The Future of States in Africa: Prospects for the Reordering of Space and the Remaking of Bureaucracies

Paul Nugent[1]

ABSTRACT

Staaten sind trotz aller Krisen auch in afrikanischen Ländern jene politischen Institutionenge-
füge, in deren Rahmen Zukunftsvorstellungen verhandelt und zur Grundlage politischer Ent-
scheidungen werden. Der Artikel fasst Diskussionen um afrikanische Staatlichkeit zusammen.
Er zeigt an den Beispielen staatlicher Grenzen einerseits, bürokratischen Handelns andererseits
auf, welche Beharrlichkeit die Institution des Staates und seine konkreten Formen trotz aller
Veränderungen entwickelt haben und wie stark sie Rahmenbedingungen für das Nachdenken
über Zukunft und die Verständigung über zukünftige Gesellschaften bilden. Damit zeigt der Ar-
tikel auch, wie stark Zukunftsentwürfe von den Mitteln beeinflusst werden, die Gesellschaften
sehen, sie durchzusetzen, und von den politischen Institutionen, die Hintergrund ihrer Soziali-
tät bilden.

Although there is a substantial body of literature on tradition in Africa, much of it car-
ries the loaded prefix of 'neo-'. Even that which purports to be traditional seemingly has
its eyes fixed on the modern. This is perhaps most obvious when it comes to "traditional
authority," where the incumbents of chiefly offices these days come with a pedigree of

foreign degrees, use the latest phones and computers, and drive 4 x 4 vehicles.[2] In the memorable phrase of John and Jean Comaroff, entrepreneurial traditional leaders seek to "'empower' their people by venturing out from their traditional capitals into the realm of venture capital."[3] It is also the case with performative genres such as "traditional" music, and dance that are in practice highly adaptive.[4] If the traditional looks to the modern, what does the modern look to? One answer lies in ultra-modernist utopias such as the fantasy cities that have begun to jump off the drawing boards and into something approximating real life. But for ordinary people, the answer is probably more prosaic: a life more abundant with sources of gainful employment, chances for international travel and enough time left over for the pursuit of leisure.

There was a time when the state was absolutely integral to the modernist vision. In the first decade-and-a-half after independence, it was possible to envision a world in which states would not merely deliver fundamental public goods such as health and education, but also transform agriculture and industry, mould new urban spaces and forge conscious citizens. The travails of post-colonial Africa have in reality led to state institutions being incapable of delivering on even the basics. And while standards of living had initially improved for most Africans, many countries began to experience negative growth, mounting unemployment (exacerbated by a demographic spurt), a decline in health delivery, and urban decay by the mid-1980s. The HIV/AIDS pandemic that followed in the 1990s also brought with it a sharp decline in life expectancy in the worst-hit countries, thereby reversing one of the key achievements of the early years. The sense that modernity and development could actually be a two-way street, as well as zero-sum in nature, is something that populations have been forced to come to terms with in so many ways.[5] But the larger message seems to be that Africans have placed their bets on something other than the state: the literatures on Pentecostal Churches, reformist Islam and international migration make it clear that ordinary Africans have remained wedded to the corpus of ideas associated with modernity, but have relied much more on social networks than on formal structures to see them through.[6]

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2   This was brought home to the author in 2014 when he first learned about WhatsApp from a chief in Ghana while trying to secure footage of the Agbamevoza cross-border festival. On the changing face of chieftaincy, see L. Buur and H.M. Kyed (eds.), State Recognition and Democratization in Southern Africa: A New Dawn for Traditional Authorities?, Basingstoke 2007; C-H. Perrot and F-X Fauvelle-Aymar (eds.), Le Retour des Rois: Les Autorités Traditionelles et L'Etat en Afrique Contemporaine, Paris 2003; and J. Ubink, Traditional Authorities in Africa: Resurgence in an Era of Democratisation, Leiden 2008.

3   J.L. and J. Comaroff, Ethnicity Inc., Chicago 2009, p. 7.

4   F. de Jong, Masquerades of Modernity: Power and Secrecy in Casamance, Senegal, Edinburgh 2007.

5   P. Geschiere, The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa, Charlottesville 1997; J. Ferguson, Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt, Berkeley 1999; C. Piot, Nostalgia for the Future: West After the Cold War, Chicago 2010; and M. Burchardt, Faith in the Time of AIDS: Religion, Biopolitics and Modernity in South Africa, New York 2015.

6   See, for example, J. McGaffey and R. Bazenguissa-Ganga, Congo-Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law, Oxford 2000; P. Stoller, Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City, Chicago 2002; M. Janson, Islam, Youth and Modernity in the Gambia: The Tablighi Jama'at, Cambridge 2013; P. Gifford, Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa, London 2015.

So where does that leave the state itself? This article attempts an answer to what is after all a rather important question. Elsewhere I address the concept of the state in more detail.[7] Here I merely wish to clarify that my understanding of the state incorporates three dimensions. Most fundamentally, "the state" is a kind of shorthand for an *ensemble of institutions* that ostensibly act in the name of the body politic, however that may be constituted. But there is also something less tangible at work here, namely the *idea of the state* – which sums up the expectations of what it means to belong to be a sovereign authority.[8] Finally, it is essential to insist on the *materiality of the state,* which is embodied in the physical existence of offices, uniforms, flags and in the much less visible revenue flows. It has been noted that studying states poses a particular challenge because the ensemble in question is also the author of its own self-image. There are certain things that states claim to do, one of which is projecting sovereignty to the outermost margins. That is one reason why the symbols of statehood, such as flags and coats of arms, and the rituals and routines associated with statehood (most notably form-filling and document-stamping), are so highly visible at border crossings.[9] But it is an open question whether states are really so concerned with broadcasting their authority in the manner that Jeffrey Herbst assumes to be the case.[10] Peering behind the curtain, as it were, and investigating what is actually going on, may help to strip away some of the mystique surrounding "the state". It also gives us some insight into where important changes are most likely to occur in the future.

One can tackle the state from a variety of vantage points. Here I only take two, but they are arguably the most important of all. If there are elements that are quintessentially "statish", these are territoriality and routine administration. Hence, I deal firstly with the boundaries of the state, whose long-term future is very much in question. Secondly, I address African bureaucracies and how they are (or are not) being reconfigured in in the context of larger changes in global governance. The discussion draws on all three of the dimensions identified above.

1. The Map of Africa's Future and The Future of Africa's Map

After independence, Africa's rulers were keen to consolidate the institutions they had inherited rather than putting everything up for grabs. This was famously encapsulated in the 1964 Cairo Resolution of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which declared "that all member States pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on the

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7   P. Nugent, Boundaries, Communities and State-Making in the Senegambia and the Trans-Volta: The Centrality of the Margins c. 1750 to the Present, chapter 1, Cambridge, forthcoming.
8   P. Abrams, Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State (1977), in: Journal of Historical Sociology 1 (10) 1977, pp. 58-89; T.B. Hansen and F. Stepputat, Introduction: State of Imagination, in: T. B. Hansen and F. Stepputat (eds.), States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State, Durham 2001.
9   R. Aggarwal, Beyond Lines of Control: Performance and Politics on the Disputed Borders of Ladakh, India, Durham NC 2004.
10   J. Herbst, States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control, Princeton 2000.

achievement of their independence."[11] This is what is often referred to as the principle of the intangibility of African boundaries. In a dissenting legal judgement, an eminent Somali international jurist, Justice Yusuf, maintains that the matter has been misunderstood.[12] His argument is partly that the principle of *uti possidetis* was not mentioned in the Resolution and was not really applicable because it was a legal principle fashioned for the internal administrative borders of Spanish South America when these were transformed into international borders. He also claims that the real intent of Africa's leaders was to establish a temporary holding pattern before revisiting the issue, rather than to render the inherited borders immovable and immutable. The first point is moot for the great federations of French West and Equatorial Africa and for Central Africa, depending on what one construes as an "internal" border and when one is talking about. But regardless of whether Africa's rulers merely intended to create a breathing space, inertia set in remarkably quickly. Even a self-proclaimed Pan-Africanist like Kwame Nkrumah was explicitly wedded to the maintenance of the borders that he so often criticized as a European imposition.

From the mid-1960s onwards, it seemed very unlikely that the borders would be altered through a process of active consent. The space for divided populations to petition for a redrawing of the borders was highly circumscribed. The Accra Declaration of the First Conference of Independent African States in 1958 referred to the "right of the African people to independence and self-determination."[13] But it was not referring to the Bakongo, Lozi or Ewe, but rather to Algeria and other colonial entities that were still under colonial rule. In effect, the OAU was set up to defend the rights of states rather than of peoples, while the states themselves became jealous guardians of their colonial inheritance. There were numerous secessionist rumblings in the early years of independence, of course, but most of the movements were snuffed out with a greater or lesser amount of repression. Re-uniting populations through an adjustment to the borders was the most difficult to achieve, not only because Africa's rulers were so protective of the status quo, but also because of the practical difficulties associated with mobilizing populations across borders. In principle it was rather easier to resolve border questions by establishing larger political entities. But while there were some efforts to revive the spirit of the former federations, this tended to be debated in terms of loose economic unions rather than amalgamations. Although many questioned their viability, the rulers of Africa's many micro-states, such as the Gambia or Rwanda, were especially reluctant to surrender their sovereignty.

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11 For the text of this resolution (AHG Res. 16.1), see http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/ASSEMBLY_EN_17_21_JULY_1964_ASSEMBLY_HEADS_STATE_GOVERNMENT_FIRST_ORDINARY_SESSION.pdf (accessed 15 October 2015).

12 „Separate opinion of Judge Yusuf", http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/149/17312.pdf (accessed 15 October 2015).

13 Accra Declaration of the First Conference of Independent African States, 15-22 April 1958, in: J. Langley, Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa, 1856–1970, London 1970.

That leaves the possibility of a change to the borders through a resort to arms. There were some noteworthy challenges to the cosy consensus in the 1960s and 1970s. The Somali authorities had never accepted the legitimacy of the Cairo Resolution, and staked claims to Somali populations in both Kenya and Uganda. Defeat in the war with Ethiopia in 1977–78 effectively put an end to that quest, even if the "Somali question" remains a thorn in the side of both the Kenyan and Ethiopian governments to this day. Likewise, Idi Amin revived some older challenges to the legitimacy of Uganda's borders with its neighbours, some of which were reflected in the demands of border populations themselves.[14] Amin's resort to arms culminated in an ignominious defeat at the hands of Tanzania, and effectively put an end to Ugandan irredentist claims for good. Armed secessionist movements did not fare much better. The Katangan bid from separation from the Congo, which followed hard on the heels of independence, was eventually quashed by the United Nations. The Biafrans won some sympathy for their cause, with Julius Nyerere famously backing the right to secede in this case. But most African leaders were reluctant to create a precedent that might rebound upon them in the future. In a nutshell, Africa's territorial dispensation seemed to have been achieved a considerable measure of fixity within two decades of independence. Tellingly, this was reflected in the lack of alternative imaginaries that challenged those constructed by the states themselves. Hence while it was possible to argue for the deep historicity of a Bakongo kingdom, it was not so easy to imagine what a Bakongo state, reuniting populations in the two Congos and Angola, would actually look like.

But in more recent times there are signs that the tectonic plates may be shifting. With a vocality that has not been seen since the early 1960s, a range of political actors are questioning whether the existing territorial dispensation is really optimal, and are tabling possible alternatives. This has been two decades in gestation and has unfolded rather incrementally. The civil wars that beset Ethiopia under the Dergue are instructive. The Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which eventually came to power after the flight of Mengistu, was wedded to the existing borders of Ethiopia, although it was willing to be flexible over the future of Eritrea. Its avowedly socialist vision was one that hitched modernism to socialism in a familiar manner – even if its adherence to the "Albanian road to socialism" was one if its quirkier attributes. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) demanded the right to break away from Ethiopia, but this was justified not as an act of secession, but as the final act of decolonization given that the former Italian colony had been absorbed into Ethiopia after the war. When Eritrea voted for independence, its alternative imaginaries were already worked out. Interestingly these harked back to a common history of Italian colonialism rather than positing a common culture binding Christians and Muslims. The Sudanese case is also instructive in that for long

14   In Uganda, there remained some dissatisfaction at the movement of the Uganda border from the Nzoia to the Lwakhakha Rivers. In 1959, a formal submission from the Bagisu District Lukhobo specifically asserted that the people had never been consulted and demanded a reversion to the former boundary, thereby reuniting the Babukusu of Kenya with the Bagisu of Uganda. They received short shrift at the time. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe, President's Office (Confidential) Box 95, Const 6/5 „Eastern Province- Bugishu" (1959).

periods of time the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) claimed to be fighting for more equitable terms within a greater Sudan, rather than separation from it. Part of the reason is that the southern Sudanese did not have their own idea of 'the state'. Even after the breakaway, both the idea and the materiality of the South Sudanese state remains very much under construction. When Somalia imploded in the early 1990s, and two de facto states emerged in the shape of the Republic of Somaliland and Puntland, the potential implications were much more profound. But while the Republic of Somaliland asserted its right to secession, returning to the borders of the former British colony in the Eritrean fashion, it has never received international recognition.[15] On the contrary, the fiction of the existence of a Somali state, which is in reality confined to parts of Mogadishu, continues to be upheld in the face of all the evidence to the contrary.

But there are signs that the challenges to existing state boundaries are starting to multiply and to present more radical alternatives. The Islamic State (ISIS) does not merely challenge the physical existence of Syria, but seeks to carve out a new kind of polity cutting across the borders that were established in the Middle East after the First World War. The ideal of a Muslim Caliphate, governed in conformity with the Islamic principles, can certainly draw on an imaginary that is rooted in centuries of history. Brooking no compromises with religious minorities who were created in the process of drawing the border,[16] ISIS nevertheless claims to be blind to race and ethnicity.[17] It has also extended its hand to other Islamist insurgent organizations on condition that they accept the authority of the new state, however rhetorical this might be in practice. There is no doubt that ISIS has set up a model for would-be radical Islamists in Africa, for whom belonging to a global movement holds definite attractions. The fascinating aspect of this putative return to the roots – which is reflected in Boko Haram's origins in the explicit rejection of "Western" education – is that it is also hyper-modern: the Koran and the sword rub shoulders with the Kalashnikov and the savvy use of social media.

The Islamist challenge to established states is reflected in the emergence of a series of linked insurgencies. These have all drawn on ideas of a global jihad, while struggling and mostly failing to present a credible vision of an alternative territorial dispensation. While Tuareg rebels in northern Mali and Niger have veered between demanding a better deal and fighting for outright secession, Islamists have played with the idea of a pan-Islamic community. At one level, this is thought of as straddling the international borders between Algeria and its southern neighbours. But operationally, the movements have tended to internalize the borders to a surprising degree, not least because the existence of the borders has proved useful to Algerian Islamists within AQIM (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) who have funded their own insurgency in large part through smuggling – which clearly depends on border logics. Initially, the Tuareg and Islamist tendencies

15   M. Bradbury, Becoming Somaliland, London 2008.

16   B.T. White, The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria, Edinburgh 2011.

17   P. Colburn, The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution, London, 2015, p. 11.

were closely related, and indeed there was some movement of fighters between the two. AQIM had for some years maintained rear bases in northern Mali, and lent support to two Malian groups, Ansar Dine and the Movement for Tawid and Jihad (MUJAO). In 2012, a renewed Tuareg rebellion led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) initially entailed close military co-operation. But after the collapse of the latter's resistance, and a military coup in Bamako, Ansar Dine and MUJAO turned on their former Tuareg allies and notionally set out to create an Islamic state.[18] Stephen Harmon notes that while Ansar Dine and the MNLA shared the aspiration for the secession of a northern state, namely Azawad, the former fought to create an Islamic state; MUJAO, on the other hand, hoped to take over the whole of Mali and to declare an Islamic state.[19] Dissolving the borders was not apparently on the agenda, even if the links to Algeria remained of paramount importance. While Al-Qaeda was the initial inspiration, the template created by ISIS has created a precedent that Salafist groups in Mali can freely draw upon. But with the French intervention of 2013, Islamic state creation remains a project for the future in Mali.

In the Lake Chad Basin, the emergence of Boko Haram follows a somewhat similar dynamic. The latter has undergone successive mutations, but its primary support base lies amongst Kanuri populations straddling the borders of Nigeria, Cameroun and Niger.[20] At its height – and nobody knows what tense to use here – Boko Haram controlled a large chunk of north-eastern Nigeria and threatened to spill over into the other states. Its strategy has been to deploy hit-and-run tactics and to engage in abductions and bombings rather than to create anything like an alternative state. Although what Boko Haram is opposed to is pretty evident – namely the political elite in general and the religious establishment of Northern Nigeria in particular – the scale of its political ambitions is not so clear. Whereas Boko Haram initially looked to Al-Qaeda, it is surely significant that it formally endorsed ISIS in 2014 and declared allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015.[21] It also declared its own Caliphate, which notionally represented a kind of province of the greater Islamic State. But this was a rhetorical gesture and the territory that was claimed has since been recaptured. At the present time, Boko Haram is capable of creating mayhem across the north-east, but it does not look like fashioning a state any time soon. Much as Boko Haram seems to be a mainly Kanuri phenomenon, al-Shabaab appeals mostly – but by no means exclusively – to Somalis.[22] And like Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab has formally shifted its allegiance from al-Qaeda to ISIS. The difference is that

18   S.A. Harmon, Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel Region: Corruption, Contraband, Jihad and the Mali War of 2012-2013, Farnham, Burlington 2014, pp. 175-179.

19   Harmon, Terror, p. 197.

20   V. Comolli, Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamist Insurgency, London 2015, pp. 85-91.

21   S. Almukhtar, „How Boko Haram courted and joined the Islamic state", New York Times 10 June 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/11/world/africa/boko-haram-isis-propaganda-video-nigeria.html?_r=0. Comolli, Boko Haram, p. 97

22   S.J. Hansen, Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012, London 2013. For non-Somali recruitment, see A. Botha, Political Socialisation and Terrorist Radicalisation Among Individuals Who Joined al-Shabaab in Kenya, in: Studies in Conflict and Terrorism 37 (2014) 11, pp. 895-919.

it comes out of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) which was in the process of building something approximating to a state before the Ethiopian intervention in 2006/7. In fact, it might be said that the ICU represented the best bet for peace, especially in view of the failure of the official state in Somalia. It is reasonable to predict that if ISIS succeeds in entrenching itself, it will give encouragement to like-minded movements in Africa. But while the ISIS imaginary can certainly be exported, materializing the state requires the creation of revenue streams and a basic fabric of administration. This has not looked like happening in the Western Sudan/Sahara, the Chad Basin or Somalia. But given the state of flux, it would be unwise to bet on this pattern holding in the long-run. But it is reasonable to draw one important conclusion: namely that the secular state is no longer the only show in town. This is clear even from the support for Shari'a law in Northern Nigeria amongst Muslim leaders who show no sympathy at all for Boko Haram.

At the same time, secessionism has crept back onto the front-burner. If the breakaway of Eritrea did not create a precedent – a claim that is certainly debatable – the secession of South Sudan has most definitely done so. The defenders of that new state might argue that the south had always been administered separately from the north during the period of the Condominium. But a similar argument might be made for the north and south of Nigeria. In fact, the Sudanese instance points to something rather prevalent, namely that colonial states were almost never uniform entities. They were routinely divided into distinct administrative units that were governed according to divergent principles. The moment of decolonization was so fraught precisely because incoming elites wished to establish a uniformity of administrative practice that had not hitherto existed. A case in point would be Uganda where the kingdoms, most notably Buganda, enjoyed an internal autonomy that was denied to other parts of Uganda. Similarly, the Lozi kingdom was recognized as a separate Barotseland Protectorate within the context of the Central African Federation.[23] Many of the emergent secessionist movements have emerged comparatively recently, but are staking their claims based on much older precedents. Their alternative imaginaries, therefore, invoke agreements and understandings that go back to the period before the time of independence. In the case of the Lozi secessionist movement, its grievances have been articulated by the royal establishment.[24] The attempt to invoke borders that pre-date colonialism has been much more problematic. This is exemplified by a map which extends the notional borders of 'historic Loziland well into Namibia and Angola. In the case of the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), there is a similar sense of grievance based on the enforced incorporation of the coastal strip, which formerly came under the Sultan of Zanzibar, into an independent Kenya.[25] The Sultan-

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23   On the Lozi case, see G.L. Caplan, Barotseland: the Secessionist Challenge to Zambia, in: Journal of Modern African Studies 6 (1968) 3, pp. 343-360.

24   At the time of writing, it was reported that the Litunga (or king) had been bribed into reversing his position on secession. http://www.zambiawatchdog.com/litunga-accused-of-receiving-k42b-from-pf-to-organise-another-council-to-reverse-secession/

25   J. Willis and G. Gona, Pwani C Kenya? Memory, Documents and Secessionist Politics in Coastal Kenya, in: African Affairs 112 (2013) 446.

ate ceased to exist after the Revolution of 1964, and there seems to be no desire on the part of the MRC to be reunited with Zanzibar, even if a shared Muslim identity remains important. The formal demand is for separation from Kenya.

Although many of these secessionist movements are backward-looking, they also draw on a very modern discourse about minority rights and are alert to international precedents. If Scotland had voted for separation from the United Kingdom in 2014, and if Catalonia eventually secures a referendum that is recognized by Madrid, there is no doubt that this would have knock-on effects in Africa. At the current time, however, there are no secessionist movements that are poised on the brink of a breakthrough: in some cases, such as Cabinda within Angola, the odds are overwhelmingly stacked in favour of the central state, while in others the movements have been handicapped by internal divisions, as has been the case in Anglophone Cameroun, the Casamance and Barotseland.[26] Many of the movements have singularly failed to flesh out a convincing vision of what an alternative future would look like, even in the most general terms. Finally, as Pierre Engelbert has plausibly argued, secession is often a strategic bargaining position – or a pitch for recognition – rather than the desired outcome.[27] In Cameroun, for example, Anglophone elites have proved to be eminently susceptible to co-optation. But then it only takes a couple of successes before alternatives become thinkable. At the current time, Zanzibar looks like the most likely candidate for becoming a separate state. Like Scotland, it already enjoys considerable autonomy under the existing constitutional provisions. There is little doubt that it would be viable as a state, given that it existed before the decision to merge with Tanganyika in 1964. Moreover, because it is a very special case in the Tanzanian context, Zanzibar would not necessarily open a can of worms, as difficult as it would be for the mainland elite to accept the divorce. If the Nigerian government really lost control of large parts of the north, that might also provide the opportunity for the oil-producing states to break away. However, as things stand, it does not seem that there will be any major redrawing of the map of Africa in the immediate future. There are too many vested interests embedded in the existing arrangements and there is too much inertia at the international level. But the case of the Congo demonstrates that where the central state is weak, a variegated kind sovereignty can emerge without forcing a change to the international boundaries: that is some regions under governmental control, others that fall under rebel movements and still others where hybridized forms of authority emerge.[28] In Africa's largest states, one might expect to see more of the same in this respect.

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26   J.-C. Marut, Le Conflit de Casamance: Ce qui Disent les Armes, Paris 2010.

27   P. Englebert, Africa: Unity, Sovereignty and Sorrow, Boulder 2009.

28   T. Raeymaekers, Violent Capitalism and Hybrid Identity in the Eastern Congo: Power to the Margins, Cambridge 2015, pp. 38-42.

2. The State of African Bureaucracy

If the redrawing of territorial boundaries provides the most tangible evidence for the ways in which African states are (or are not) being re-made, the restructuring of bureaucracies goes to the heart of what the state is all about. African bureaucracies have taken a battering over the past quarter-century. Although the list of formal functions has often remained the same – for example, the provision of primary-level education to the entire school-age population – the capacity to deliver has weakened over time. The demand for public goods has typically increased at the same time as the underpinning resources have been in decline. This has contributed to what some regard as the informalization of public functions. Education is a prime example because the low salaries of teachers – once considered as belonging to a rather prestigious profession – has spawned forms of moonlighting that have become the norm in countries such as Tanzania. During school hours, teachers cover a fraction of the curriculum, but provide additional classes in return for money after hours. This blurs the line between work time and leisure time and between governmental spaces (classrooms) and private spaces (homes).[29] Similarly, many academics in African Universities have multiple jobs that they use to augment their income – work which is done on government time. It is often the case that the authorities openly accept such arrangements because the alternative is the loss of key personnel altogether. In addition to salaries, there are many logistical challenges that make it difficult for bureaucrats to go about their jobs. In Ghana, for example, the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) is mandated to educate the population on their rights as citizens. This includes voter registration and sensitization over the importance of turning out to vote. In practice, NCCE officials routinely don't have serviceable vehicles. In the experience of this author, NCCE personnel relish the chance to get out of the office and to perform the jobs they are paid to do, but a basic lack of resources gets in the way.[30]

During the peak years of Structural Adjustment, civil service reform was supposed to reduce the payroll, to rationalize the pay bands and to improve pay incentives overall. The idea was that the state could be run more smoothly on less money. But the underlying agenda was also highly ideological and, as Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan assert, was not rooted in an empirically-grounded assessment of how institutions actually functioned.[31] Indeed, the World Bank's own data contradicted the claim that African bureaucracies were bloated. One study from the end of the 1990s came up with three significant findings: that Africa had fewer public servants than any other developing region, that the numbers had fallen under the adjustment regime and that the countries that were the most economically successful (Mauritius and Botswana) had

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29 I am grateful to Dr Steve Kerr for this particular insight.
30 These comments are based on direct observation and discussions with NCCE officials in the Volta Region secretariat in Ho.
31 T. Bierschenk and J-P. Olivier de Sardan, Studying the Dynamics of African Bureaucracies: An Introduction to States at Work", in T. Bierschenk and J-P. Olivier de Sardan (eds.), States at Work: Dynamics of African Bureaucracies, Leiden 2007, p. 45.

actually expanded their public sectors employment to nearly four times the sub-Saharan average.[32] The point can be exemplified with specific reference to policing where data is freely available. Ghana had a population of 25 million in 2012 and currently employs some 23,000 Police officers, thereby yielding a figure of 92 officers per 100,000 people.[33] Kenya had an estimated population of 46.8 million in 2012 and only 35,000 police officers.[34] That amounts to some 74.8 officers per 100,000 Kenyans. By comparison, Denmark employed 13,500 police for a population of 5.5 million, amounting to 245.5 per 100,000 inhabitants.[35] The same pattern would hold for Australia or Great Britain. Hence, in assessing the size of the bureaucracy, Goldsmith is surely justified when he concludes that "explanations for Africa's much lower than average economic growth have to be sought elsewhere."[36] It would also seem to follow that a reinvigorated role for the state might be rather important for Africa's future escape from the impasse in which it still finds itself – despite the rhetoric of "Africa Rising."

At the current time, the reconceptualization of the state is taking place in several domains, but in what follows I will single out three that are of particular importance. The first is with respect to the rural areas where, it has been argued, a process of de-agrarianization is under way. That is, it is claimed that the rural areas are not just losing population (in relative and absolute terms) to the city, but have long since ceased to produce enough food to feed the wider population – whilst themselves becoming dependent on urban and overseas remittances.[37] This is clearly related to more profound patterns of internal and international migration, but it also reflects the weaknesses of the agricultural economies that have not responded to adjustment reforms as predicted. The notion that the state should be directly engaged in production has long since been ruled out of court. Even the important agricultural extension roles played by government institutions, including the provision of key inputs such as fertilizer, seems unlikely to return despite the gravity of the food deficit in many countries. The emphasis has tended to fall on three other options: agri-business, land reform and improved land management practices. Under the first of these, the state has essentially allocated substantial tracts of land to external investors, including many from China, who have tended to plant non-food crops intended for overseas consumption.[38] This is an enclave strategy that essentially bypasses the peasant economy. With a rather different start and end point, land reform is ostensibly about the empowerment of farming populations through a more equitable distribution of land. This has remained a particularly emotive issue in those countries in

32   A.A. Goldsmith, Africa's Overgrown State Reconsidered: Bureaucracy and Economic Growth, in: World Politics 51 (1999) 4, pp. 520-546.
33   http://www.interpol.int/Member-countries/Africa/Ghana (accessed 15 October 2015). On the police, see A. Hills, Policing Africa and the Limits of Liberalization, Boulder 2000.
34   http://www.interpol.int/Member-countries/Africa/Kenya (accessed 15 October 2015).
35   http://www.interpol.int/Member-countries/Europe/Denmark (accessed 15 October 2015).
36   Goldsmith, Africa's Overgrown State, p. 530.
37   D. Bryceson and V. Jamal, Farewell to Farms: De-Agrarianisation and Employment in Africa, London 1997.
38   L. Cotula, The Great African Land Grab? Agricultural Investments and the Global Food System, London 2013.

Southern and Central Africa that have a prior history of settler colonialism.[39] Although the reforms are notionally intended to benefit ordinary households, they have also given the state a firmer grip over rural populations. Finally land management reforms, which intersect with the first two, are about changing the rules of the game in the allocation of access rights.[40] The term "land management" is loaded because it implies that land is a public good that ought to be subjected to regulation from above. It is also profoundly ambiguous because land is discursively converted back into private property in the blink of an eye. A received wisdom in donor discourse is that Africa's land systems are a barrier to investment and risk-taking because they are fractured and governed by non-market logics. If land was titled and then opened up to the market, so the reasoning goes, the result would be much greater efficiency in the agricultural sector as a whole. The creation of land registers is the first step towards what is intended to be a fundamental reorganization in the way land is allocated. The problem is that the state does not always own the land. Often land is vested in lineages or chieftaincies – or is at least accessed through them. Moreover, it is not uncommon for land rights to overlap, most notably in areas where farmers and agriculturalists co-exist. It can safely be predicted that land titling would create winners and losers, and that pastoralists would be overwhelmingly on the losing end – as they have been in Kenya, with its well-developed land market, for some decades now.[41]

All of this has important implications for the ways in which states relate to their rural populations. In recent times there have been two approaches designed to improve rural governance. The first is essentially to co-opt traditional authorities, often vesting them with substantive powers while rendering them more accountable to central control. This is what is being attempted in Mozambique where traditional authorities have gone from being treated as pariahs to governmental partners.[42] The second approach assumes the form of decentralization, which ostensibly brings land, and other collective resources such as forests, under the management of elected local authorities that are formally absorbed within the structures of the state. In practice, decentralization has often proceeded in tandem with the embedding of traditional authorities that are not usually popularly elected. Although local government systems have been in place for a couple of decades now, there is little evidence to suggest that they have won common acceptance.[43] Typically rural populations have been reluctant to pay taxes to local government bodies, which have remained dependent on subventions from the centre. Moreover, local authorities have lacked the capacity to effectively intervene in land allocation, which has

39   I. Scoones, Debating Zimbabwe's Land Reform, Brighton 2014; B. Cousins and C. Walker (eds.), Land Divided, Land Restored: Land Reform in South Africa for the 21st Century, Johannesburg 2015.
40   A. Manji, The Politics of Land Reform in Africa, London 2006.
41   K. Homewood, Pastoralists and Boundaries: Ecological Outcomes of Boundary Formation in Maasailand, in: P. Nugent and A.I. Asiwaju (eds.), African Boundaries: Barriers, Conduits and Opportunities, London 1996.
42   L. Buur and H-M. Kyed, State Recognition of Traditional Authority in Mozambique: The Nexus of Community Representation and State Assistance, Uppsala 2005.
43   J.T. Dickovick and J.S. Wunsch (eds.), Decentralization in Africa: The Paradox of State Strength, Boulder 2014.

meant that existing conventions have in practice continued as before. If central author-ity were to attempt to drive land management reforms in a more intrusive manner, it would no doubt have a fight on its hands because the legitimacy of what is proposed is so much in question. But the basic fact still remains that farming has lost its attraction, and most especially so for rural youth. A classic example would be the Casamance region of Senegal which has an abundance of wetlands that are ideal for paddy rice production, but where the youth increasingly look to escape to Dakar and overseas to fashion a live-lihood. The depopulation of the African countryside – already well-advanced in a vast country like Angola – may only increase the potential for "land grabs". Herein, of course, likes an obvious vicious circle.

The second domain is that of Africa's cities, many of which have experienced very rapid growth in recent times. The startling population projections for some of Africa's largest agglomerations suggest that this is only going to gather momentum over the coming decades. The growth of cities has some obvious implications for the future of African states. The expansion of the Lagos Metropolitan Area is simply staggering: it is estimated to have grown from 5.3 million people in 1991 to around 21.3 million today.[44] The cities are the places where the state is most visibly present in the shape of government Min-istries. The cities are also the places where populations are the most politically volatile – as is reflected in vote-switching and street protests. The challenges surrounding urban governance are profound, to the point of seeming intractable. As cities expand, the popu-lation that needs to be fed, housed and employed increases; there is greater congestion; and waste disposal becomes a serious public health concern. Although urban planners have attempted to channel the expansion, reality is typically several decades ahead of the plan. Such has been the case with Maputo where the planned expansion of the 1990s was designed for a much smaller population.[45] Moreover, as cities sprawl into what was once the countryside, large informal areas spring up beyond the contours of the formal plan – that is, until they are included retrospectively. Managing Africa's urban expansion is arguably the greatest governance challenge that will be faced in the coming decades. In the current climate, it is difficult in most cases to imagine a highly co-ordinated response. Part of the reason is that, in the context of decentralization reforms, many of the chal-lenges sit somewhere between being the concerns of metropolitan authorities and the central state, both of whom are strapped for resources. Only in South Africa, does local government command a significant chunk of the national budget: namely 25 per cent in 2010 as against an average of 8 per cent for all African countries. Despite its federal rev-enue formula, the corresponding figure for Nigeria is only at the continental average.[46] Although Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are much discussed, it striking that 70 per cent of all African PPPs have been dedicated to telecommunications and a further 11 to

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44   http://www.citypopulation.de/php/nigeria-metrolagos.php (accessed 15 October 2015).
45   P. Jenkins, African Cities: Competing Claims on Urban Land, in: F. Locatelli and P. Nugent (eds.), African Cities: Competing Claims on Urban Space, Leiden 2009.
46   T. Paulais, Financing Africa's Cities: The Imperative of Local Investment, Washington DC 2012, table 3.4., p. 121.

transportation, with water and sanitation only receiving two per cent.[47] In a nutshell, the provision of urban amenities has not been considered sufficiently profitable to attract the interest of private investors.

What emerges, therefore, is a patchwork of responses in which a range of actors come up with their own short-term solutions. In many countries, land is allocated for urban settlement by those who claim to be the owners without reference to the central state or the metropolitan authorities. Informal settlements sprout in the absence of amenities such as running water or refuse disposal. It is only later on that some informal settlements benefit from upgrading in what is essentially an attempt at amelioration after the fact. In other cases, land is sold privately to developers who proceed to create gated housing schemes and the shopping malls that are much beloved by the African middle classes – typically away from the bustle of the inner cities. And finally, there are the grandiose projects in which the central authority enters into partnerships with external investors. Recent examples include the waterfront development and new cities of Angola and, even more so, Eko Atlantic City which is an ultra-modern "fantasy city" – dubbed "Africa's Hong Kong"[48] – that is currently being built on land reclaimed from the Lagos lagoons. These initiatives, which are inevitably highly speculative in their financing, are based on the "boosting" commonly associated with global mega-cities. They look outwards to their counterparts elsewhere in the world and are more or less imagined as a concrete bubble that is sectioned off from the wider society. The role of the state is effectively that of the gatekeeper rather than the architect or builder, but if any of these projects were to come to fruition and create a functional form of urbanism, with associated "agglomeration effects",[49] African states would bathe in some of the reflected glory.

This brings us conveniently to the third domain, which is the interface between Africa and the external world. During the first decades of independence, African governments typically tried to develop from behind tariff walls. The logical implication was that it would be necessary to maintain tight controls over the flow of goods at the international boundaries. In recent decades the push has rather been in the opposite direction. Under Structural Adjustment, exchange rates were allowed to float and most of the protections accorded to domestic industries were removed. This went along with the pursuit of regional integration initiatives promoted under the banner of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and supported by the African Union (AU).[50] After some decades when scepticism about infrastructure as the magic bullet was the de rigeur, the current development orthodoxy holds that Africa can achieve both regional integration and a more equitable insertion into the global economy through large-scale investments in

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47   Paulais, Financing, pp. 170-171.

48   http://www.ibtimes.com/nigerias-new-city-eko-atlantic-construction-lagos-fuels-criticism-praise-2048964 (accessed 15 October 2015). The project is being led by a company owned by a Lebanese-Nigerian, while much of the building work is being carried out by Chinese firms.

49   World Bank, World Development Report, 2009: Reshaping Economic Geography, Washington DC 2009.

50   F. Söderbaum and I. Taylor (eds.) Afro-Regions: The Dynamics of Cross-Border Micro-Regionalism in Africa, Uppsala 2008.

port facilities, roads, railways and bridges. As with urban planning, the role of the state has been redefined in the process. Hence, the core financing for the infrastructure is typically coming from the European Union or China, while African states serve as the guarantor. The physical infrastructure is built by multinational companies, often with local businesses as junior partners. And much of the subsequent management of infrastructural facilities is sub-contracted to private companies or public-private partnerships. All of this raises the important question of what impact the project for "respacing Africa" is likely to have upon African states themselves.[51]

Contrary to a pessimistic reading, it seems reasonable to conclude that we are not witnessing the hollowing out of African states under the reign of neo-liberal capitalism, but a reconfiguration of the institutional landscape. For many state employees, the nature of the work is undergoing important changes, and this is likely to become more prevalent over time. For example, one of the consequences of regional integration within the East African Community (EAC) is that Ugandan Customs officials are present in the Kenyan coastal port of Mombasa. The computer records that they generate for goods destined for the Uganda market are intended to be accessed by the Customs authorities in both countries in order to prevent double taxation and ease the flow along the transport corridor.[52] At the same time, the value attached to state work continues to shift. Whereas some parts of the state apparatus have come to be considered as the "poor relations", others are in the process of being re-valorized. Typically, police personnel in African countries feel undervalued, especially as private security companies have moved in to plug the gaps.[53] At the same time, newly-constituted Revenue Authorities, which include the internal tax authorities and Customs, have been revitalized.[54] The sense of a pecking order often comes down to matters as simple as the newness of uniforms and office equipment, but it also extends to the possibilities for training, travel and additional perks. In Ghana, the Police Service may appear to be near the bottom of the food chain by comparison with the Immigration Service, but personnel within the latter also feel that they are less well-treated than their Customs, Excise and Preventive Service (CEPS) counterparts. As Brenda Chalfin indicates, there are also internal hierarchies within CEPS, as some personnel are seconded to work with those drawn from private firms, but this is simply an additional complexity associated with the remaking of bureaucracy in general.[55] The importance attached to the revenue agencies, of course, reflects the economic reform agenda that has been ongoing since the 1980s. But it is also integral to the attainability of some of the ambitions associated with state agendas. It is unlikely that African states will ever become

51   U. Engel and P. Nugent (eds.), Respacing Africa, Leiden 2010.

52   In 2014, however, the problem was that the two sets of authorities are using different computer systems. Interview with Nelson Mugisha, URA Customs officer, Lwakhakha-Uganda, 30 August 2014.

53   R. Abrahamsen and M.C. Williams, Security Beyond the State: Private Security in International Politics, Cambridge 2011; T. Diphoorn. Twilight Policing: Private Security and Violence in Urban South Africa, Berkeley 2015.

54   O.H. Fjeldstad and M. Moore, Revenue Authorities and Public Authority in Sub-Saharan Africa, in: Journal of Modern African Studies 47 (2009) 1, pp.1-18.

55   B. Chalfin, Neoliberal Frontiers: An Ethnography of Sovereignty In West Africa, Chicago 2010, p. 231.

fiscal states in the accepted sense of the term, but certain forms of extraversion do make it more likely that African states will have the capacity to deliver a range of public goods on the back of rising revenues. Over the past decade, taxes as a percentage of GDP have risen across the continent, but the progress has typically been slow – and the picture is even less impressive once oil revenues are taken out of the equation.[56] If African states are to truly re-invent themselves, we can be sure that raising revenues and establishing trust in the tax system will be fundamental – as they have been everywhere else.

3. Conclusion

Within African Studies, it has become fashionable to document people and goods on the move. Whether globalization is seen as potentially advantageous, or is regarded with greater scepticism, the general message is that Africa is undergoing rapid change, and that on the whole this presents exciting prospects that are worthy of closer investigation. After all, who can fail to be intrigued by the revelation that there are already up to 130,000 Africans living in the Chinese city of Guanghzou?[57] To turn the focus back on African states might seem like a retrograde step because they are probably the least susceptible to rapid change. In this paper, I have opted to be unfashionable for the reason that I believe that states continue to matter. They are influenced by the global flows in their own ways, as I have sought to demonstrate with respect to bureaucracies, but they also continue to influence the ways in which Africans experience globalization. To a re-markable extent, the *idea of the state* that was inherited with independence has displayed a remarkable resilience even when its materiality has been placed in question.

In this article, I have argued that some fundamental challenges to state boundaries have arisen as political actors struggle to fashion alternative imaginaries and to carve out territory. But for all the turmoil in particular regions, it does not seem very likely that many new states, Islamist or otherwise, will coalesce in the near future. Nor does it seem re-motely likely that in the era of neo-liberalism, African states will become any less important. Aside from the essential gatekeeper functions they perform, there are certain public goods that the state is best placed to provide. Ironically, at least when viewed in the light of Weber, the monopoly over violence, and hence the guarantee of personal and collective security, is probably not one of those. But states have a role to play in making African cities more livable and in facilitating Africa's place in world commerce. As Africa's cities grow apace, it is reasonable to expect that urban populations will assert their demands in a more direct manner. Herein lies the possibility for the emergence of new kinds of pro-

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56   For example, in Ghana tax revenue as a percentage of GDP (excluding oil) rose from 11.9 per cent in 2003 to an estimated 14.1 per cent in 2013. Table 1, http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/Africa-tax-and-inequality-report-Feb2014.pdf (accessed 15 October 2015).

57   M. Lee, Africa's World Trade: Informal Economies and Globalization From Below, London 2015, pp. 20, 22; citing H. Haugen, Nigerians in China: A Second State of Immobility, in: International Migration 50 (2012) 2.

ductive social contracts.[58] Of all the things that the state can contribute, re-fashioning a sense of political community is arguably amongst the most profound.

58   P. Nugent, States and Social Contracts in Africa, in: New Left Review 63 (2010), pp. 35-68.