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The rise of the state system in Africa

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Africa's relation to the concept and practice of 'state' and 'states system' has been problematic since its first encounters with those who were armed with the concept. In observing the collapse of authority and governance in a number of African states, some scholars have suggested that Africa presented the states system with alternative political organizations. Others argue that so long as there is a kernel of armed authority in territorially demarcated areas, a state exists. Africa's polities have often responded unconventionally, yet strategically, to interaction with the sovereign state system first elaborated by the Europeans. To comprehend the novelty, or lack of it, in the 'state system' of contemporary Africa, we need to know something about its pre-colonial political structures and organizations and about the imprint of empires (the construct which effectively limited the 'international' system of sovereign states to the West) on Africa. Did colonialism and the Western system of sovereign states rule out alternative structures for the newly independent African states? What might alternative structures have looked like? What impact did colonial rule have on the development of states in Africa? Does contemporary Africa have a 'state system'? This article addresses these questions in the context of the Special Issue's concern with both the structure of the international system and developments among and between the units.

It begins by considering alternative, abstract conceptions of the political communities which constitute states. Attempting to use these definitions in the African context illustrates the difficulties of formulating a workable definition of the state, and also highlights the differences among various scholars about what constitutes a suitable definition. Realist, Institutionalist, Constructivist, and Comparativist criteria face a terminological jungle as well as incredible empirical diversity when studying African polities over the last 500 years.

Defining the state

In an essay titled 'The Character of a Modern European State', Michael Oakeshott writes that in the sixteenth century the word 'state' 'stood for a somewhat new kind of human association which had been emerging, more rapidly and more clearly in some parts of Europe than in others, for over a century'. He adds that the word

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'provided little to identify, and much less to specify, the character of the association thus named'.[2] Four hundred years later, and with an added concern to understand the development of 'state systems' in non-European parts of the world, the problem is still with us.

To the question, 'what is a state?', numerous definitions have been offered by scholars from different subfields of political science. Most definitions convey the notion that the state is an entity which controls conflict between individuals within a bounded territory, or, conversely, calls upon individuals to participate in conflicts with other bounded territories.[3] Another view is that the state is the allocative mechanism within a political system.[4] Such a system is one in which humans continuously interact with one another as they seek to satisfy their individual desires.[5] In a political system, there is some general agreement on the 'rules of the game', and support for the government in its role as the mediator of competing claims. A third view is of the state as a symbolic system, in which ritual and culture create and bind a political community.[6]

The Realists present a forceful rebuttal to these views. Perhaps the most well-known challenge to the view of the state as an authoritative allocator of values is that of Carl Schmitt.[7] He points out that humans may be organized into communities, but each community inhabits an anarchic international system. Therefore, the essence of the political is making a distinction between 'friend and enemy'. What matters is not the character of the state, but whether there exists a community willing and able to define itself against a 'non-self'. This is strictly a public act. The political entity understands itself as such only because of 'the real existence of an enemy'.[8] Only after this political entity is protected can other values and projects be pursued. The state is that entity which is capable of imposing 'its own unqualified right to existence in the face of all other vital forces'.[9] The definition of a political entity is one-dimensional: 'that grouping is always political which orients itself toward this most extreme possibility', that is, making and acting upon a friend-enemy distinction. The locus of sovereignty is in that which makes the decision for the group, and the state is that which holds power over the physical lives of men.[10]

Other theorists have argued that, fundamentally, the state is 'organized violence'. Alexandro Passerin D'Entreves makes the argument that the development of the notion of the state as a sovereign, legal entity grew out of the historical necessities confronting medieval political theory. There was a need to characterize the 'greater

[2] Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 196.
[3] For example, J.P. Nettl, 'The State as a Conceptual Variable', *World Politics*, 20 (1968), pp. 559–92; for a critique, see Peter Gourevitch, 'The Second Image Reversed: the International Sources of Domestic Politics', *International Organization*, 32:4 (1978), pp. 881–911.
[4] David Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965).
[5] See also Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, p. 261.
[6] Two striking examples are in Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).
[7] Schmitt specified Harold J. Laski, *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1917) as his main target.
[8] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976), pp. 49, 19, 28, 53.
[9] F. Meinecke quoted in Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 9.
[10] Schmitt, *The Concept*, p. 38, 37, 47.

complexity of human intercourse', and a need to 'assess the proper seat of power' in such a way as 'to differentiate the State from other social institutions'.[11] D'Entreves notes that the concept is indebted to Roman law, for it is Roman law which posits that 'there is somewhere in the community … a *summa potestas*, a power which is the very essence of the State'.[12]

By restricting the 'political' to the capacity of a community to make and act on such a distinction, Schmitt misses the politics and process inhering in the act of constituting the collectivity.[13] How do members of what appears to be a political community come to recognize themselves as being a community, distinct from other individuals and other entities, and as being a community worthy of self-defence? Is the threat of elimination *the* one element which 'forges' the 'decisive entity which transcends the mere societal-associational groupings'?[14] Africa provides some interesting perspectives on this view.

The state, then, is the supreme political entity; it represents the '*institutionalization* of power'[15] the nature of which is nevertheless dependent upon the manner in which people order their self-interested interactions with one another (as David Easton would assert).[16] This concentration of power, this bid for state sovereignty, whether by an individual or group, entails a struggle not just over power but over the rules which are to control its legitimate expression. The state's recognition of itself as a distinct entity is dependent upon the outcome of internal allocative struggles and upon the generation of values held in common. The values and culture can transform the very nature of the actors within the state, leading to a transformation in the character of that state. Implicit in this is the notion that the character of a state is being perpetually redefined. As Kenneth Dyson has put it, 'Being in part constitutive of political activity and of the state itself, the idea of the state is connected in an intimate, complex and internal way with that conduct, shaped by and shaping it, manipulated by and imprisoning the political actor whose political world is defined in its terms'.[17] How it comes into being, even whether it will, can never be taken for granted.

Territoriality has come to be a key feature in several definitions of the state. In Weber's famous formulation, '[t]he term "political community" shall apply to a community whose social action is aimed at subordinating to orderly domination by the participants a "territory" and the conduct of the persons within it, through readiness to resort to physical force, including normally force of arms'.[18] For scholars and the international legal community, sovereign control over a specific territorially-bounded population has continued to be a defining feature of a state.

[11] D'Entreves, *The Notion of the State: An Introduction to Political Theory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 89. See also Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Margaret Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

[12] D'Entreves, *The Notion*, pp. 92, 93. Emphasis in original.

[13] Gianfranco Poggi, *The Development of the Modern State: A Sociological Introduction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978), pp. 11–12.

[14] Schmitt, *The Concept*, p. 45.

[15] J. P. Nettl, 'The State', p. 563.

[16] Easton, *A Framework*.

[17] Kenneth Dyson, *The State Tradition in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 3.

[18] Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (eds.), *Economy and Society*, vol. 2 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), ch. IX, p. 901.

When pressing beyond the realist assumption that takes the existence of states for granted, to ask why states and not some other type of entity are the main units in the international arena, some scholars of IR have distilled the state's features to three key institutions: (1) a hierarchical authority structure which accepts no extra-territorial jurisdiction, that is, it has sovereign authority; (2) territorial demarcation with formal boundaries; and (3) a public judicial authority with codified laws.[19] The latter criterion implies that there is a division between public office and the person who occupies the office. The argument is that, given extant political and economic conditions during a particular era of European history, these traits proved themselves to be more functional, in an evolutionary sense, than those of the state's rivals (city-states and city-leagues). These traits are in line with a definition generally accepted by Comparativists: 'We consider the state to be a set of organizations invested with the authority to make binding decisions for people and organizations juridically located in a particular territory and to implement these decisions using, if necessary, force'.[20]

Constructivists and some legal scholars argue that this is a thin definition of a state. It ignores the community which constitutes the state, and since not all entities called or recognized as being 'states' meet those criteria, it is a deceptive definition. Statehood, according to Christopher Clapham, had as its central concept a '*public* character', in which states claim 'to act collectively on behalf of their citizens'.[21] Presumably, those political communities which did or do not do so are not states. Yet the extent to which any sovereign state acts for the common good of its citizens and not the private interests of certain powerful groups and individuals is a much debated topic, and leads us back to Schmitt's analysis. Further, as Robert Jackson has argued, numerous political communities which do not meet Clapham's criterion are now accorded sovereign status, and others, which would seem to meet it, are not.[22] The response of the Constructivist school (see below) is that states exist because we say that they do.

While Weber is most remembered for defining the state as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory', it is worth noting, as Constructivists have, that Weber suggested that a state exists when 'the action of various individuals is oriented to the belief that it exists or should exist'. That the state is territorial and sovereign over a territory depends on us defining it as such, and on others acting as if it were. This gives entry to the Constructivist definition of a state, that it is a 'corporate agency', which is also more than the sum of its individual parts; it is a set of rules and an organization that acts (or claims to act) on behalf of a collectivity—a community.[23]

[19] Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 39.

[20] Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 47–8.

[21] 'Degrees of Statehood', *Review of International Studies*, 24 (1998), pp. 143–57, here at p. 154. Italics in original.

[22] Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[23] Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 78; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 219; see also Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

It also depends on a 'story of origins' which sees the Peace of Westphalia as having instituted the sovereign territoriality of state-like polities, inaugurating the international system of states.[24] The Constructivist view implies that the development of the state system in Africa has been dependent on 'actors' defining, while using the terms and concepts of sovereign statehood, 'who they are and what they want'.[25] Ironically, this view contains the essence of Schmitt's identity politics and Easton's allocation politics.

In practice, scholars of different traditions, such as the Institutionalists and Constructivists, borrow from each other. One noted Institutionalist stipulates that the spread of sovereign territorial states partly depended upon states recognizing, anointing, certain other political entities as being like them.[26] Constructivists stress that the state has bureaucratic (and not just symbolic, discursive) structures of control and of collective decision-making.

While mainstream IR and its critics have been preoccupied by the idea that, as of about 1600, the international system became one of sovereign territorial states—the 'Westphalian' system,[27]—other political forms simultaneously existed in the world, and other political forms with considerable international reach and influence were developed by the same 'sovereign, territorial' states, namely, empires. Krasner (in his contribution to this issue) suggests that the Westphalian model is violated by states when they, by contract or convention, surrender some of their sovereignty, or when other states compromise that sovereignty through coercion or imposition. Yet the point of departure is still the existence of some semblance of a sovereign territorial state—a state which decides to act towards, or which is acted upon by, other states.

The pre-colonial system of political entities in Africa

This does not adequately capture much of Africa's political history. In the pre-colonial era, some political entities began to approximate the Westphalian state, others had different organization structures and operating principles. In the post-colonial era, the Westphalian model is violated as much by the states' failure to generate an authority which could, by contract or convention, alienate its own sovereignty, as by coercion or imposition of a rival power base *from within*. This section surveys the varieties of polities present in Africa at the time that states were consolidating in Europe. The differences are quite enlightening. In fact, the various types of political communities which existed in Africa before colonialism present problems for our use of the term state. The easiest solution is to assign them other labels, reserving 'state' for those entities which are sovereign, territorial, and bureaucratized, with a legal system separate from any specific rulers. There is an

[24] A. Claire Cutler, 'Critical Reflections on the Westphalian Assumptions of International Law and Organization: A Crisis of Legitimacy' *Review of International Studies*, 27 (2001), pp. 133–50, here at 134–5. More generally, Roxanne Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[25] Wendt, *Social Theory*, pp. 336–7.

[26] Spruyt, *The Sovereign State*.

[27] Ibid.; John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Wendt, *Social Theory*.

inevitable Western bias in doing so: states as so defined first emerged in the West. The purpose of the following section is to review some of the pre-colonial African polities, their authority structures, and to discuss the problem of the definition of the state through an analysis of Islam-based polities.

To read the history of fifteenth to nineteenth century Africa is to be struck by the wealth of organizational forms taken by its polities, not to mention the plethora of terminology which European scholars have applied to them. It is hard to know whether the variety of fifteenth–nineteenth century political entities named by scholars really were distinctly different categories, or whether scholars are merely trying to vary their vocabulary. In one region, Senegambia, the same scholar discusses 'states', 'kingdoms', 'autocracies', 'vice-royalties', 'confederations', coastal and island 'peoples', and 'theocracies'.[28] Another scholar refers to 'city states', 'empires', 'sultanates', 'states', 'dynasties', and 'nomadic confederations' in North Africa and Central Sudan.[29] Others note 'pastoral societies', 'clans', 'tribes', 'war lords' and 'semi-autonomous vassal states', and still others, 'cities' and 'houses'.[30] East Africa was apparently populated by 'dynasties', 'tribes', 'states', 'kingdoms', 'tributary states', 'sub-dynasties', 'clans' and 'sub-kingdoms'.[31] A state might encompass several kingdoms.[32] More recently, the terms 'decentralized' or 'stateless' societies have been used to refer to very small polities with personalized rule, in which no one had the power or authority to coerce anyone else.[33]

How were these polities structured? In the area now known as Uganda, some polities were based on the 'free association of men in clientelist relations'.[34] The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw the formation of 'confederacies' of small communities based on 'kinship or clan ties'.[35] Other structures were more complicated. The 'Houses' of polities in the Eastern Niger Delta were structured much like small city-states of medieval and early modern Europe. Based on wealth acquired through trade, entrepreneurs 'began to build up their personal households'. Marriages also enabled an entrepreneur to increase his personal control over individuals, and thus increase his power in the community. When he had acquired a certain level of wealth, 'he equipped a war canoe and showed himself to the

[28] B. Barry, 'Senegambia From the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century: Evolution of the Wolof, Sereer and Tukuloor', in Ogot (ed.), *General History of Africa*, pp. 262–99; see also Christophe Wondji, *La côte ouest africaine* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1985).

[29] J.O. Hunwick, 'Songhay, Borno and Hausaland in the Sixteenth Century', in J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (eds.), *History of West Africa*, vol. I, 2nd edn., pp. 264–301.

[30] Murray Last, 'Reform in West Africa: the Jihād Movements of the Nineteenth Century' in J.F.A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder (eds.), *History of West Africa*, vol. II (London: Longman Group, 1974), pp. 1–29, here at pp. 10–13; S.F. Nadel, 'The Kede: A Riverain State in Northern Nigeria', in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (eds.), *African Political Systems*, pp. 165–96, here at p. 166; E.J. Alagoa, 'The Niger Delta States and Their Neighbours to 1800', in Ajayi and Crowder (eds.), *History of West Africa*, vol. I, pp. 331–73, here at p. 341.

[31] Roland Oliver, 'Discernible Developments in the Interior *c*. 1500–1840', in Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew (eds.), *History of East Africa*, vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 169–211.

[32] Ndaywel Nziem, 'The Political System of the Luba and Lunda: Its Emergence and Expansion', in Ogot (ed.), *General History of Africa*, vol. 5, pp. 588–607, here at pp. 593–4.

[33] Martin Klein, 'The Slave Trade and Decentralized Societies', *Journal of African History*, 42 (2001), pp. 49–65, here at p. 52.

[34] K. Oberg, 'The Kingdom of Ankole in Uganda', in M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.), *African Political Systems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 121–64, here at p. 135.

[35] A.A. Boahen, 'The States and Cultures of the Lower Guinean Coast' in Ogot (ed.), *General History*, pp. 399–433, here at p. 412.

amanyanabo [leader] and community as a political leader, … and became a member of the King's council', which decided foreign and domestic policy. Given that there was constant competition between Houses for increased wealth and a larger network of individuals obligated to a House, the community's leader 'had to cope with these inter-House conflicts as well as to protect his position against the ambition of the House heads'.[36] Stripped of its cultural and ethnic content, this could describe a form of political organization in medieval Europe. Polities sometimes consolidated for protection against pirates, head hunters, slave raiders or other attackers, or were linked in vertical ties to one authority when one, in taking over a trade route, obtained *de facto* control over the villages along the route.[37]

Scholars who have developed classification schemes for pre-colonial African polities have noted extensive diversity within very broad categories. Peter Lloyd found numerous kingdoms grouped in 'recognizable clusters' such as 'the Western Sudan, Ghana and Dahomey'. They had in common an acceptance of the idea of divine kingship, and each cluster may have shared some other cultural traits, but 'the political structure of neighbouring kingdoms' often was 'markedly different'.[38] There is extensive debate about the extent to which sovereign state concepts of public authority, that were distinct from the specific individual who held authority, existed, but it would be a mistake to adopt Van Creveld's position, that 'not one African or Asian society seems to have developed the concept of the abstract state as containing both rulers and ruled but identical with neither'.[39] As with the formative years of the European sovereign territorial states, the physical boundaries of these kingdoms are not clear to scholars and seem not to have been always clear to the populations concerned.[40]

Islamic states / polities

In fact, for Islamic-based polities, territoriality was a secondary consideration. Membership in the polity (and community) was tied to allegiance to a belief and not to a clan, class or territory. Because Islam had a substantial impact on the shape and destiny of many African polities, and because of the challenges which Islamic-based polities pose for definitions of the state, it is instructive to consider how Islamic polities were governed.

Although the rise and spread of Islam out of the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century was, in one sense, quite clearly 'territorial', that is, it conquered territory

[36] E.J. Alagoa, 'The Niger Delta States and Their Neighbours, to 1800', in Ajayi and Crowder, *History*, vol. I, pp. 331–73, here at pp. 341, 343, 344.

[37] Oliver, 'Discernible Developments', p. 210; Klein, 'The Slave Trade', p. 60; Alagoa, 'The Niger Delta States', pp. 345–6, 352.

[38] Peter C. Lloyd, 'The Political Structure of African Kingdoms: An Exploratory Model', in Michael Banton (ed.), *Political Systems and the Distribution of Power* (London: Tavistock, 1965), pp. 63–112, here at p. 69.

[39] Martin Van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 315. For an exploration of African concepts of rule, see 'Issues in Divine Kingship'.

[40] Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Jeffrey Herbst, 'The Creation and Maintenance of National Boundaries in Africa', *International Organization*, 43:4 (Autumn 1989).

which was until that time under the control of the Eastern Roman Empire, the Persian Empire, and so on, one could argue that the primary motivation was not the conquest of territory for its own sake. It was, rather, to spread the message of Muhammad and Islam. There are two pieces of evidence for this, which, regardless of the motivation for territorial conquest, highlight key features of Islamic polities.

The first is the mechanism by which (non-Islamic, religiously-identified) groups were governed: in essence they were allowed to become (remain) self-governing entities under their own system of laws (the system which the Ottoman Empire institutionalized under the term '*millet*' [nation]) as long as they recognized the suzerainty of the Islamic Empire, and paid their taxes (the '*jizya*').

The second requires that we confront the thorny question of whether there is a distinction between 'state' and 'religion' in the Islamic context. Most introductory works on Islamic 'political' thought make the point that, in theory, there is no distinction in Islam between these two realms. As in other complex political questions, there is here a 'level of analysis' issue.

In the basic formulation of Islam, there is indeed no distinction between 'the state' and 'religion'. The clearest evidence for the validity of this claim is that the life and career of Muhammad are the ideal, the perfect model of politico-religious leadership for Muslims. (And, in fact, that is what Muhammad's life after the Hijra personifies: leadership of the Islamic community at the same time as he carried out what we would today call 'administrative' and 'political' functions in Madina after 622 AD).

However, after Muhammad's death (and the resulting conflict over leadership of the Islamic community—the *ummah*), and the responsibilities associated with governing the vast expanses of territory and the array of peoples which had come under the Islamic empire's sway, a very clear distinction between the two realms emerges, best illustrated by the two 'offices' which develop:

1. The '*caliph*' (from the Arabic '*khalifah*', the 'successor'), who is the 'successor' of Muhammad as the leader of the *ummah*; and
2. The '*sultan*' (from the Arabic 'salata', which means 'power', 'might', 'strength', and most importantly, 'authority'), who is the individual who exercises power and authority—in other words, what Western political thought would recognize as the 'head of government', that is, the individual who controls the administrative machinery and personnel of the 'state' and is the primary policymaker in temporal affairs.

This distinction enables us to say that, indeed, a state exists (since there is a separation of functions). Note that the distinction of 'state' which is being used here is that there is a piece of territory under the exclusive domain of the ruler, there is a population which recognizes and/or accepts the individual as ruler, and there is a bureaucracy which administers the law, collects taxes, and so on. While that conclusion may therefore be warranted, there are additional considerations.

First, nearly every ruler of an Islamic polity (whether Sunni or Shi'a) was inclined to term himself 'amir al-mu'minin' ('commander of the faithful'), the *political equivalent* of 'caliph'. In other words, he lay claim to being Muhammad's successor as the head of the 'true' community of Islam, the real ummah. The rather clear implication is that there is no distinction between the 'state' and the 'religion' at this level of analysis.

Second, all such rulers essentially carried out the secular function of 'kingship', that is, they were the primary policymaker within their polity; they controlled the machinery of the 'state' (such as it was), the military, were recognized by others in their leadership position, and also carried out the 'religious function' of being the leader of an, if not the only, Islamic community.

Third, after the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols and the 'death' of the Abbasid 'state' (1258 AD), no Muslim ruler was willing to arrogate to himself the title of caliph; the term went into desuetude (which is not to say, as indicated above, that some Muslim rulers did not think of themselves as legitimate successors to leadership of an Islamic community).

Fourth, not one of these rulers ever arrogated to himself the right to make laws or policy for the non-Muslim inhabitants; indeed, in modern terminology, they were autonomous entities within the confines of the Islamic polity. (The leaders of these communities had independent access to the sultan, set their own tax rates among their members, set education policy, determined personal status, and so on). In that sense, it is important to remember that the Islamic polity did not see itself as a territorial enterprise. (More on this below.)

Fifth, these rulers typically made no distinction between a 'public' and a 'private' sphere of activities, policies, and spheres of control. In fact, traditional Islam provides no basis for making a distinction between these two spheres, and in reality the vast majority of Islamic rulers made no such distinction.

This characteristic continues into modern times: the Islamic rulers of polities in various places throughout the Islamic world had no reason to implement any such distinction: the private 'purse' of the ruler is the same thing as the 'public purse'.

Perhaps the continued relevance of many of these points into the twentieth (and twenty-first) centuries is best provided by a short look at some Arab/Muslim monarchs of this period: King Hasan of Morocco, King Husayn of Jordan, King Ahmad of Yemen, and King Abd al-Aziz al-Sa'ud of Saudi Arabia. All of these monarchs lay claim to some form of religious rationalization for their leadership function: in the case of the rulers of Morocco and Jordan, the claim was based upon their descent from the prophet Muhammad; in the case of Abd al-Aziz, the claim was based on his leadership of the Wahhabi Movement of Islam; in the case of King Ahmad, who actually lay claim to the title 'amir al-mu'minin', he believed himself to be the legitimate successor/leader of the entire Islamic *ummah*. However, it is in the characteristics of the Saudi monarchy that one most clearly sees the continued lack of clear separation of public and private spheres. Although Abd al-Aziz, like the rulers of Kuwait, Bahrain, and elsewhere, eventually divided his income into thirds (one-third for his personal use, one-third for the administration of the realm [primarily for the military], and one-third invested in financial instruments in the West), there was (and remains) no legal provision or requirement for such a division to exist.

In other words, at the next level of analysis, once again we are faced with the lack of any clear distinction between the state and religion, between public and private spheres—they are all part of a seamless web of relationships and responsibilities.

Modern Islamic reformers have sought, and generally found, citations in Islamic texts, including the Quran, which can be used to support their call for reform and modernization of these traditional institutions and practices; but it is important to remember that the average Muslim finds nothing particularly offensive or unusual

when a Muslim ruler makes no distinctions between his religious function/leadership, his political, economic and social responsibilities, and his private life.

In those West African polities which came under the influence of Islam prior to their confrontations with the West and its (nation-)states, a number of these ideas and conceptions were an integral part of their views of the nature of government, politics and religion. It would appear that among these were (in no particular order):

(1) The view that a leader who carries out what we might term 'secular' functions, such as controlling the military, ineluctably also carries out religious functions (consider, again, that Muhammad was a military leader, as well as an administrator, as well as a prophet), and *vice-versa*.

(2) The community, the *ummah*, consists of individuals (and groups) who have accepted membership and the responsibilities and rights associated with such membership; those who have not elected to join are not considered 'citizens' or subject to the decisions (military, political, social, economic, and so on) made by the *ummah* (however broadly or narrowly that may be defined in different areas).

(3) Legal requirements, that is, the Law (the *Shari'ah*), applies only to members of the community; non-members are not bound by its moral, ethical, economic and social prescriptions and rules. Non-Muslims may live under their own code of laws (as long as they do not try to impose them on Muslims, seek to convert Muslims, behave in a manner offensive to Muslims, or make alliances with other non-Muslims that threaten the safety and well-being of the *ummah*).

(4) Muslims are bound by the requirements of their legal and religious systems even if living under the temporal control of non-Muslims. Although Muhammad recognized that some of the prescriptions and requirements of the faith might be difficult to implement in a non-Muslim environment, and allowed for temporary suspension thereof, it was always believed that Muslims should attempt to bring non-Muslim areas into the Dar al-Islam (the House of Islam, that is, where Islam is numerically and politically dominant).[41]

(5) The 'realm' of the ruler (no matter the indigenous term used, such as caliph or Amir) extends to all of the adherents of the faith, no matter where they may be at any given time; it is *not* territorially bound, defined or delimited.

It should not, therefore, be terribly surprising that the political interaction between the very differing conceptions of community, the 'state', and the role of religion held by Catholic and Protestant Europeans and Muslim Africans, would lead to friction, misunderstandings, and conflicting claims in the realm of economics, politics, and social *mores*. It was probably inevitable that without any structural mechanism to facilitate compromise, much less any organized effort to reconcile differing views on

[41] It is interesting to note in this regard that Muslims in contemporary Europe have asked that the traditional right of autonomy in matters of education, personal status, family law, dress, etc., which were granted to European Christians in the Middle East in the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates and then more formally in the Ottoman Empire (and which continue in certain areas to the present day) should be extended to them while they reside in Europe. This claim, and the logic upon which it rests, has been a rather regular 'bargaining position' of Muslims since the mid-1970s, when the Egyptian Imam of the Regent's Park Mosque in London made the case to British authorities. (S.A. Pasha, 'Muslim Family Law in Britain'. Unpublished paper presented to the House of Commons, 1977; cited in: Joergen S. Nielsen, *Towards a European Islam* (London: Macmillan Press for the University of Warwick, 1999), ch. 7.

such matters, who emerged as the 'victor' would be the result of conflicts carried out using economic and military measures. With fewer resources, a far less centralized administration, and a decentralized relationship between the pieces of the realm, the Islamic states of West Africa stood very little chance against the economic and military might of the European empires.

One such case is the Sokoto Caliphate. While often referred to by Africanists as a 'state', the Sokoto Caliphate was a congeries of 'emirates', or local governments, which were united 'by common membership of one Umma [community of believers] dedicated to the upholding of Islam and of Dār-al-Islām',[42] who agreed that the Caliph was the supreme temporal and spiritual authority. It was not a set of people brought into a contiguous territory with a marked separation of private from public power.[43] This was also the case for the nascent states/large kingdoms of West Africa in their dealings with the Europeans. Islam-based polities also signed treaties with other states or polities (an accepted practice, even with non-Muslim polities), and attempted to enforce their control over territories. When Umar Tal, the prominent leader of what most historians refer to as the *jihad* in West Africa which formed the basis of the Tukulor empire, entered a rival polity's vassal city, the latter's leader wrote to Umar, saying 'It has come to our attention that you entered Sinsani without our knowledge or permission'.[44] Even if the polity's territory was non-contiguous, it would claim its treaties were binding on those who were members of the *ummah*.

Even though the Caliph was considered sovereign for those communities which swore allegiance to him, and though he claimed the right to establish treaties, the leaders (emirs) of those communities often had separate enemies. The Caliph became involved in trying to co-ordinate defence efforts. Such a system makes a hash of Schmitt's view that the central criterion of a political community or state is that which distinguishes itself from all the enemies—all in the community have the same enemy. It also contravenes the accepted social science view of a state as being that which represents all its inhabitants uniformly in dealings with an identifiable 'external' realm—that is, with other states and international actors.

The structure of the African Islamic polities also poses a problem for our idea of a state to the extent that each emirate was composed of multiple villages, and while the emirate claimed a central authority structure, most of what passed for politics occurred at the village level as a result of decisions and actions taken at the local level. Lloyd comments that the villager lived 'subject to both forms of government' and that 'two different sets of political norms' were involved. Johnston refers to the duality of a 'feudal structure' in which 'authority was first centralized and then extensively delegated'.[45]

[42] R.A. Adeleye, 'The Sokoto Caliphate in the Nineteenth Century' in Ajayi and Crowder (eds.), *History of West Africa*, vol. II, pp. 57–92, here at 75; see also H.A.S. Johnston, *The Fulani Empire of Sokoto* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (London: Longmans, 1967), pp. 46–60, 145–9.

[43] One of the signs of a sovereign territorial state is that it recognizes other, like entities as being sovereign in their own territory. European trades and colonial officials observed that some African polities signed treaties between themselves, which would imply a recognition of exclusive spheres of authority. John D. Hargreaves (ed.), *France and West Africa: An Anthology of Historical Documents* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 113.

[44] David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 263.

[45] Lloyd, *The Political Structure*, p. 71; Johnston, *The Fulani Empire*, p. 170.

If we choose not to call the Sokoto Caliphate a state, and instead call it an empire, we must be careful to recognize that it had structures of governance which succeeded in making the 'authoritative allocations of values' which are held to be a key activity of a state. (The concatenation of multiple, non-contiguous and enclave entities into a larger polity has led some scholars to coin the term 'segmentary state'.)[46] In addition, the Sokoto Caliphate rulers used patronage to secure their support bases; disputes between sub-units (the emirates) were mediated by the Caliph who also chose, from a list of suggested 'candidates', the emirs, and 'had a coherent machinery of government'.[47] That said, social scientists might be more comfortable calling the Caliphate an empire—an entity claiming 'military and spiritual' sovereignty without territorial limits. The Sokoto Caliphate was not the only type of Islamic polity in Africa. Others, such as the Tukulor Empire, known for its 'national unity and political centralization',[48] appear to have more closely approximated a 'traditional' state structure. Its authority structures evolved over time: the Islamic-based Tukulor empire at first was heterocephalous, with multiple authorities laying claim to the population.[49] These Islamic polities point to the insufficiency of the term 'state' in describing many pre-colonial African societies (and contemporary political systems). This descriptive inadequacy is not due to the fact that their sovereignty as states was breached but that they do not meet the basic criteria set for them by the Western sovereign state model.

Pre-colonial Africa in the international political economy

If, in the West, trade was a major factor in the development of sovereign territorial states, what was its impact in Africa? In particular, what effects did the international political economy have on emerging African political structures? Were there patterns to its effects? A study aimed at answering these questions has yet to be written, perhaps because it appears there was no consistent pattern.

It has generally been thought that the slave trade, and then other forms of trade, began to favour the coastal polities. Several of the polities that were slave hunters or producers of gold became powerful kingdoms.[50] This thesis, as summarized by Martin Klein, 'links the formation of highly militarized states in West Africa to the increase in demand for slaves after the development of sugar plantations in the West Indies and sees slave production and the slave trade as crucial to the functioning and reproduction of such states as Oyo, Asante, Futa Jallon and Segu'.[51] Recently, several

[46] Aidan Southall, 'State Formation in Africa', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 3 (1974), pp. 153–65, here at p. 156.
[47] Adeleye, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, p. 83.
[48] Y.F. Hasan and B.A. Ogot, 'The Sudan, 1500–1800' in B. A. Ogot (ed.), *General History of Africa*, vol. V (Berkeley, CA: Heinemann, 1992), pp. 170–99, here at pp. 172 and 196–7.
[49] Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, p. 79.
[50] A.A. Boahen, 'The States and Cultures of the Lower Guinean Coast', in Ogot (ed.), *General History*, pp. 399–433, here at 412–15; Robin Law, 'The Politics of Commercial Transition: Factional Conflict in Dahomey in the Context of the Ending of the Atlantic Slave Trade', *Journal of African History*, 38 (1997), pp. 213–33.
[51] Martin A. Klein, 'The Slave Trade and Decentralized Societies', *Journal of African History*, 42 (2001), pp. 49–65, here at p. 49.

historians have convincingly argued that 'slave production and trade' could flourish even in the absence of militarized kingdoms such as Asante. 'Where warfare and raiding had increasingly limited results, commercial and client linkages became effective mechanisms for extracting slaves from decentralized societies because they mobilized agents within the targeted societies'. Collaborators were easy to find, and communities discovered that '[t]he slave trade became a way of getting rid of enemies and unwanted people'. Slave traders were not restricted to suppliers from the large militarized states such as Asante, but were also able to create networks which took advantage of inter- and intra-village disputes to generate a supply of slaves.[52] While the market may have prompted notable adjustments in social and political structures within and across African polities, it did not inexorably distil African polities into two types: powerful, militarized states and weak, defenseless, acephalous societies.

Scholars disagree on whether Islam provided the impetus or the excuse for political organization in parts of Africa, but it is clear that Islam conditioned large parts of Africa's pre-colonial politics. The Arab historian of the fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldūn, wrote of the Islamic conquest in the Sudan that the Muslims 'triumphed over the Sudanese, destroyed their dwellings and country, levied tribute, forced many of them to join Islam, and subjugated them'.[53] That Islam had a role in the destruction and subjugation may be irrelevant: humans always find ways to dominate and kill each other. What is more important was the influence Islam had on the type of political structures put in place after conquest.[54] The reforming zeal of a certain leader 'can be seen, on the one hand, as having led to the creation of the Sokoto Caliphate, with the captives and the slave trade as a side effect, or, on the other, as the political reorganization of a society that was becoming increasingly dependent on slave labor for production'. Manning gives an economic interpretation to an apparently religious movement, the Mahdist of the [Nilotic] Sudan, noting it coincided with an 'anti-slave-trade' agreement between the ruler of the Sudan and the British: 'Those who then joined with the Mahdi to proclaim a rightly guided, theocratic state included slave merchants and planters, whose slave villages produced grains and manufactures for domestic sale and export'.[55] The Sokoto Caliphate had no scruples about slavery or about providing male slaves with female slaves in order to make control easier, yet treated slaves according to Islamic principles.[56]

Changes in the slave trade (with demand from Europe and the Americas having fallen) ended the population drain, (the demographics are themselves a heavily disputed subject), and also prompted some traders to invest in (local slave) plantations. This, in turn, led to 'rapid population growth and disputes over land ownership'.[57]

[52] Klein, 'The Slave Trade', pp. 58, 59, 62.

[53] Nehemia Levtzion, 'The Early States of the Western Sudan to 1500', in Ajayi and Crowder (eds.), *History*, vol. I, pp. 114–151, here at p. 124.

[54] Timothy Cleaveland, 'Islam and the Construction of Social Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Sahara', *Journal of African History*, 39 (1998), pp. 365–88.

[55] Patrick Manning, 'Contours of Slavery and Social Change in Africa', *The American Historical Review* 88:4 (1983), pp. 835–57, here at pp. 852, 855.

[56] Paul E. Lovejoy, 'The Characteristics of Plantations in the Nineteenth-Century Sokoto Caliphate', *The American Historical Review*, 84:5 (1979), pp. 1267–92; Manning, 'Contours', p. 855. Likewise Christianity left an imprint, albeit of a different sort, on African polities and post-colonial states. On the latter, see Ronald Kassimir, 'Uganda: the Catholic Church and State Reconstruction', in Leonardo A. Villalón and Phillip A. Huxtable (eds.), *The African State at a Critical Juncture* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998), pp. 233–53.

[57] Manning, 'Contours', p. 854.

This could have been expected to have led to a demand, on the part of quarrelling land owners, for a sovereign authority to adjudicate conflicts and to guarantee contracts—in other words, a state. Instead, as Europeans became involved in disputes, sometimes deliberately exacerbating them and thus artificially heightening the 'demand' for authority, their actions and the European political responses prevented a local, autonomous 'supply' of authority from reorganizing and emerging.

In West Africa, several powerful kingdoms emerged with the slave trade and Africa's incorporation into the international economy: Asante, Fante, Denkyira, Akwamu, Dahomey. At the same time, several Islamic empires established themselves. Both political forms, kingdoms and empires, appear to have profited from the slave trade and other kinds of business, rendering it difficult to argue that, in Africa, trade was a force for establishing the Westphalian style of sovereign state. Non-contiguous, and hence non-territorially fixed, organizations (such as Tukulor, Sokoto) seem to have been able to profit from international trade, and, after the British banned slavery, to have been able to shift to other forms of commerce.[58] Co-existing with, at times conquered by, these powerful polities were a variety of other types of polities. Some scholars argue that, at least for the slave trade, effects 'varied sharply from polity to polity'.[59] By the mid-nineteenth century, after 250 years of international trade, largely in primary products[60] (if one can also call a human being such), the natural selection effects expected by the IR Institutionalists appear not to have occurred. Trade in Africa appeared to have allowed a variety of forms to flourish.

The European powers preferred this multiplicity of political communities, as it prevented any one or two powerful African states from emerging and dominating international trade, setting mercantilist prices and terms of trade. The alleged advantages of sovereign statehood were not recognized by the Europeans: any efficiencies the Europeans would have derived from one African sovereign representing and guaranteeing the behaviour of a set of people within a specific territory were, apparently, considered negligible in comparison to the profits to be had by preventing African trade monopolies.

To the extent that mutual recognition of state sovereignty was necessary to grant African polities statehood, it is clear that the Europeans were unwilling, perhaps unable, to recognize 'stateness' or similarities in the organizational structure of various African polities. As Tarikhu Farrar has noted, there was a change over the centuries in the labels given to African rulers. Those offices which had previously been called 'kingships' were later labelled 'chieftancies'.[61] Racism may have been a factor,[62] so too

[58] Paul E. Lovejoy, 'The Characteristics of Plantations in the Nineteenth-Century Sokoto Caliphate', *The American Historical Review,* 85:5 (1979), pp. 1267–92.

[59] Patrick Manning, 'Contours of Slavery and Social Change in Africa', *The American Historical Review*, 88:4 (1983), pp. 835–57, here at p. 849.

[60] David Eltis and Lawrence C. Jennings, 'Trade Between Western Africa and the Atlantic World in the Pre-Colonial Era', *The American Historical Review*, 93:4 (1988), pp. 936–59.

[61] 'When African Kings Became "Chiefs": Some Transformations in European Perceptions of West African Civilization, c. 1450–1800', *Journal of Black Studies*, 23:2 (December 1992), pp. 258–78.

[62] It is evident in many statements by British and French explorers. F.J. McLynn, *Hearts of Darkness: The European Exploration of Africa* (London: Hutchinson), pp. 308–311; Le Capitaine Binger [Louis Gustave], *Du Niger Golfe de Guinée par le pays de Kong et le Mossi*, vols. I & II (Paris: Hachette, 1892). Yet Europeans also laboured to develop an appropriate, respectful terminology for African political/social structures and offices. See, for instance, Ray A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 98–101, 104–5, 113–4.

the European perception of great contrasts in infrastructures, population, military power, influence over the hinterland, and so on: Kumasi was not London, and Masina was not Paris.

The Europeans sought to thoroughly dominate the area and monopolize its trade; their method was, at first, to prevent further consolidation of African kingdoms, then, second, to colonize them. The Realist response, logically enough, would be that this was the inevitable result of an extraordinary imbalance of power between industrializing European states and agricultural African polities.

The broad outlines of sixteenth–nineteenth century African history should be familiar to scholars of European state-formation.[63] In Africa as in Europe, political entities engaged in warfare, kings and similar titular 'sovereigns' struggled to establish their authority over sets of groups and individuals, in the process producing various authority structures. Some of these demonstrated temporal and spatial overlaps, some managed to wield political authority over expressly demarcated borders, many relied upon religious rationalizations, and dynastic conflicts were quite common. Traders and merchants wanted independence from the restrictions imposed on their activities by aristocratic families, not to mention the monarch. Economic entrepreneurs sought alliances with partners in other systems (including European ones!). Social groupings engaged in conflicts over *mores*, influence, and power, with the political authorities (whether termed caliph, amir, and so forth) attempting to maintain a coherent socio-political system (if for no other reason than to maintain their position and power).

Amidst this patchwork quilt of political entities, several were apparently moving in the direction of sovereign statehood, consolidating rule with territorial boundaries, developing notions of a supreme authority, and of at least some public law not dependent on the persona of the ruler (but see the above discussion of Islamic entities). Whether they would have become what Western scholars recognize as modern sovereign states is not knowable. We can only conjecture that since a number seemed to be developing the requisite attributes prior to colonization, they may have.

I have argued in this Journal that the failure of African polities to become what Westerners recognize as sovereign territorial states was not due to an incapacity to participate in international trade, or withstand the changes in social structure brought by changes in trade commodities. Rival arguments suggest the opposite.[64] No matter how one constructs the argument, and what evidence one brings to bear on the hypotheses, it is clear that the myriad historical structures of pre-colonial Africa were eclipsed by the Westphalian state model. Yet that political structure was not imposed on the African polities *until decolonization*. If, following the logic of the political economists, sovereign territorial statehood met the material interests of European traders and monarchs in Europe, it appears that empire met their interests elsewhere. Alternatively, one would have to postulate the argument that empire, rather than sovereign territorial statehood, was a more 'efficient' form in general, for the international system.

[63] Carolyn M. Warner, 'The Political Economy of "Quasi-Statehood"and the Demise of 19th Century African Politics', *Review of International Studies*, 25 (1999), pp. 233–55.

[64] A.G. Hopkins, 'Asante and the Victorians: Transition and Partition on the Gold Coast', in Roy Bridges (ed.), *Imperialism, Decolonization and Africa* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 25–64.

Spruyt's argument, and that of Institutionalists in general, requires us to consider why, if sovereign territorial states were the efficient solution for Europe, that form did not and was not allowed to spread to other parts of the world. While Britain and France may have become 'classic' sovereign territorial states, they both also had the word 'empire' attached to their systems, and, after decolonization, they have existed in the international system both as sovereign states and as the 'British Commonwealth' and the 'French Union'. In addition, they are members of the 'European Union'. If evolutionary theory is applicable to international relations in the way advocated by many political economists, international politics appears to allow more diversity of form than expected by these scholars. This is the area where Constructivists are persuasive: states are states only when others recognize them as such, and what may have been states instead become colonial fodder when more powerful states say so.[65]

Decolonization also depended upon the will of the more powerful states, and it is to the post-colonial era that I now turn.

What impact did the empires have on the current African state system?

The imprint of empire on the African state system was undoubtedly substantial. I will not try to evaluate the extent of it, but rather raise points about several major effects. At one extreme is the argument that colonial rule had an enormous, deleterious and completely transformative effect on Africa. Young puts it most forcefully: 'one consequential factor in the crisis faced by most African states by the late 1970s—and intensifying since—was the singularly difficult legacy bequeathed by the institutions of rule devised to establish and maintain alien hegemony'. Africa faced the brunt of the developed sovereign territorial state competing not with one or two other powers, but with several all at once: 'The forces of conquest were under a pressure unusual in imperial annals to give muscular effect to the doctrine of effective occupation, exhumed and sanctified at the Berlin Congress'. In addition, the imperial powers insisted that the colonies pay for themselves and pay immediately. According to Young, this led to repressive and brutal extractive mechanisms.[66] These imperatives were backed by an ideology of racism which was at its 'historical zenith', and by advanced military technologies.[67]

Colonial rule infantilized African politics, stunting its growth such that after forty years of indirect rule, British officials noted 'one always had a feeling of despair reading [provincial reports from the Gold Coast]. The unending … palavers, apathy, lack of real interest, lack of policy, lack of coordination, lack of vision characterized the whole administration of the Gold Coast and the sooner it [was] given a real jolt the better for all concerned'. As Gocking notes, '[t]he competition for office that indirect rule unleashed did much to undermine what officials hoped

[65] The problem is that Constructivists have difficulty accounting for which political organizations can force their definitions on others.

[66] Herbst gives the Berlin Conference a different interpretation: these were not states on steroids rolling over Africa, but states seeking to minimize expenditures and conflicts with each other in Africa ('Boundaries', pp. 683–5, 688).

[67] Young, *The African Colonial State*, pp. 244, 278, 280.

would be a smooth-functioning native order'.[68] Imposing colonial authority over local authority inevitably undermined the latter. The French were particularly insistent that 'the native chief must be our instrument', and 'The native chief never speaks or acts in his own name, but always in the name of the *commandant de cercle*'.[69] One could argue that had colonial rulers established complete hegemony and totally reorganized African society in the manner which they desired, it is quite possible that the African states would have started with a much more stable and extensive political and economic infrastructure, and that these states would be better able to cope in the modern world.

There is a revisionist current which argues that African polities only partly absorbed European notions of 'stateness' and political behaviours. Just as a number of scholars have argued that the sources of pre-colonial demise were largely rooted in the African polities themselves, recent works take issue with Young's claim that the colonial state 'totally reordered political space, societal hierarchies and cleavages, and modes of economic production'. These revisionists emphasize continuities in structures and practices, adaptations but not submission to European concepts of politics and state.[70] For instance, in Buganda, the English only grafted their ideas and practices of individual land ownership onto pre-colonial practices, turning peasants and chiefs into tenants and landlords, thus continuing the original hierarchies. McKnight paints an image of Bugandan social groups strategically using new colonial institutions to further their own interests.

Yet the revisionists, to make their point, must downplay the extent to which the interests of the colonized were shaped by the new colonial structures. For instance, private property created a new set of interests and strategies for attaining them. Goals changed, self-definitions altered, and the colonized Africans incorporated new concepts into their politics. As A.F. Robertson's work on the deposition of Asante chiefs shows, British 'over-rule added a further level of authority to the Ashanti chiefly hierarchy'. Those 'tacticians' interested in over-throwing or in promoting a chief saw in British rule a new resource, not merely a new external authority. And when actors obtain new resources, and also when conflicts which were previously adjudicated internally have an external judge, actor strategy changes even if the goal remains the same. With the arrival of the British, the English language was used in filing and pursuing a deposition claim against an Asante chief (a local political structure left intact by the British), and rulings were now written.[71] These changes gave an edge to those educated in English, and lent an air of finality to the decisions.

The colonial powers' efforts to dramatically alter African societies also have their source in the ideology of scientific planning which became prevalent in the West

[68] Roger Gocking, 'A Chieftaincy Dispute and Ritual Murder in Elmina, Ghana, 1945–6', *Journal of African History*, 41 (2000), pp. 197–219, here at p. 217.

[69] In Hargreaves, *France and West Africa*, p. 213, 212. See also Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[70] Young, *The African Colonial State*, 9; Apter, 'The Subvention of Tradition'; Glenn H. McKnight, 'Land, Politics, and Buganda's 'Indigenous' Colonial State' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 28:1 (January 2000), pp. 65–89; A.F. Robertson, 'Ousting the Chief: Deposition Charges in Ashanti', *Man*, 11:3 (September 1976), pp. 410–27; Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[71] A. F. Robertson, 'Ousting the Chief: Deposition Charges in Ashanti', *Man* New Series 11:3 (1976), pp. 410–27, here at pp. 416, 417. The British, recognizing the significance of the throne for the Asante king, banished it until they realized that doing so made indirect rule more difficult.

(and the Soviet Union) in the 1920s and 1930s and lasted through the 1950s.[72] With domination as the effective result, the British undertook large scale agricultural transformations, all of which failed (for example, Shire Valley in Malawi, groundnut production in Tanganyika). As James C. Scott says, '[t]he point of departure for colonial policy was a complete faith in what officials took for "scientific agriculture" on the one hand and a nearly total scepticism about the actual agricultural practices of Africans on the other'. British experts were brought in to plan the colonies' agricultural development. They 'were inclined to propose elaborate projects—"a total development scheme", a "comprehensive land usage scheme"'. The planners dismissed the local knowledge of the peasants, since it hadn't been arrived at by 'scientific' analysis.[73]

Oddly, the failures of these large-scale planned 'rural settlement and production schemes' did not dissuade post-colonial states from attempting some of their own. It is not clear that this was, as Young might expect, because the colonial states had inculcated the new elite with the colonials' way of thinking and governing, or whether it was because the new leaders were attracted by the communist ideology, which was inherently optimistic about the possibilities (and exigent about the need) for large scale planning involving extensive resettlement and massive agricultural production. It's also plausible that the new elites, bequeathed political structures, societies and economies woefully behind the Western world and needing development in order to profit from international trade, saw large scale transformations as the only means of catching up to the West.

In Tanzania, Julius Nyerere tried a version of collectivization, with rural populations forced to move into government built, standardized villages, and to work on large, single crop farms. His justification: 'if you ask me why the government wants us to live in villages, the answer is just as simple: unless we do we shall not be able to provide ourselves with the things we need to develop our land and to raise our standard of living'. While state involvement in development may have been the solution, the specific strategy, given the conditions, doomed the project to failure. But the concern here is what connection the strategy had with the imprint of empire. While the idea of massive development and transformation may have been internalized and used by the new elite, Nyerere did try to give his strategy a non-Western stamp: 'we should gradually become a nation of *ujamaa* villages where the people co-operate directly in small groups and where these small groups co-operate together for joint enterprises'.[74] To the extent one can say that empires bequeathed underdeveloped state institutions and a faith in planning to the independent African rulers, the empires had a definite long term impact on the character of states in Africa, and on their *non*-development.

The impact is also seen in the state-building efforts of early post-independence leaders, and here, it seems, colonial rule was not the juggernaut Young depicts it as: if it had been, the African elite would not have needed to build up their bureaucracies.

[72] James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, 'Desiccation and Domination: Science and Struggles over Environment and Development in Colonial Guinea', *Journal of African History,* 41 (2000), pp. 35–54; Monica M. Van Beusekom, 'Disjunctures in Theory and Practice: Making Sense of Change in Agricultural Development at the Office du Niger, 1920–60', *Journal of African History,* 41 (2000), pp. 79–99.

[73] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 226.

[74] Scott, *Seeing*, p. 230.

The colonial state apparatus had, if at all, built only weak administrative and infrastructure links to much of the state's territory. As in Tanzania, '[t]he vast majority of the Tanzanian rural population [11–12 million people] was, in terms of legibility [infrastructure, information] and appropriation [taxation, citizenship], outside the reach of the state'. Independence leaders had to build the state and establish an administrative presence in areas the colonial powers had left untouched. 'Modernization required, above all, physical concentration into standardized units that the state might service and administer'. Unfortunately, they replicated both the colonial states' use of large-scale planning and homogenized housing and agriculture, and their use of force when incentives did not work.[75]

An additional effect is conceptual: the impact came from the beliefs, or, as Benedict Anderson put it, the 'imaginings', of Europeans. Indigenous political thought, concepts of authority and government, and so on, of African polities were largely superceded by or subordinated to European versions. If one accepts the constitutive force of ideas, this is of no small consequence.[76] Young argues that the newly independent states were 'successors to the colonial regime, inheriting its structures, its quotidian routines and practices, and its more hidden normative theories of governance. Thus, everyday reason of state, as it imposed its logic on the new rulers, incorporated subliminal codes of operation bearing the imprint of their colonial predecessors' (and, of course, most of the post-colonial elites were Western-educated).[77]

One might also consider that the new African political elite may have chosen to adopt the programmes and policies which were associated with, and promoted by, the clearest, most obvious, most powerful opponent of the former colonial powers in the international arena, that is, the Soviet Union. Precisely because the USSR was the public opponent of their former colonial masters in the international arena, its policies, programmes, mechanisms, and so on, for 'development' were automatically worth considering (and even slavishly copied). Clearly, at least in the view of the leaders of most of these states, the programmes and policies of the former colonial states had not accomplished the 'development' and 'modernization' which would give these states international status and recognition, much less domestic prosperity. In many quarters, there was the widespread view of the USSR of a state and government which, through massive programmes of industrialization had succeeded in moving from being a third-rate agricultural state into the status of a world power, challenging the United States and its (former colonialist) allies for control, leadership, and power in the modern world, and even beating the US in the 'space race'.

The fact that Ethiopia, which was never colonized, also, but later (in the 1970s and 1980s) tried forced resettlement and large scale agricultural production suggests that the colonial state had less to do with these post-colonial states' activities than did elites' interests in making their entities into Western-style sovereign states and in 'modernizing' the economy. Mengistu 'decried Ethiopia's reputation as "a symbol of backwardness and a valley of ignorance"'.[78] In the end, the dislocations, the starva-

[75] Ibid., pp. 229, 231, 232–7; also Herbst, 'Boundaries'.
[76] Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993).
[77] Young, *The African Colonial State*, p. 283.
[78] Scott, *Seeing*, p. 248.

tion, and brutality which the forced resettlements and new agricultural techniques produced in turn contributed to political instability and to the growing economic problems. Farmers went from producing surpluses on their own plots, thanks to their intimate knowledge of local conditions and their initiative, to being unskilled workers on 'foreign' terrain. Efforts to achieve rapid development, which were simultaneously efforts to seem like a state, had devastating results.

Pan Africanism

Upon gaining independence, was it inevitable that the former colonies would become sovereign states? Why did the Pan African movement not provide an alternative conception and structure for political organization and authority in Africa? To answer these questions we must first address the questions of what was the Pan African movement and what would a Pan African polity have looked like?

The history of the Pan African movement has been well-documented, as has the fact that it took a variety of forms: in addition to being a political movement (promoting 'the intellectual understanding and cooperation among all groups of African descent in order to bring about the emancipation of black peoples'),[79] it was also a literary and cultural movement. Yet to speak of 'it' in the singular implies unity in a movement that was characterized by myriad interpretations of 'Pan Africanism' and its goals, and promoted by multiple and diverse organizations and leaders. Contemporary observers used the plural when writing of the unity movements,[80] and there, perhaps, lies the crux of 'its' downfall: a multiplicity of material interests, some with significant structural bases, and of ideological leanings and goals. At the broadest level, there were disagreements within the so-called 'Black Triangle' of the United States, the West Indies, and Black Africa, and there were divisions within each of these. A case in point is the fact that the man whose name is most closely linked with the movement, W.E.B. Du Bois, thought continental Africans needed civilizing, and were not ready for self-governance. That view was rebuked by the continental Africans.[81] (Though some did express concern that they needed more time before independence).

The death-knell to the cross-continents and regions movement was sounded in 1958 by Kwame Nkrumah, with his call for an 'All Independent African States Conference' and an 'All African Peoples' Conference'.[82] Concerns in Africa had, logically, turned towards a specific goal which set continental Africans apart from those in the US and the West Indies: that of attaining independence from colonial rule.

Following the Pan African movement was the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which was 'a compromise between radically differing views of African unity,

[79] Nagueyalti Warren, 'Pan-African Cultural Movements: From Baraka to Karenga', *Journal of Negro History,* 75:1–2 (1990), pp. 16–28, here at p. 16.
[80] Erasmus H. Kloman, Jr., 'African Unification Movements', *International Organization*, 16:2 (1962), pp. 387–404.
[81] Alexandre Mboukou, 'The Pan African Movement, 1900–1945: A Study in Leadership Conflicts Among the Disciples of Pan Africanism', *Journal of Black Studies*, 13:3 (1983), pp. 275–88; 277, 280.
[82] Mboukou, *The Pan African Movement*, p. 281.

between those who thought of African unity as a symbolic and tactical aspect of a revolutionary movement and those who thought of it as an alliance between sovereign states to protect their newly acquired status in the world community'.[83] The OAU, however, had entered a world already peppered with a plethora of regional and rival 'unity' groups. Like the Pan African movement, the OAU foundered on the incentives political leaders had to promote the specific interests of their states and themselves, and on competing definitions of goals.

What would a Pan African polity have looked like? Again, starting with the broadest level, it presumably would have accorded some legal, authoritative and redistributive powers to a community of individuals dispersed across the US, the West Indies and Africa. One's legal status would not be based on the state within which one resided, that is, it would be non-territorial. This community would have had to negotiate with each of the states in the relevant regions for its individual political status, or perhaps within the framework of the United Nations, with the necessary bilateral agreements made afterward. It is important to note that the idea of non-territorial communities continues to have meaning in the contemporary world (see also n. 41, above): a contemporary example of such a community with non-territorial legal status is the language communities of Belgium. Rights and duties are based on membership in a group, not on presence in a territory. Or, perhaps it would have been limited to Pan Africanism in Africa. Here one might have a large state, with near-continent wide spread (as, say, the United States).

The failure of Pan Africanism

As with the failure of the Pan European movement after World War II, the failure of the Pan-African movement may have been over-determined. Constructivists would emphasize the hegemony of the idea of the sovereign state: the international system would not have recognized any political structure other than a sovereign state as the basis for political organization in Africa; Institutionalists would emphasize the incentives which borders and existing political structures created. The quasi-statehood school, incorporating aspects of both perspectives, would note that Pan Africanism was not an alternative because independence leaders got sovereignty 'on the cheap'.[84] To have superseded the sovereign state structure, they would have had to expend enormous resources. With ordinary state sovereignty, politicians did not even have to demonstrate that they had the full institutional structures of modern states, nor demonstrate that they had full authority. According to Robert Jackson, sovereign statehood was seen as 'egalitarian' and arguments for it being 'granted categorically even if the territory in question was extremely marginal became morally impregnable'.[85] Institutionalists note that sovereign territorial statehood is convenient as an information economizer. As Herbst suggests, recognizing boundaries and control of the capital city obviates other states' needs to see if a

[83] Immanuel Wallerstein, 'The Early Years of the OAU: The Search for Organizational Pre-Eminence', *International Organization*, 20:4 (1966), pp. 774–87, here at p. 774.
[84] Mayall in Young, *The African Colonial State*, p. 29.
[85] Jackson, *Quasi-States*, p. 104.

'state' really has effective control of a territory, really does act for the collectivity, really has a public administrative and judicial system, and so on.

The Institutionalist arguments take two forms. One argues largely from the basis of colonial institutions, the other on the logic of boundaries. I turn first to the imprint of colonial institutions as an obstacle to post-independence unity, and unity on some other basis besides that of the sovereign territorial state. There is extensive debate about the extent to which colonial institutions 'froze' pre-existing political arrangements. If the 'freezing' argument is correct, then pan-Africanism was doomed to failure because it had neither the material resources nor the ideological means to bring together in a coherent governing structure the myriad polities and ethnicities that marked the colonial states. If colonial rule did not 'freeze' pre-colonial structures and alignments, it nevertheless deliberately discouraged unity within each colonial state in order to reduce the likelihood of successful challenges to colonial rule. An alternative argument would say that pre-colonial polities were not frozen in place under colonial rule; rather, the colonial states did not implement any significant changes for the simple reason of cost considerations. Thus, the colonial powers only discouraged unity as a side-effect of trying to rule on the cheap—trying to rearrange African political structures, and trying to bring some uniformity to the societies within the territorial boundaries, would have been an enormously expensive undertaking for which the colonial governors had not the resources. Ruling through local political structures was the rational response to the conditions (though France and the Great Britain clearly differed on how direct/indirect their rule was). Whatever the exact character of transformation effected by the colonial powers on the pre-existing African polities, the pan-African movement faced enormous obstacles to unity.

Jeffrey Herbst's boundaries argument, while more directed at accounting for why, despite their lack of correspondence to ethnic, national, and political organizations, the sovereign state boundaries drawn up at the partition of Africa have remained largely unchallenged, provides a concise answer to the question of why the Pan-African movement failed. Herbst reasons that Africa poses particular problems to creating a boundary system, and that once any boundaries are in place, the risks of disaster to each state in trying to alter them are far greater than any problems created (for the actors in control) by the boundaries themselves. First, '[t]he continent cannot be divided into natural frontiers, and there is really no way to divide people because loyalties are diffuse and quite capable of changing, depending on the specific politics of the nation-state'. Second, 'once African boundaries begin to change there would be an indefinite period of chaos (given that there is no set of universally recognized natural frontiers to revert to), the grave danger of not cooperating [to maintain boundaries] is clear to all'.[86] Applied to the failure of Pan-Africanism, Herbst's view would say that African elites had a very strong incentive to adhere to their states' status as sovereign territorial entities, rather than to renounce territoriality as a key organizing principle.

Spruyt's Rationalist argument views boundaries and sovereignty from a different angle, which suggests a slightly different account of why Pan Africanism failed. This

[86] Herbst, 'Boundaries', p. 688, 689. For a different argument, but which leads to a similar expectation, see Ravi L. Kapil, 'On the Conflict Potential of Inherited Boundaries in Africa', *World Politics*, 18:4 (1966), pp. 656–73.

argument stresses that sovereign territoriality reduced 'transaction and information costs' between economic actors. States became the dominant 'unit' in the international system because, first, they were more effective at mobilizing their societies' resources, were able to make credible commitments about future actions between their populations and other international actors, and because states had 'spatial limits to authority' thus avoiding confusing and costly jurisdictional overlap.[87] As Spruyt notes, this type of unit, the sovereign territorial state, arose at a particular time and in response to a convergence of socioeconomic and political developments, and so we might expect that at some time in the future, the state will give way to something else.

To substantiate his argument, Spruyt notes that the Italian and German city-states were accorded sovereign status, even though 'this was not a reflection of their material power or geographic size. Instead, this was the result of their empowerment as equivalent actors on the international scene, because of their external similarity to sovereign, territorial states'. They were considered 'organizationally compatible with sovereign states'.[88] In the context of the contemporary African system of states, what is striking about Spruyt's analysis is the fact that many African states are not similar to sovereign territorial states, yet they remain considered so. The fact that they are may lend further support to the claim in Spruyt's argument that sovereign states prefer, as a matter of efficiency and reduced transaction costs, dealing with what they are willing to consider sovereign states, so will continue to act as if such entities exist even where they do not (Zaire/the Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone).[89] As William Reno states, 'Stronger state reluctance to permit disorder ensures nominal support for territorial integrity'.[90] We might recall that Catholicism's status in the international system was only 'solved' when Mussolini granted the Church the status of a sovereign, *territorial* state. It is of note that Catholicism is the only religion which has observer status at the United Nations, and to which other states send diplomatic missions. Thus, Pan Africanism failed because the other units in the international system valued sovereign states.

Some reflections on the contemporary African state system

According to international law, and as recognized by other states, Africa is home to a multitude of sovereign states. While for the most part current boundaries are accepted as legitimate, many states themselves may lack a central locus of authority, and there are significant areas where boundaries are in dispute. In numerous places states do not seem to be 'sovereign' even if they are territorial. Crawford Young bluntly notes that African states are characterized by '[f]ragments of state authority [which have] become instruments of predation among dispersed structural segments

[87] Spruyt, *The Sovereign State*, pp. 88, 185–6.
[88] Ibid., pp. 176, 179.
[89] David Williams, 'Aid and Sovereignty: Quasi-States and the International Financial Institutions'. *Review of International Studies*, 26 (2000), pp. 557–73.
[90] 'Sierra Leone: Weak States and the New Sovereignty Game', in Villalón and Huxtable (eds.), *The African State*, pp. 93–108, here at p. 108.

and individual actors'.[91] Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg have called these 'quasi-states'—states with the internationally recognized juridical trappings of sovereign statehood, but which lack the features expected elsewhere in a state.[92] As Joshua Bernard Forrest notes, 'a greater proportion [than in the past] of Africans are now experiencing political life with no minimally viable state presence'.[93]

Some observers are not so pessimistic, but they seem contradicted by the perspective and evidence to which they point, in this case the opinion and evidence provided by Forrest: Huxtable notes that 'Even the countries in which state collapse is most severe, discussed here by Joshua Forrest in Chapter 3, contain some entity that is generally regarded as "the state". The state as an institution for organizing politics certainly appears robust, despite predictions of its imminent demise'.[94] Catherine Boone suggests that Africa does have cases of relatively successful state-building efforts, and that these have usually occurred 'in the Africa of peasant commodity production' rather than 'in the extractive and plantation enclaves'.[95]

Huxtable goes on to suggest that, 'The African state may disintegrate, not because of the failure of Africans to adapt to the world system, but because the state itself has become inadequate for the realities of the current world system'.[96] The sovereign territorial state may retort that 'reports of my death have been premature'. State collapse in Africa has been fuelled by the efforts of competing elites to control the state or to create one of their own. The internal conflicts are still over issues which seem to be core questions of state: who controls what territory and which institutions for the benefit of whom, who has the authority to make friend/enemy distinctions, and what is the political community's identity and what are its constitutive elements? Yet Huxtable's statement contains an important truth: the modern state is not adequate to meeting the demands placed on it. What is striking is that even when the state was apparently at its zenith, it constructed other organizational forms: the empire, and, after two world wars raised questions about the severe costs of the world being defined by sovereign territorial states, the regional economic or political union. Ruggie notes that 'the first specifically modern invention of diplomacy was the principle of extraterritoriality: having so profoundly redefined and reorganized political space, the possessive individualist states "found that they could only communicate with one another by tolerating within themselves little islands of alien sovereignty"'.[97] And as African states began to attain independence, they immediately created numerous cross-national organizations.[98] Their behaviour is in line with Stephen Krasner's statement that '[t]he basic organizing principle of

[91] Young, *The African Colonial State*, p. 23.
[92] *Personal Rule in Black Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).
[93] 'State Inversion and Nonstate Politics', in Villalón and Huxtable (eds.), *The African State*, pp. 45–56, here at p. 45.
[94] Phillip A. Huxtable, 'The African State Toward the Twenty-first Century: Legacies of the Critical Juncture', in Villalón and Huxtable (eds.), *The African State*, pp. 279–94, here at p. 279.
[95] Catherine Boone, 'Empirical Statehood and Reconfigurations of Political Order', in Villalòn and Huxtable (eds), *The African State*, pp. 129–142, here at p. 131.
[96] Phillip A. Huxtable, 'The African State Toward the Twenty-First Century: Legacies of the Critical Juncture', in Villalòn and Huxtable (eds.), *The African State*, pp. 279–93, here at pp. 292. See also Martin van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[97] Ruggie, *Constructing*, p. 149.
[98] As contemporary observers noted: Erasmus H. Kloman, Jr., 'African Unification Movements', *International Organization*, 16:2 (1962), pp. 387–404.

sovereignty—exclusive control over territory—has been persistently challenged by the creation of new institutional forms that better meet specific material needs'.[99]

The current 'state system' in Africa is marked by numerous 'states' in which 'rule based upon violent accumulation creates archipelagos of control rather than hegemony over a contiguous territory'. As the warlord polities of Zaire/the Congo, and of Liberia show, new political organizations have emerged in Africa 'that are not states, yet are capable of "sovereign" diplomacy in the international state system'.[100] A number of militarized elites have violated sovereign state boundaries, have engaged in deliberate state destruction, and otherwise appear to be ignoring the alleged advantages of boundaries and sovereign statehood. They have been able to control the distribution of resources, and have appropriated for themselves the right to identify enemies. This, unfortunately, is the world as Schmitt saw it: raw force defining 'international' relations and relations between 'communities'. There is no agreement on the 'authoritative allocation of values', on the rules governing resource access and distribution. What matters is not the character or structure of the state, but whether there exists a community willing and able to define itself against a 'non-self'. The political entity is a political entity only because of 'the real existence of an enemy'. The essence of a political community is its willingness and ability to differentiate itself, to assert its existence.[101] Applied to the African context, whether warlords and rebel groups, or the existing 'state', can succeed may not depend so much on their attaining the structure of a sovereign territorial state but on their ability to crush rivals. Their capacity to do so may, in turn, depend on their control of resources valued in the international economy, and on their links to public and private international economic actors. Perhaps the problem for Africa is that, given international norms and the current structure of the international system of states, it is constrained to force its politics into the 'state' format, even while it seems unable to do so. As William Reno notes, the '[r]ulers that survive develop alternative, rational forms of political organization suited to Africa's marginal position in the changing global economy'.[102] In the centuries prior to colonialism, Africa was host to a wide variety of political forms; in the centuries after, it may continue to be so.

[99] 'Westphalia and All That', in Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (eds.), *Ideas and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 235.

[100] Reno, 'Sierra Leone', p. 106; William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner,1998); Boone, 'Empirical Statehood', p. 141.

[101] Schmitt, *The Concept*, pp. 19, 53.

[102] 'War, Markets, and the Reconfiguration of West Africa's Weak States', *Comparative Politics*, 29:4 (1997), pp. 493–510, here at p. 493.