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Rethinking corporate citizenship in Africa

Johan Hattingh
Department of Philosophy
Stellenbosch University
South Africa

jph2@sun.ac.za



Departement of Philosophy
•
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences





Problem statement



- Taking it further from Deon Rossouw's conceptual housekeeping
 - Corporate citizenship as contribution to and participation in society
- Bearing in mind
 - The politics of language (Neron and Norman)
 - The political economy of exploitation of Africa and its marginalization in the global consciousness (Helen Lauer)
- Focus on corporate citizenship
 - “Substance”
 - Presuppositions
 - Implications



Problem statement - continued



- If it is used as a “founding metaphor” or model to think through the norms and standards we set to assess the social responsibility performance of corporations in Africa
- Are the systems of governance, and procedures for decision-making, stakeholder engagement etc implied by “corporate citizenship” relevant and applicable to the realities of Africa?
- Does it contribute to the systematic misrepresentation of African reality, and if so, to what extent?
- Does African reality require a revision / rethinking of corporate citizenship?



Overview



- The standard concept of citizenship
 - Usually emphasizes political agency within the framework of democratic national states
- Dominant notions of corporate citizenship
 - Does it build on dominant concept of citizenship?
- Confrontations between corporate citizenship and African reality
 - Condemnation of realities in Africa?
 - Imposing an external set of values on Africa?
 - Shattering “corporate citizenship”?
- Expanding the notion of citizenship
- Expanding the notion of corporate citizenship



The standard concept of citizenship



- “A citizen is a member of a political community who enjoys the rights and assumes the duties of membership.”
- These rights usually include:
 - Equal protection of the rights of all members of the polity
 - The right to vote
 - The right to speak freely on public issues
 - The right to participate in voluntary organizations



The standard concept of citizenship



- Usually include the duties of:
 - Paying taxes
 - Serving in the country's armed forces when called upon
 - Obeying the laws enacted by one's representatives in government
 - Demonstrating commitment and loyalty to the political community and the state
 - Constructively criticizing the conditions of political and civic life
 - Participating in improving the quality of political and civic life
 - Taking action to narrow the gap between ideals and realities



The standard concept of citizenship



- Is thus closely linked to
 - The state, in particular the liberal-democratic nation state, closely linked to ideas of a free market economy
 - Notions of freedom, autonomy and self-determination that sets citizenship apart from merely being a “subject”
 - A certain legal status
 - Political agency
 - A notion of identity that transcends cultural and ethnic differences, “based on freely given commitment to certain civic principles and values ...” (John J. Patrick 2009)
 - Membership of a very specific community with its own internal links, psychological ties, and a sense of belonging in different degrees of strength



Implications for education ... very revealing



- Higher Education Act of South Africa sets 3 aims:
 - Teaching for personal self-realization
 - Teaching for the acquisition of skills that support the structures and infrastructure underpinning a liberal democracy
 - Teaching understanding and respect for the principles and values constituting a liberal democracy
 - Open and critical dialogue
 - Transparency
 - Accountability
- Teaching turning students into “good citizens”



Looking deeper, some problems arise ...



- Around the instrumentalization of teaching, i.e. the danger of placing it in the service of
 - Very narrow or uncritically accepted notions of self
 - Technical functionality and economic efficiency in a free market economy (in a liberal economy)
 - Exclusive and elitist conceptions of community characterized by fairly impenetrable boundaries and mostly effective protection mechanisms



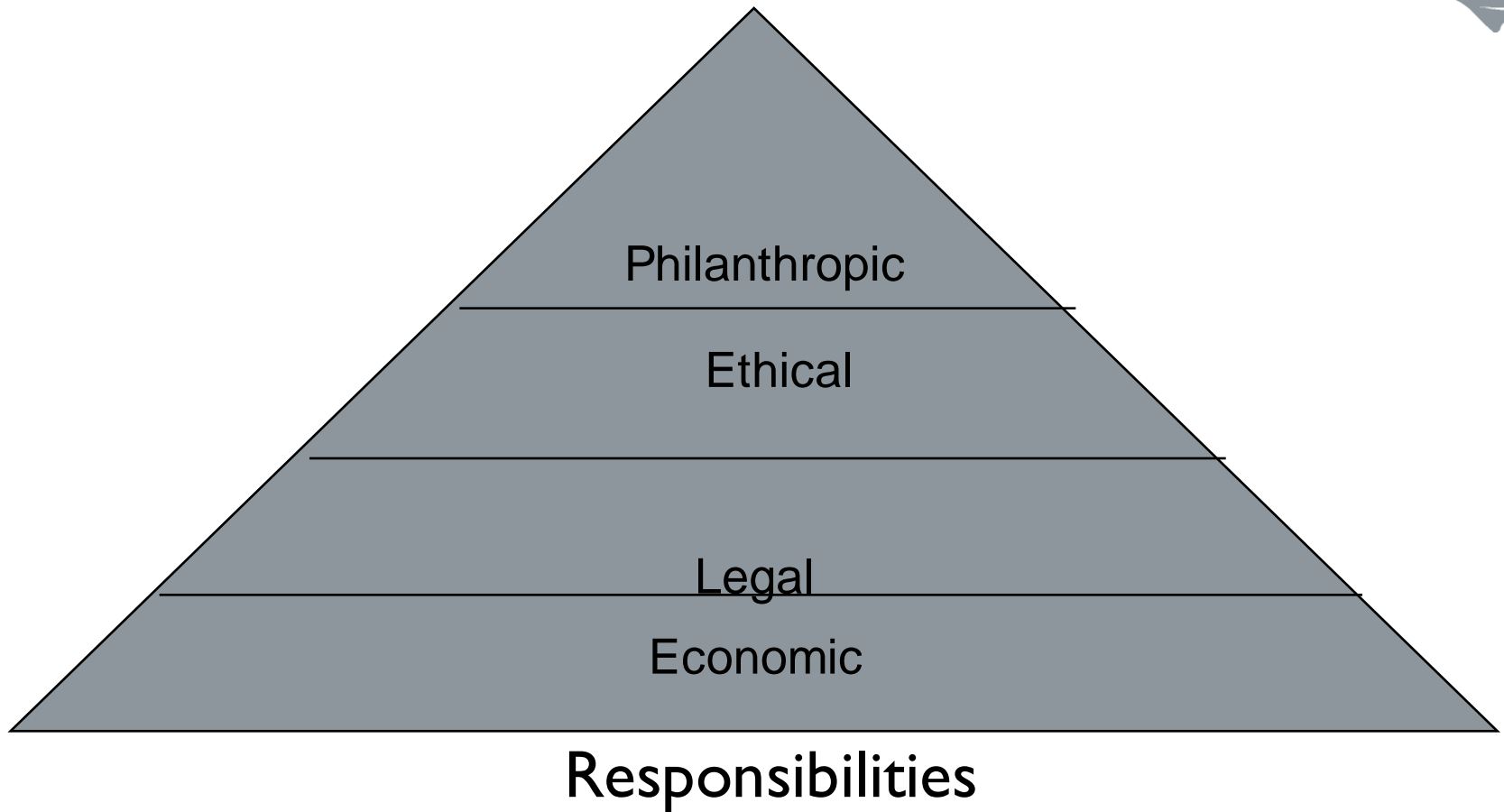
A wider, critical conception of citizenship



- A critical understanding of the selves that we strive to realize
- A contextualization of the technologies we use and the infrastructure we establish
- A radical questioning of the boundaries we draw and the identities we promote in the communities we form, protect and perpetuate



Corporate citizenship – the classic definition



Carroll (1991)



Problems with the classic definition



- In Africa, a different hierarchy apply
 - First economic, then philanthropic responsibilities
- The model itself is flawed
 - Environmental responsibilities not included
 - Social responsibility reduced to voluntary charitable giving?
 - Only four layers of responsibility?
 - Does not capture complexities
 - Job creation and environmental protection
 - Short term profitability and Aids treatment
 - Dictatorial regimes and need for transparent governance
 - Economic empowerment and social investment
 - Economic growth and stakeholder legitimacy



From the discussion of the presentation ...



- It emerged that further unpacking of corporate citizenship is required:
 - A conceptualization of corporate citizenship within a shareholder model of responsibility
 - A conceptualization of corporate citizenship within a stakeholder model of responsibility



Corporate citizenship and Africa



- Enters into debates about Africa's future, and addressing the legacy of its colonial history
 - The contribution that corporations can make to the development of Africa through
 - Capital investment
 - Job creation
 - Skills transfer
 - Infrastructure development
 - Knowledge sharing

VERSUS COMPLICITY IN

- Political corruption
- Environmental destruction
- Labour exploitation
- Social disruption



Looking deeper ...



- In this development discourse “corporate citizenship” still seems to set external standards that somehow clash with realities in Africa, evident from the following formulations of the challenges of corporate citizenship in Africa:
 - When do local cultural traditions take precedence over global standards and policies?
 - How far do companies’ responsibilities extend in providing public services?
 - When does involvement in local governance become an unhealthy intrusion into the political process?
 - How can business avoid creating a culture of entitlement and dependency through its charitable activities?
 - Do global companies have a right to impose Western ideas of ethics on African societies that have their own, often different, sets of values?
 - (Visser, McIntosh, Middleton, 2006: 12)



Looking deeper ...



- ... the challenges facing corporate citizenship in Africa involve messy, ‘on the edge of chaos’ scenarios (De Jongh and Prinsloo [2005])
- The discourse seems to be assuming that corporate citizenship has a “home” outside of Africa,
 - That northern countries find it difficult to globalize its notion of corporate citizenship (a logic of transfer)
 - and that countries in Africa finds it difficult to “host” corporate citizenship – a logic of source and transfer
- This discourse seems to continue the marginalization of Africa from the benefits of globalization – a logic of exclusion



Could a wider conception of citizenship help?



- Where citizenship entail
 - A critical understanding of the selves that we strive to realize
 - A contextualization of the technologies we use and the infrastructure we establish
 - A radical questioning of the boundaries we draw and the identities we promote in the communities we form, protect and perpetuate



Such a wider conception of corporate citizenship



- Can be articulated from African notions of
 - Self and community in relationship with one another
 - Governance and decision-making
 - Nationhood



In such a wider sense of citizenship ...



- “Corporate citizenship” can promote
 - Moral agency – the selves, technologies and infrastructure required to form a community of responsible action that acknowledges respect for persons, human dignity, the prevention of harm, justice, fairness, integrity, transparency, accountability in Africa
 - Post-national agency – the selves, technologies and infrastructure required to form a community of global solidarity that acknowledges the importance of collective action in support of one another in the face of unprecedented trans-national challenges and scientific uncertainties
 - Post-human centered agency – the selves, technologies and infrastructure we need to act as ordinary citizens of the community of life



Conditions under which this could be done?



- Radically rethinking corporate citizenship [“contribution” and “participation”] from within a context, not imposing or importing it from the outside
- Solidarity with realities in Africa?
- Speaking from a place, in concrete terms, articulating what responsibility and agency entails?
- Deciphering the non-discursive texts that emerge from a context that protest against injustices; that build independent selves; that produce technologies appropriate to that context; that promote communities of care and solidarity?



Unconcluding questions



- Can we point to examples of the above?
- Do we take these examples seriously?
- And again I catch myself out in the act of constructing and re-enforcing a language of distance: of us standing outside of the examples we can “point to”
- Should we not be part of the examples we want to learn from?

- Is there a way to move beyond this language?
- Would it entail moving beyond the language of corporate citizenship and social responsibility?
- Have we set ourselves up for this problem? How?