

Twilight Institutions: An Introduction

Christian Lund

Literature on the state in developing societies, and in particular in Africa, generally has a hard time specifying what is 'state' and what is not. It seems that the closer one gets to a particular political landscape, the more apparent it becomes that many institutions have a twilight character; they are not the state but they exercise public authority.¹ They defy clear-cut distinction. In fact, as we venture to study the political contours of public authority and the political field in which it is exercised, we are saddled with a paradox. On the one hand, actors and institutions in this field are intensely preoccupied with the state and with the distinction between state and society, but on the other hand, their practices constantly befuddle these distinctions.

In an issue of *Development and Change* entirely devoted to state collapse, Milliken and Krause (2002) question whether this phenomenon describes an actual collapse of concrete institutional forms, or whether it is our vision of a progressive, coherent and development-oriented state that has collapsed. Whereas difficult to determine, it is a useful heuristic question. Milliken and Krause argue that while full-blown state collapse remains a rare phenomenon, investigation of such cases may, as their volume proves (see for example Doornbos, 2002; Musah, 2002), provide clues for the understanding of weak and failing states which are far less exceptional.

Most of the articles in this issue of *Development and Change* were first presented at a PhD seminar at the Graduate School of International Development Studies, Roskilde University, in late 2002. The seminar produced a very stimulating debate, and as the first set of papers was circulated, others joined in with contributions to make up the issue as it is. Some of the participants in the seminar who did not deliver papers for this issue should be recognized for their important contributions to our discussions, namely Karin Barber, Simon Batterbury, Tania Murray Li, Peter Geschiere, Eric Worby and Amanca Hammar. I also wish to thank the two anonymous referees for their constructive comments and suggestions and Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde for assistance with the editing of the papers in Roskilde.

1. One of the questions that arose in our debate was whether 'twilight' was an appropriate metaphor to signify the phenomenon we have in mind. It was suggested that the temporal aspect of twilight would imply an expectation that these institutions should gradually disappear. In fact, none of the contributions in this collection suggest this. The metaphor simply signifies that contours and features of these institutions are hard to distinguish and discern.

Lund, Christian. 2007: "Twilight institutions: an introduction". In: Ders. (Hg.):
Twilight Institutions: Public Authority and Local
Politics in Africa. Oxford: Blackwell: 1-12.

This collection concentrates on Africa and essentially shares the same concern: the state and processes of state formation. However, we privilege an alternative and complementary perspective. Instead of studying collapse and failure we attempt to develop an approach to investigate *how public authority actually works* in the face of obvious state failure and impending collapse. Moreover, instead of looking at the state as an entity 'from above', we attempt to approach public authority 'from below', from the variety of concrete encounters between forms of public authority and the more or less mundane practices of ordinary people. The contributions that follow put the focus on the institutions that Bailey describes as, 'those which are partly regulated by, and partly independent of, larger encapsulating political structures; and which, so to speak, fight battles with these larger structures in a way which seldom ends in victory, rarely in dramatic defeat, but usually in a long drawn stalemate and defeat by attrition' (Bailey, 1968: 281). While sharing an interest for how public authority actually works, the contributions reflect a variety of contexts. Hence some focus on how government institutions fail to rule and other institutions of public authority emerge (Pratten, Buur, Turner, Hagberg and Blundo), while others deal with situations where government institutions to some extent rule despite the contingencies of context (Le Meur, Buur and Kyed, Juul and Gould). However, even this simple distinction is rendered precarious by the richness of the individual articles.

Thus, the ambition of this collection is not to generate general explanatory theories *à la* Chabal and Daloz (1999) where catchy statements are often purchased at the expense of nuance. Rather, the ambition is to suggest ways of investigating how public authority operates in local contexts. The first article by Lund thus suggests an analytical strategy for taking on the phenomenon of public authority in contexts where it is not the exclusive possession of government institutions, where institutional competition is intense and a range of ostensibly a-political situations become actively politicized. To zero in on the object of concern it might be useful to take a brief look at two perspectives from which we would like to distinguish ourselves. Two views on state and society in developing societies have dominated much debate since the mid-1980s; one initially focusing on economic development, the other on politics and democratization. However, both literatures contain significant gaps.

Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol published *Bringing the State Back In* in 1985 in an attempt to demonstrate that effective state intervention was a prerequisite for capital accumulation (Skocpol, 1985: 4-5, 20). Two significant points issued from their work and the series of publications in its wake: not only is the state an actor in its own right with a significant degree of autonomy from particular social forces, this is true to such an extent that its structures and activities condition and configure what may appear to be socio-economic phenomena (Bratton, 1994; Chazan, 1988; Degnbol, 1999; Marenin, 1987; Migdal, 1988). While this was a welcome refocusing on the political, the conceptualization of the state treats certain central issues

as given rather than problematic. First, such an approach tends to see state and society as fundamentally distinct entities. Chazan (1988: 123) is a good example, as she ventures:

State and society are conceptualised ... as two intersecting and potentially independent variables with political processes as the dependent variable. Thus, the state entity does have an existence of its own, and its actions may have a profound bearing on social organisation and economic enterprise. Social groups, similarly, maintain an institutional and resource base which permits them to act independently as well as conjointly with structures in the political domain. These political, economic and social fields may intertwine in a multiplicity of ways.

Despite statements about the fluidity of state-society notions, the binary opposition constitutes a profound mental template (for stimulating critique see Kaviraj, 1997; Lemarchand, 1992; Mitchell, 1991; Rose and Miller, 1992). Secondly, and following from the above, this focus is pervasively state-centred, that is, it concerns itself with what is *necessary* for the state to implement policy. To the extent that the state is dis-aggregated, it is generally into various agencies (executive, legislative or judiciary), all of which are acknowledged constitutionally or otherwise legally as the state. Organizations and institutions that exercise legitimate public authority, but do not enjoy legal recognition as part of the state, are out of focus (see Migdal, 1988: 28; 2001: 15-23).

Many scholars of a state-centred inclination draw heavily on Max Weber, conceptualizing the state as an *organization* with legitimate means of coercion. However, had they turned their attention to the Weber who tried to get to grips with the nature and "legitimacy" of territorial political organisations' (Weber, 1922/1978: 901-4), their focus might have been less on organization and more on the *substantive activity* of competing political organizations as they exercise public authority. The main weakness in privileging organizational features of the state is that one tends to ignore the processual aspects of the formation of public authority, and in particular how it takes place in day-to-day social encounters. To paraphrase E. P. Thompson, the *state* did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making. That is, one of the ways in which public authority is established is by its successful exercise as a result of struggle. When an institution authorizes, sanctions or validates certain rights, the respect or observance of these rights by people, powerful in clout or numbers, simultaneously constitutes recognition of the authority of that particular institution.

Focusing on struggle as a prime mover, Jessop proposes a definition which assumes a zoning of society into institutions, of which some are more and some less 'state'. He defines it like this: 'The core of the state apparatus comprises a distinct ensemble of institutions and organizations whose socially accepted function is to define and enforce collectively binding decisions on the members of a society in the name of their common interest or general will' (Jessop, 1990: 341). This suggests both institutional and coercive dimensions as well as elements of discourse as constituents of 'state'. Jessop

hastens to qualify this by arguing for the historically-specific constitution of the 'core'; for wide variations in forms of enforcement; for common interest and general will as rhetoric and strategic statements articulating social interests and, finally, for the existence of multiple, even mutually contradictory, institutions in which various structural powers are inscribed. These social institutions constitute centres of power and develop procedures, norms, hierarchies and codes proper to themselves. This means that no institution is state as such; 'state' is, rather, the quality of an institution being able to define and enforce collectively binding decisions on members of society. We tend to reserve state qualities for government institutions, but this is more a reflection of our idea of an end result than of the messy process of state formation itself. This means that we should investigate the processes producing institutional forms as well as the processes that bring about the idea of the state.

National laws and government institutions constitute an environment for local politics and important local players within it; a structure of opportunities for the negotiation of rights and distribution of resources, and significant agents who negotiate. However, government institutions are not alone in wielding public authority. Whether labelled state or not, it seems that a wide variety of institutions constitute themselves as de facto public authorities, with greater or lesser success. And this is the point. Public authority can wax and wane. Institutions or groups of actors — such as mayors, district chief executives, district commissioners, magistrates, chiefs, 'strong-men', and professional associations, societies, parties, home town and youth associations, churches, revolutionary defence committees, development projects, and so forth — all take an active interest in local politics and the shaping of governance, and in defining and enforcing collectively-binding decisions and rules. Or rather, attempting to define and enforce them, since this capacity is rarely fully accomplished and often challenged. Consequently, while parties in dispute may go 'forum shopping', taking their claim or dispute, or issue of public concern to the institution which they deem most likely to produce a satisfactory outcome, institutions also use disputes for their own, mainly local, political ends. As Keebet von Benda-Beckmann puts it, 'besides forum-shopping disputants, there are also "shopping forums" engaged in trying to acquire and manipulate disputes from which they expect to gain political advantage, or to fend off disputes which they fear will threaten their interests. They shop for disputes as disputants shop for forums' (von Benda-Beckmann, 1981: 117). As indicated above, when an institution authorizes, sanctions or validates certain rights, the respect or observance of these rights by people constitutes recognition of the authority of that particular institution. In order to understand how political power is exercised, we therefore need to have an eye for the processual aspects of the formation of public authority, and in particular how it takes place in day-to-day social encounters. Yet, legitimate authority is not necessarily legitimate authority for good but must be vindicated and legitimated through a broad array of political practices.

In essence, such practices constitute the negotiation of public authority in a particular context.

More subtly, the state invades the field of local politics in the form of an idea (Abrams, 1988). The exercise of power and authority by local institutions alludes to the state and government policies symbolize the state and the idea of law. Hansen and Stepputat (2001a: 8) suggest that states only exist when practical and symbolic languages of governance combine. The institutionalization of law and legal discourse, and the materialization of the state in a series of permanent signs and rituals — so-called state spectacles — are integral parts of that language, and the collection of essays edited by Hansen and Stepputat (2001b) provides a range of illustrations.

Das and Poole (2004) show how the idea of the state is effectively conjured up through the production of its flipside, the 'margin'. By various forms of marginalization of regions, groups and concerns, the idea of a purposive centre develops. Work by Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (1997, 1998, 2003) demonstrates how the idea of a state — however seemingly distant — informs the organizing practices of everyday politics. Thus, the language of the state is not the preserve of government institutions alone, and other institutions strut in borrowed plumes. What we are witnessing is certain forms of institutionalization and formalization of the exercise of authority alluding to state, law and the bureaucracy, encoded in official language and often exercised with the paraphernalia of modern statehood. A variety of institutions may use the language of the state as well as its props in terms of contracts, deeds, attestations, stamps, stationery and declarations. The irony of such 'unstately stateliness' is that while distinctions get increasingly blurred (who is exercising state authority?), they become increasingly important (who can produce rights?).

The other major debate on state and society appears more concerned with democratization and political participation. Thus, since the early 1990s it has been difficult to talk about the state in development societies without making reference not only to society but also to civil society. However, as Mamdani (1996: 139) observes, the concept is more programmatic than analytical and more ideological than historical. The concept of civil society has travelled a long way from Scottish Enlightenment and nineteenth-century European political philosophy. It was revived after a long period of hibernation by intellectual dissidents in Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. Now, it seems to be the finest ideological export item that the West can offer the rest of the world, in particular in the light of general disillusionment with a centralized state. It has almost become a Eurocentric index of accomplishment, upon which aid and trade deals partly depend (partly, because geo-strategic considerations indeed also inform international *realpolitik* — see Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999). In political jargon, and in particular within *development speak*, a number of reductions seem to dominate. In his analysis of the debate on civil society in Africa, Karlström remarks, '[w]hile some political scientists include virtually all voluntary associations in their definition of

civil society, the dominant trend among Africanists has been to narrow the concept, excluding associations that do not engage with the state in ways that enhance either the democratic character of governance or the state's capacity to carry out its policies' (Karlström, 1999: 105). In excluding the 'bad boys' from our analytical lens, we develop 'tunnel vision' and lose perspective. The unruly, the un-civil and the ones who are capricious and hard to nail down are just as significant in local politics as more angelic organizations. Moreover, such groups are generally more recalcitrant, vociferous and outright flamboyant than benign voluntary associations patronized by benevolent donors, and they lead us to identify tensions in society. They are epistemologically as well as aesthetically fascinating (see Pratten, Buur, Turner and Hagberg, this volume). However, such fascination should neither lead us to boyish celebration of violence, nor to disregard institutions that operate in less flagrant contradiction to the tenets of 'good governance'.

The state-society distinction is embedded in the idea of public-private which stands out as one of the grand dichotomies of Western thought. However, as Weintraub (1997: 2) points out, the distinction comprises not a single paired opposition, but a complex family of oppositions. Weintraub shows how various ideas and meanings are attached to private and public over time and context (see also Bobbio, 1989; Cohen and Arato, 1994; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999; Gellner, 1996; Mamdani, 1996; Taylor, 1990). However, while the distinction between state and civil society has become a less than useful analytical tool, it has spilled over from academic to more popular political discourse with other effects. As it is 'no longer divorced from the agency of the groups of individuals it purports to describe' (Whitfield, 2003: 380), it becomes part of a dynamic process of production of popular distinctions. As a consequence, we should not refrain from studying civil society. On the contrary, we should pay careful attention to *how* concepts and distinctions are produced, instrumentalized and contested. The purpose of this collection of articles is to question the alleged lucidity of such popular distinctions.

In order to engage with the public authority, it is, nonetheless, useful to sketch out some of its elements. By *authority* is meant an instance of power which seeks at least a minimum of voluntary compliance and thus is legitimated in some way. The element of *public* should direct our attention toward two associated elements. On the one hand, public authority connotes impersonal administrative operations in a wide sense. On the other hand, it refers to public (as in 'not secret') confrontations, discussions and action in concert. Thus, we are dealing with institutions which, in the exercise of power, take on the mantle of public administrative authority (legitimated administrative operations) and in their attempts to govern articulate notions of state varying from their source of power to their antithesis. What characterizes this group of institutions is their movement in and out of a capacity to exercise public authority. They operate in the twilight between state and society, between public and private. We ought to invest our energy in an agnostic and non-normative enquiry of the hodgepodge of twilight institutions that

govern daily lives in local contexts, and to problematize the distinctions we tend to accept as given. Moreover, we ought to investigate the *making* of public authority as an active and contested process of assertion, legitimization and exercise.

True to the nature of the issue at stake — state formation and transforming institutions of public authority — the contributions to this volume represent variation in empirical focus and analytical approach stretching from security and service provision, over taxation and control over space, to the definition of rule of law. However, central elements bind them together. The most conspicuous commonality is that they all deal with Africa. The ambition of this collection is not regional in a strict sense, but African history and theoretically informed empirical analysis have significant theoretical and epistemological insights to offer development studies and social science in general. Bayart's book on the politics of the belly was emblematic of much of the research on state and politics in Africa and triggered more research in that particular field (Bayart, 1989). The blurred boundary between state and non-state is often more conspicuous in Africa than in other places because of the many challenges to a grand state formation project. Empirical evidence from Africa thus clearly exposes the theoretical fragility of clear separation between state and society. Moreover, evidence from research in Africa — as demonstrated in this volume — also bespeaks the tenacity of the *idea* of a clear separation between the two. This paradox, while clearly revealed in Africa, is not reserved for this region, but could well prove significant beyond (see for example Gupta, 1995; Hansen, 2001; Nuijten, 2003).

The other common feature in the articles that follow is the focus on dynamic processes, whether in the form of conflict or more subtle negotiations. The immense variation in processes of reproduction and change of institutions of public authority calls for empirical studies which can unveil their historical, contextual and contingent construction. Socially constructed does not necessarily mean ephemeral or weak, however. While fluidity may characterize institutions and authority, it may not be of the lowest possible viscosity. Certain settlements, rights and authorities may 'stick'. Once successfully constructed, institutions of authority become markers for the future negotiation of society, and such settlements may hold for some time. The 'stickiness' of certain structured situations is related to the institutions involved in the competition and to the context of opportunities.

Local politics provides a privileged opportunity for the study of such political processes and how the capacity to regulate and control is not neatly stored within the state. The first article (by Christian Lund) aims to discuss an analytical approach to public authority in contexts where clear distinctions are rare and where ideological registers and political practices are composite and often contradictory. The article describes the phenomenon of public authority on the basis of theoretically informed empirical analyses which, though disparate, share a concern for different aspects of the phenomenon and its mercurial character. It is therefore an attempt to recover and systematize

some of the insights from empirical analyses of institutions which operate between public authority and private agency in Africa. The article discusses some of the central political practices that constitute, and unravel, public authority; it also suggests a number of possible institutional ramifications of the various political practices.

The 'twin' articles by David Pratten and Lars Buur address the question of how youth in southern Nigeria and South Africa respond to disorder in the political economic and judicial spheres. Both look at vigilantes and local justice enforcement as emerging from below. While Pratten's case shows the organization set in deep vertical politics of patronism, Buur's analysis shows how institutions from the struggle against apartheid search for a place in the post-apartheid political structures. Common for both is how repertoires of accountability and crime are actively employed by these institutions in order to place themselves on the side of propriety and order.

The article by Simon Turner explores how Burundian refugees in Lukole refugee camp in Tanzania negotiate public authority in a space that is at once heavily governed by international relief agencies while simultaneously marked by a collapse of the known moral order of Burundi. Thus, Turner deals with an 'exceptional situation' (though not as exceptional as one would like). The formal state is suspended, and a technical agency — UNHCR — operates as an a-political surrogate authority. Nonetheless, public authority is produced partly by the powers that UNHCR delegates to these actors and partly by the power bases that they manage to build up in the gaps in UNHCR's system. It rests partially on the respect that these brokers gain from other refugees (a respect that is earned in numerous ways, such as outwitting the international organizations) and partially on the recognition that they get from the very same organizations.

Sten Hagberg offers a 'biography' of a political entrepreneur in Burkina Faso. By studying a particular controversial 'master hunter', Hagberg reveals the intricate networks that the entrepreneur creatively appropriates in the making of public authority. He breaks state law to assert his own authority. But he also draws upon state institutions to be recognized as a legitimate political actor. Hagberg joins the other authors by locating the case in the context of the making and unmaking of public authority, and discusses its implications for understanding local political culture in contemporary Africa.

Giorgio Blundo focuses on the informalization and privatization of state services such as customs, police and local tax offices. He demonstrates how the inability of the under-staffed Senegalese administration creates opportunities for the production of institutions that undertake the day-to-day administration in increasing informality. This way, private entrepreneurs begin to undertake tasks which are normally associated with 'stateness' and thus actively remodel the distinctions. One of the central features of the state is its prerogative to tax. Kristine Juul demonstrates how the attempt to involve local councils in tax collection in the pastoral region of Senegal has not been met by great enthusiasm. Rather, payment of local taxes failed after

responsibility for tax collection was transferred to the politically elected rural councils. Meanwhile, other local institutions with less clear relations to government manage to tax water, and seem to have taken over the role of providers of public services, of political representation and as suppliers of secure access or more or less formalized rights over crucial local resources. The article by Juul also broaches the aspect of space and control over spatial resources.

Helene Kyed and Lars Buur show how traditional leaders in Mozambique were formally stripped of authority during the one-party Frelimo rule. However, this did not mean that the war areas had no public authority. On the contrary, a range of non-state forms of authority filled out the socio-economic and cultural space outside the Frelimo-controlled district headquarters. The most vital of these forms of authority — traditional leaders and Renamo militants — had been forged in opposition to the Frelimo-state. While Renamo militias have by now *de jure* been converted into a political party, the government is currently trying to include and formalize chieftaincy, granting traditional leaders a dual position and double accountability as community representatives as well as agents of local state administration.

Pierre-Yves Le Meur also engages with institutional vacuums in his article on access to land in Benin. Access to and control over land is not unequivocal. Various institutional forms such as administrative chieftaincy, patron-client relationships linking migrants and autochthonous people, intra- and inter-lineage ties and alliances, religious cults and affinities, all deal with access to and control over strategic resources. Within this complex political landscape, state intervention is itself plural: besides 'classical' territorial and development services and the newly implemented political decentralization, it takes the ambiguous form of a natural resource management project funded by foreign donors and bearing a discourse of democratic participation and of power territorialization. State-making in this context is much more a product of this blurring of discursive and institutional boundaries than an evolutionary process of state construction.

Carola Lentz's article also sees the territorial ordering of space as central in state making. But state making is obviously not only the business of the state. Based on work in Ghana, Lentz engages general questions of governance at the local level: the spatial delimitation of administrative units and the social delimitation of local political communities. When civic associations, traditional rulers and other non-state institutions present their claims *vis-à-vis* the state, they often invoke some form of 'natural' solidarity that binds the local community together and legitimates its quest for a separate administrative entity. Decentralization projects therefore become arenas of debate over the boundaries of community and the relationship between 'local' and national citizenship.

In the final article, Jeremy Gould moves from the local to a national level as he undertakes a political ethnography of the 'rule of law' in a post-colonial

African context. He argues that not only are struggles over legitimacy and sovereignty played out at different scales, but that the struggles are in part about scale and whose authority is to prevail and be overarching. In the run-up to the 2001 presidential elections, the Zambian bar association was instrumental in forming an activist body of unprecedented political leverage, the Oasis Forum, which united lawyers, church leaders and the women's movement. Based on a close reading of Zambia's recent political history, Gould's contribution deals with the constitution and compelling nature of legal authority in the Zambian social imagination as authored by non-state actors with legal legitimacy, and the meaning of 'law' as a constitutive element in post-colonial state formation.

No simple pattern emerges from these contributions. Large structural transformations, such as state formation in Africa, are wrought with conflict, ambiguity and open punctures, and characterized by the presence of multiple, competing logics. However a central point can be distilled. When we approach the phenomenon of public authority and governance, it is useful not to see it as stemming from one single source, but rather to focus on how particular issues (security, justice, development, taxation and others) are governed and which actors are engaged in them. Many of the political actions in these spheres of life presuppose a state, but the state qualities of governance are not exclusively nested in government institutions. Consequently, there is an ongoing competition in society — perhaps most visibly so in African societies where governments are often under-funded, overstretched, in-capacitated and de-legitimized — to rearrange the boundaries of public authority between institutions so far unable to command enduring functional hegemony. While the twilight has an opaque character, these contributions not only show that this is when and where politics 'happens'; they also demonstrate that the twilight is certainly not beyond detailed and vivid empirical analysis.

Obviously, when trying to fill a gap in the literature on state formation by focusing on local political processes, other gaps remain and new ones emerge. Two merit mentioning here. First, this collection leaves it for others to get to grips with how public authority is constituted and contested in macro settings and could be charged with 'localism' (Mohan and Stokke, 2000). We have not dealt with how state sovereignty and international agencies and business are confronted. This is a major concern of international politics; although often seen as remote from the concerns of the present issue, there are several overlapping interests which could provide an interesting dialogue. Secondly, by selecting Africa as a critical case, we may well have privileged certain aspects of public authority and local politics. We would therefore like to see this as an invitation to others to confront our findings with empirical analyses of other contexts. This would no doubt produce complementary institutional forms and alternative ideas about the state.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, P. (1988) 'Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1(1): 58–89.
- Bailey, F. G. (1968) 'Patapolitical Systems', in M. J. Swartz (ed.) *Local-Level Politics: Social and Cultural Perspectives*, pp. 281–94. London: University of London Press.
- Bayart, J. F. (1989) *L'État en Afrique. La politique du ventre*. Paris: Fayard.
- von Benda-Beckmann, K. (1981) 'Forum Shopping and Shopping Forums: Dispute Processing in a Minangkabau Village in West Sumatra', *Journal of Legal Pluralism* 19: 117–62.
- Bierschenk, T. and J. P. de Sardan Olivier (1997) 'Local Powers and a Distant State in Rural Central African Republic', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 35(3): 441–68.
- Bierschenk, T. and J. P. de Sardan Olivier (1998) 'Les arènes locales face à la décentralisation et à la démocratisation', in T. Bierschenk and J. P. Olivier de Sardan (eds) *Les pouvoirs au village. Le Bénin rural entre démocratisation et décentralisation*, pp. 11–51. Paris: Khartala.
- Bierschenk, T. and J. P. de Sardan Olivier (2003) 'Powers in the Village: Rural Benin between Democratisation and Decentralisation', *Africa* 73(2): 145–73.
- Bobbio, N. (1989) *Democracy and Dictatorship: The Nature and Limits of State Power*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Bratton, M. (1994) 'Peasant–State Relations in Post-colonial Africa: Patterns of Engagement and Disengagement', in J. Migdal, A. Kohli and V. Shue (eds) *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*, pp. 231–54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chabal, P. and J. P. Daloz (1999) *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. Oxford: James Currey; Bloomington, IN: International African Institute/Indiana University Press.
- Chazan, N. (1988) 'Patterns of State–Society Incorporation and Disengagement in Africa', in D. Rothchild and N. Chazan (eds) *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, pp. 121–48. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Cohen, J. L. and A. Arato (1994) *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Comaroff, J. and J. Comaroff (1999) 'Civil Society and Political Imagination in Africa: Introduction', in J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff (eds) *Civil Society and Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives*, pp. 1–43. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Das, V. and D. Poole (2004) 'State and its Margins: Comparative Ethnographies', in V. Das and D. Poole (eds) *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, pp. 3–33. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press; Oxford: James Currey.
- Degenbol, T. (1999) 'State Bureaucracies under Pressure: A Study of the Interaction between Four Extension Agencies and Cotton-Producing Farmers in the Sikasso Region, Mali'. PhD dissertation. Roskilde University, Denmark.
- Doornbos, M. (2002) 'State Collapse and Fresh Starts: Some Critical Reflections', *Development and Change* Special Issue 33(5): 797–815.
- Gelner, E. (1996) *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals*. London: Penguin.
- Gupta, A. (1995) 'Blurred Boundaries, the Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State', *American Ethnologist* 22(2): 375–402.
- Hansen, T. B. (2001) 'Governance and State Mythologies in Mumbai', in T. B. Hansen and F. Stepputat (eds) *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*, pp. 221–54. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hansen, T. B. and F. Stepputat (2001a) 'Introduction: States of Imagination', in T. B. Hansen and F. Stepputat (eds) *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*, pp. 1–38. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hansen, T. B. and F. Stepputat (2001b) (eds) *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Jessop, B. (1990) *State Theory: Putting Capitalist States in their Place*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Twilight Institutions: Public Authority and Local Politics in Africa

Christian Lund

INSTITUTIONS OF PUBLIC AUTHORITY

In his famous article on the difficulty of studying the state, Abrams makes the insightful distinction between the state system and the state as an idea. The system part is made up of tangible, mostly government, institutions, whereas the idea is what is generally expected to make up the state. As Abrams suggests, the 'relationship of the state-system and the state-idea to other forms of power should and can be central concerns of political analysis' (Abrams, 1988: 82). When approaching African political landscapes, however, two provisos seem in order. First, while government institutions are important, the state qualities of governance — that is, being able to define and enforce collectively binding decisions on members of society — are not exclusively nested in these institutions. A wider variety of institutions are at play in this enterprise. Second, while the idea of the state is powerful — Hansen and Stepputat (2001: 38) even suggest that it has become truly global and universalized — it is employed also to depict its opposite, or 'what we are not', even by institutions that effectively exercise public authority of one kind or another.

In Africa there is no shortage of institutions attempting to exercise public authority. In the first place, there are multiple layers and branches of government institutions (the judiciary, the administration, the customs service and police, the various extension agencies and so on) which are present and active to various degrees; but there are also so-called traditional institutions vying for public authority, often bolstered by government recognition. Much of the literature on African politics and its history details how governmental and chieftancy institutions negotiate, forge alliances and compete to constitute public authority and political control (Bayart, 1989; Berry, 1993; Boone, 1998, 2003; Gluckman, 1958; Mamdani, 1996; Moore, 1986; Peel, 1983; Rathbone, 2000; van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, 1999). In addition, associations and organizations which do not appear at first sight to be political may also exercise political power and wield public authority. Similarly, ostensibly non-political situations may reveal themselves to be active sites of political negotiation and mediation over the implementation of public goals or the

- Karlström, M. (1999) 'Civil Society and its Presuppositions: Lessons from Uganda', in J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff (eds) *Civil Society and Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives*, pp. 104–23. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Kaviraj, S. (1997) 'The Modern State in India', in M. Doornbos and S. Kaviraj (eds) *Dynamics of State Formation: India and Europe Compared*, pp. 225–50. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Lemarchand, R. (1992) 'Uncivil States and Civil Societies: How Illusion Became Reality', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30(2): 177–91.
- Mamdani, M. (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. London: James Currey.
- Marenun, O. (1987) 'The Managerial State', in Z. Ergas (ed.) *The African State in Transition*, pp. 61–85. London: MacMillan Press.
- Migdal, J. (1988) *Strong States and Weak Societies: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Migdal, J. (2001) *State in Society: Studying how States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Milliken, J. and K. Krause (2002) 'State Failure, State Collapse, and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons and Strategies', *Development and Change* Special Issue 33(5): 753–74.
- Mitchell, T. (1991) 'The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics', *American Political Science Review* 85(1): 77–96.
- Mohian, G. and K. Stokke (2000) 'Participatory Development and Empowerment. The Dangers of Localism', *Third World Quarterly* 21(2): 247–68.
- Musah, A. F. (2002) 'Privatization of Security, Arms Proliferation and the Process of State Collapse in Africa', *Development and Change* Special Issue 33(5): 911–33.
- Nuijten, M. (2003) *Power, Community and the State: The Political Anthropology of Organisation in Mexico*. London: Pluto Press.
- Rose, N. and P. Miller (1992) 'Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government', *British Journal of Sociology* 43(2): 173–205.
- Skocpol, T. (1985) 'Bringing the State Back In', in P. Evans, D. Rueschmeyer and T. Skocpol (eds) *Bringing the State Back In*, pp. 3–37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1990) 'Modes of Civil Society', *Public Culture* 3(1): 95–118.
- Weber, M. (1992/1978) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Weintraub, J. (1997) 'The Theory and Politics of the Public/Private Distinction', in J. Weintraub and K. Kumar (eds) *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*, pp. 1–42. Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Whitfield, L. (2003) 'Civil Society as an Idea and Civil Society as Process. The Case of Ghana', *Oxford Development Studies* 31(3): 379–400.