

   The paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken amongst a range of NGOs but focuses on one of these, Catholics for Action (CFA)[ii]. Through oral history narratives of the organization's development, I explore the role, meaning and significance of various kinds of inter-personal relations. Although such relations are by definition "personal", these narratives shed light on wider understandings of friendship as an "ideological" and hence non-corrupting relation. In the latter part of the chapter I consider the significance of such friendships in the context of wider debates about the contemporary NGO sector in Ghana.

<A> Catholics For Action

CFA is a small community development NGO, located in a modest office in a squat concrete building off the main Accra-Kumasi road. The organization was founded in the early 1980s at a time in which a range of other significant national NGOs were founded . Although the emergence of these organizations can be related to wider donor policies and to the NGO 'explosion' (Igoe and Kelsall, 2005) that took place globally, it is also important to locate the emergence of these organizations in relation to forms of political activism that arose during this period in the context of Ghana. In common with a range of other organizations that have since become prominent within the Ghanaian NGO movement, CFA founders supported the 'popular' coup that brought Jerry Rawlings to power in 1981, and saw their own activities contributing to the 'socialist revolution' he initially sought to achieve. Whilst relatively small, many of those initially involved in the organization have since gone on to play important roles as subsequent founders of some of the country's largest NGOs, and as important public figures in various other spheres. Thus the organization has been central to the development of a network of people, whose personal relations have in many cases outlived their involvement with CFA.

Funded mostly by international Catholic agencies, the organisationattempts to use the gospel as the basis for concrete actions to help the "poor and oppressed". Specifically they have sought to accomplish this through a variety of activities including undertaking small-scale community projects and various advocacy initiatives. Founded in 1981 by a small group of Catholic students centered around the University of Science and Technology in Ghana's second largest city, Kumasi, the organization was set up with the aim of putting into practice the teachings of Liberation Theologists. As a brochure produced by the organization explained, their aim was "to live out the radical message of the gospel, epitomized in the liberation of the poor and oppressed". During interviews with founder members of the

organization, these ideologies were further elaborated. Significantly these ideologies were not simply seen as the basis for the organization but also as the basis for the interpersonal relations that developed between them.

Thomas, one of the eight founder members of CFA, left some time ago when funding difficulties made it impossible for him to remain involved. He now works as a marketing manager for the international drinks firm, Guinness. At his suggestion I interviewed him one afternoon in the plush surrounds of the Novotel hotel. As we sat chatting over cokes at the side of the pool, ex-pats lay sprawled on sun-loungers as a group of young Ghanaians splashed boisterously around a beach-ball. Gesturing vaguely at the surrounding scene, he contrasted the evident wealth of Accra's contemporary elites with the experiences of poverty and hardship that led him and others to want to set about changing things for the better. In the 1970s, he explained, mass corruption led to a situation in which the conditions of the poorest members of society were increasingly unacceptable. For him, as for other CFA founders the teachings of Liberation Theologists provided a way of understanding this inequality and a moral imperative to act upon these. In this context he located the organization's formation in the central importance of using the gospel to bring about social and political change:

> There was a new consciousness of using Christianity not as a church thing but as a community thing, as a society thing, as a political tool. Not a political tool in the sense of just political leadership but for political change, to effect the national economy – everything.

More generally CFA members described the importance they attached to the "action, reflection, action" methodology used in their study groups. Being influenced by the teachings of Paulo Freire and Bishop Romero, they stressed that the idea was not simply to discuss issues, but to use reflections as the basis for action.

Albert, another of the CFA founder members, left the organization some time ago to set up his own NGO but remains committed to the ideologies that originally led to the organization's inception. An imposing man in both stature and demeanor, he now runs one of the country's leading community development organizations, focusing on projects promoting the rights of children. I talked to him in the NGO's headquarters, where he connected CFA's approach to the one he continues to take: "The idea was that you intervened and God supported you. It was not just about talking but also about doing things". Later he described how attempts were made to implement community projects and to use these as a way of *conscientising*[iii] villagers about inequalities between the rich and the poor. He recounted how a project undertaken in a village near Kumasi, enabled them to go beyond the theorizing and thinking of their study sessions:

> We were toying with Paulo Freire's idea of pedagogy for the poor. One of the
> words that leapt out from his writings was *conscientisation*. I remember we went
> to the village and worked with the local community. It was basically an attempt to
> help these people put up a structure – a clinic or something – but it was an attempt
> by us to put into practice some of the things we had learnt.

More generally CFA members saw the organization as a means to go beyond "ideas" and "rhetoric" and put the teachings of the gospel "into practice". Ideology was not opposed to 'action' but provided a stimulus to social change. As elucidated below, it was in this contact that personal relations became instrumentally useful. Friendships were based on the need to act and provided the context in which this became possible.

<A> Friends and Brothers

Relationships within the group were imagined to have a number of particular qualities encapsulated in the term "friendship". During this period 'ethnic' and 'tribal' differences were widely regarded as socially and politically divisive, and the basis for various "corrupt"

and "nepotistic" relations. Members of CFA came from various ethnic groups including Ewe (who at the time constituted much of the support for Rawlings' regime under the Provisional National Defence Committee) and Akan, (the main stronghold of support for a more conservative tradition of politics). Against perceived differences in terms of ethnicity, family background and class, CFA members considered themselves to be connected by their common beliefs. Their profound faith was said to give rise to long-standing friendships. George, the only founder member still working for the organization, explained: "because our views were so similar, it was easy for us to get together and have fun. And as we continued to have fun, the bonds became stronger". Thus he described how the group formed an "open brotherhood" in which relationships were intimate and enduring: "If you went round to friends, you knew without being told that you had an invitation to eat – that helped to cement the bonds a lot. We had parties but it was not like you would get a big sound system and invite a lot: it was more like a family gathering".

While the group was often described as "small" and "intimate", friendships within it were understood to be "national" in scope, connecting people from all over the country and from different social backgrounds. Many of those who were active in the formation of CFA had previously known one another through involvement in other Catholic organizations, such as The Young Christian Students (YCS). These provided the basis for personal relations that were important in bringing CFA members together. Although not himself involved in the CFA, Gabrielgot to know many of its founders in the context of this wider movement. While talking to him in the offices of the international NGO he now works for, he explained their significance: "We'd meet every year in the holiday for work camps, for congresses, for meetings…and this is at the national level. So there was a lot of synergy and that is what built the solidarity and fellowship". In describing such relations as "national", CFA members drew

attention to the ethnic composition of the group, seeing parallels between their own ethnic diversity and that the ethnic diversity of the nation.

Such friendships were therefore imagined as "national" in scope. They were also imagined as national*istic*, contributing to the development of a properly functioning state.Martin, now in his late forties, left the organization in the mid-1980s, when work on his PhD made it difficult to remain actively engaged. Unlike many of the other founders, he came from a poor family in a rural part of the country, and was only able to attend university through a scholarship. Echoing sentiments expressed by a number of the others he related the social diversity of the group to the "universality" of their outlook. Correspondingly he contrasted it with the "tribalism" and "corruption" that was widespread at the time.

Through describing their relationships in terms of "friendship", CFA members actively sought to downplay the importance of these other kinds of affiliations. In this sense they were seen as exemplary, contributing to a country in which *what* you knew, rather than *who* you knew counted.Gabriel, a national leader of YCS in the mid 1980s, contrasted the relationships existing within the Catholic Youth with those that predominated in the country more generally:

> The corruption was unprecedented. You could only do what you wanted depending on who you knew: which part of Ghana you were from made a difference. But we came from across the country and that created a space for us to look at one another not in terms of tribe or in terms of geography…We gathered around common aspirations that went beyond the boundaries of ethnicity and class.

Relations within the group were regarded as open and meritocratic, defined in terms of ideals and aspirations rather than along more ostensibly exclusive criteria of social and cultural membership. The legitimacy of such relations derives from their imagined basis in "the

common good", as defined against the more parochial underpinnings of relations of ethnicity and kinship (cf. Bissell, 1999).

Such friendships were often described as a novel and even unprecedented in the context of the period. By highlighting the "mass corruption" of the 1970s CFA members drew attention to a state in which the use of "connections" along the lines of kinship and ethnicity was rife. The "corrupt" nature of these relations was related to their use for personal gain, in nepotistically favouring family and hence in undermining the wider public good. Against this, they highlighted their own distinctiveness from one another, , seeing their connections as 'ideological' rather than deriving from inviolable connections of kinship or ethnicity. By contrast to relations based on kinship or ethnicity, friendship was premised on a conception of people as originally distinct (see also Bell and Coleman, 1999, Carrier, 1999, Paine, 1999, Rezende, 1999). In this sense intellectual engagement was only considered possible through detachment from other, potentially compromising relations.

Friendship was understood as a relation that made this possible. While CFA members stressed the ideological foundation of such relations, they nonetheless spoke of their capacity to ground disagreement and debate. In this vein it was often held that "because we are friends we can disagree". As such, they spoke of a capacity to detach the "personal" from the "ideological". In other words, ideological disagreement is a particular kind of detachment that friendship allows for.

The "independence" of friends was related to the idea that such relationships were voluntary and open to negotiation. While some members described the persistence of friendships made through their involvement in CFA in the early eighties, this persistence was itself seen to be a matter of choice. Now in his late forties, Tony worked as one of the first paid coordinators for CFA during the early 1980s. In the late eighties he left to help set-up his own NGO. For some time I lived with Tony and his family in Kumasi. During this time I

came to see the enduring importance of friendships forged through this historical period. Many of the CFA members continue to live locally. Despite now working in different organizations, many continue to collaborate professionally. Some also continue to see each other socially. On one occasion I asked how he accounted for this enduring importance and he highlighted the enduring "ideological" connections:

> We still are together, we still challenge each other. We don't always see eye to
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> eye, but those you don't see too much eye to eye with, you don't carry on with.

If friendship is premised upon shared ideals, then by the same token these could be severed by disagreements. Thus members described how they maintained relationships with those in the group with whom they continued to share an "ideological connection", while disputes or differences of opinion led people to drift apart.

Many of the understandings of friendship that CFA members articulate bear striking similarities to what Carrier (1999): refers to as the ideal western form. Friendship is a specific way of thinking about affective relations. It depends on a notion of a "self" seen to exist independently of external constraints of alliance, faction and patronage and free from self-interest; it is imagined to be based on affection and sentiment; and it is therefore seen to arise on the basis of common interests and values rather than social or class distinctions. Yet if such ideas of friendship, echo those encountered in other western contexts, there is a specificity to the context in which they are articulated, which prompts a degree of self-consciousness about what friendship is and is not. In claiming to associate as friends, CFA members explicitly see themselves in distinction to the perceived norms of society. In this context, the autonomous "self" is not an a priori given, but a positive achievement that not only entails a commitment to "ideology" but, as a corollary, the non-recognition of the significance of other relational forms (cf. Reed 200?).

<A>Friendship and Adversarial Culture

Similar ideas of friendship were more widely expressed by so called "pioneers" of the NGO movement – those, now mostly in their forties and fifties, who set up the first national NGOs in the 1980s (Yarrow, 2008a). In common with CFA members, many of these also had backgrounds in the so called "Young Catholic Movement". Other NGO "pioneers" traced their roots to socialist political activism that emerged during the late 1970s and early 1980s around a range of organizations including the June the Fourth Movement (JFM) and New Democratic Movement (NDM).

Now in his mid-forties, Mawuliwas active in the New Democratic Movement during the early 1980s, while studying Law at the University of Ghana in Legon. He now works for an international human-rights NGO. Speaking to me in their headquarters in the leafy Accra suburb of Legon, he outlined to me how his activism developed through ideological currents encountered during his youth. his youth. Being a socialist, he initially he supported the broadly socialist Rawlings government that came to power via a military coup in 1981. However as the regime became increasingly authoritarian he became more outspoken in his criticism against it. In the late 1980s, he exiled himself to the UK from where he continued to protest against the government. With the formal return to democracy in 1992, and increasing funding for NGOs, he returned to the country to help set-up the human-rights NGO he now co-directs. Questioned about the broader significance of the inter-personal relations that developed during this period, he acknowledged their continued strategic importance in terms of the functioning of the contemporary NGO sector. In contesting my suggestion that such relations were potentially nepotistic or corrupting, he highlighted their "ideological basis". For him, such relations constituted the means for addressing some "simple but profound problems", relating to ongoing social inequalities in the country.

While he maintained friendships developed through his political engagement during the early eighties, relationships his current NGO relied upon were based "purely on a shared vision of how Ghana should develop". He went on to explain: "We went into the movement only for political purposes. I got to know them as friends because I became politically connected with them. So I would go to their houses and have a drink. Before I was part of the movement, I wouldn't go to their houses to have a drink". Hence the "personal" relationship derives from the "political" relationship. People without prior relationships and from different ethnic and class backgrounds came together in the context of a shared ideology. Because such friendships have their basis in shared "ideology" or shared "politics" they are seen to persist only so long as ideological similarities remain:

> You go into political movements as an intense personal commitment and a *fierce* commitment to do something. So your bonding is also very fierce. But precisely because you went there for personal commitment, you also have the fiercest fallings-out. When you fall out, you fall out because you are fighting about your dreams. So friendships made out of the process of politics get exploded when the politics explode.

More generally, NGO pioneers echoed these sentiments, describing how the political turbulence of the country had its counterpart in the turbulent nature of such interpersonal relations. Shifts taking place at the level of "personal relations" proceeded from the dynamics of shifts taking place between organizations and factions of national politics. Former political activists now working in the NGO sector talked of the ways in which the ideas and dreams of the eighties were shattered by Rawlings' betrayal of the revolution and the values it stood for. The ideological disputes around this period were often related to the "factionalism" that resulted and the termination of long-standing relationships. In these understandings

friendship is regarded as a personal relationship that does not compromise the independence of the values and beliefs of individuals, being built on the basis of "ideals".

Debating Independence

The instrumental possibilities of such personal relations and friendships were often described in positive terms as facilitating various forms of ideological and institutional autonomy. During the 1980s an authoritarian political culture developed in which formal opposition became impossible. During this period funding for both national and international NGOs increased. In the context of Neoliberal reform and accompanying state retrenchment, NGOs became increasingly important in fulfilling various welfare functions. Whilst service NGOs were generally tolerated, government criticism was not. AsPeter, one of the CFA founders explained: "Things were very fluid and you had to able to build a network in order to get your ideas across". In this context he related how friendships were often instrumental in the formation of coalitions that were less prone to persecution. In the context in which formal means of opposition were closed off, NGO workers described how civil society went "underground", becoming increasingly dependent on a set of relations that were largely invisible to the state.

In the contemporary situation friendships were also seen as important means by which independence from government could be maintained. In this vein, relationships deriving from social and political activism of the 1980s were seen to be pragmatically important in creating formal alliances and networks and disseminating ideas. A former political activist now directing a Ghanaian NGO thus told me: "If you want to get things across to the media, you can easily identify [friends] who are working for the media and see what support you can get from them in terms of airing things that are of national concern that you can't get out any other way. These connections are very important." Personal "connections", in other words,

were regarded as legitimate to the extent that they were seen to enable advocacy that was in the broader public interest.

A similar logic underpinned the idea that personal relations and contacts were legitimate to as a means of maintaining independence from donors. On one occasion I interviewed the director of one of the country's leading advocacy NGOs. A former member of the socialist New Democratic Movement in the early 1990s, and an active member of the student movement described the importance of relations forged through these engagements in the context of the work he does today. He explained:

> I now find some of my colleagues in quite a number of sectors who are outspoken
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> and supportive speaking less and less because they don't want to upset funders…
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> I know this NGO, I know they are supportive of me but officially they are neutral,
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> or they may even be saying things against what I am doing. But at a personal
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> realm when they meet me they say "you go on" and even give me information
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> that I may not know.

In a situation in which donor agendas are imagined to suppress dissent, personal relations make the existence of alternative perspectives possible. If the existence of a "public" presumes the existence of autonomous individuals and interests, then in the face of state oppression and donor attempts to co-opt development agendas, personal relations are seen as the very condition of civil society autonomy.

Despite the acknowledged virtue of such relations, however, they were also sometimes regarded as problematic, having the potential to distort organizational goals and indeed the very existence of an effective civil society. Amongst NGO "pioneers" the use of "friends" and "contacts" was sometimes debated. Reflecting on work of CFA during the 1980s, Albert, one of the CFA founders, related the fact that a number of the organization had personal relations to government ministers to the effectiveness of the organization. From his

perspective this made it easier to advocate for the views they believed in and therefore to bring about the kinds of social change they hoped for.:

> We'd go to the minister and say, "This is what you said but you are not doing it. Why not?" Because we had some access to the state, some access to higher government they were scared.

Yet other CFA founders played down the significance of such connections either through denying their existence or through claiming that they did not "use" them. Contrasting their approach with the widespread nepotism and corruption at the time, Martinexplained to me, "we had independent minds; we did everything the way we thought it should be done." For him, "independence" meant the use of "formal mechanisms" and hence eschewing a more particular set of personal relations. Indeed, as somebody from a relatively "humble" background he saw his "lack of connections" as a positive virtue.

Similar criticisms were also leveled by younger NGO workers who sometimes suggested that the older generation of NGO "pioneers" constituted an "old boys network". From their perspective, longstanding relationships developed through social and political activism during the 1980s were seen to have the capacity to close down debate as friends side with one another regardless of their ideological beliefs. Similarly it was sometimes claimed that such relations were used in order to gain employment or funding. In this vein, the "ideology" of the older generation of NGO pioneers was sometimes construed as a "charade", masking self-interest and the pursuit of personal gain.

Now in his mid-fifties, Emmanuelhimself engaged in activism during his youth, being an active member of the student movement and later the socialist June Fourth Movement. His activism led to imprisonment and later exile. Following the formal restoration of democracy he returned to the country and now works as a development consultant. Although being friends with many of those now at the forefront of the NGO movement, he was also highly

critical of the negative affect that such relations can have. Talking to me over a lunch of *fufu* at an upmarket Accra chop-bar he explained:

> Africans like to connect with who they know. Where they come from. Kinship is very important. When they organize, they tend to bring along who they know and a lot of these formations shape the way NGOs organize. Even if in terms of modern governance structures there is an illusion of independent institutionally organized structure. But if you go deeper you find a network of relations that either go back to the past, a shared history of experience, or are basically from university.

From this perspective, the problems of Ghanaian civil society were seen as part of a more general "African" problem. Rather than emergent features of social life the existence of specific kinds of personal relations are thus seen as facts *about* Africa.

<A> Conclusion: The Ambiguities of Friendship

Anthropological theories have tended to regard organizational procedure as a detached form of practice, by contrast to the purportedly more concrete and specific workings of personal relations. In this vein bureaucracy can be seen positively as upholding egalitarianism (e.g. DuGay, 2000), accountability and fairness, or negatively as promoting soulless instrumentalism and indifference (e.g. Herzfeld, 1992). On the other hand, patronage can be seen positively as the means by which order is obtained in an otherwise lawless world (e.g. Bayart, 1993) or alternatively as a pathology of society – the means by which collective goals are subordinated to individual or parochial interests (e.g. Chabal and Daloz, 1999, Price, 1975).

Ghanaian NGO workers understandings of friendship complicate this opposition. As I hope to have shown, these interweave *both* detachment and engagement. For these actors, personal relationships are not straightforwardly opposed to their stated goal of organizational

autonomy. Rather the former enable the latter. Various NGO actors recognize that personal relations may at times compromise the kinds of independence and detachment they strive for. However this does not entail a necessary antipathy between these.

Some time ago, Cohen (1981) pertinently argued that no society can be organized along purely rational bureaucratic lines. In the context of a study of Sierra Leonian creoles, he showed how public organizations -- and those that claim to speak in the name of the public good -- inevitably depend upon extensive informal dealings, secrecy and concealment. Yet although necessarily invisible from public view, such covert coordination nonetheless conforms to unwritten rules, norms and beliefs. These ensure that while friendships may be regarded as "personal" in the sense that they arise on the basis of deeply held beliefs and give rise to a range of emotional attachments they are not *necessarily* used to pursue personal gain. Indeed Ghanaian NGO workers often used such informal mechanisms to pursue visions of social and economic development, even at the expense of their own personal interest (Yarrow, 2008a) and often at the risk of considerable personal danger.

These understandings complicate prevailing donor and policy discourses of "good governance", in which personal relations have been broadly equated with personal interest and hence "corruption". Although Ghanaian NGO workers also see the potential for personal relations to work in this way, they also highlight their more positive role in upholding ideological visions at odds with those of donors and the government and hence in maintaining ideological and organizational independence.
Given that the informal nature of such relations constitute their very condition of possibility, there is clearly no sense in which their promotion could ever be a meaningful policy objective for international donors or governments. However recognizing the importance of these relations does make the case against the over-determination of policies that close-down the space in which such relations operate and emerge. In particular I would suggest that the

normative valorization of 'transparency' undermines the effectiveness of relations that are not formally and hence institutionally visible. At best these initiatives provide a way of re-describing relations that already exist in more acceptable terms to an external audience of donors and international NGOs; at worst the pursuit of formal "transparency" and "accountability" runs the risk of undermining the very forms of relationship practically required to bring these about.

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[i] The paper is written in the ethnographic present of 2003, when the bulk of research for the paper was undertaken.

[ii] This and all personal names referred to in the chapter are pseudonyms.

[iii] The term derives from liberation theology. CFA members described it as an unveiling of social reality which precipitated and enabled social action.