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# Rethinking civil society and Pan-African participatory governance: the case of the African Union-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AU-NEPAD)

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**2021**
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/33852

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**Abstract**

This thesis is a journey of critical interrogation of power relations that underpin practices, techniques and rationalities of contemporary forms of governance represented by the governing strategy of the AU-NEPAD. It asks the question, 'how is the Pan-African civil society made within the context of neo-liberalised Pan-African Institutions?' To navigate this complex question, the study used a combination of three case studies, drawing on the nuanced conceptualisation of governmentality from Michel Foucault in conjunction with the Arnestein´s ladder of citizens 'participation and the John Gaventa's Powercube . The study found that there is a clear disconnect between the discourse on citizens driven AU-NEPAD and the praxis of enabling civil society to meaningfully engage in decision making processes. The use of neoliberal rationalities of governing which transform the governments of Member States into a self-disciplined neoliberal subject that must behave in an appropriately competitive fashion congruent with the ethos of market rationality is the AU-NEPAD attempt to discursively legitimise their political and developmental strategies through the imposition of a neoliberal economic agenda for Africa. AU-NEPAD promotes Pan-African civil society to comply with neoliberal requirements and at the same time contests Pan African civil society through what Arnstein calls co-optation, on one hand, and the divide-and-rule strategy, on the other hand, allowing AU-NEPAD to maintain the 'status quo'. Therefore, Pan-African civil society faces monumental challenges to meaningfully participate (hardly going beyond placation and tokenism) in the making of a people´s driven and owned African Union. In addition, the study found that although heterogeneous in scope, capacities, size and resources endowment, Pan-African civil society undertakes 'non-compliance' as a counter response of hegemonic dominance from the AU-NEPAD. This is one possibility of Foucauldian 'counter-conduct' through which Pan-African civil society undermines and challenges the shrinking of civic spaces and the AU governmental-driven forms of power, by setting up what Gaventa calls ´invented spaces´.