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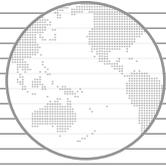
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**Ulf Engel &  
Gorm Rye Olsen**

**Authority, sovereignty and Africa's  
changing regimes of territorialisation**





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# **Authority, sovereignty and Africa's changing regimes of territorialisation**

**Ulf Engel & Gorm Rye Olsen**

Authority in Africa is increasingly exercised beyond the state. Likewise, forms of sovereignty are practiced in settings which are not territorialised as 'states'. After 1989, and the end of the Cold War, in substantial parts of the continent accelerated processes of globalisation and the weak institutionalisation of the post-independent state have contributed to the demise of the state as the major regime of territorialisation. Processes of deterritorialisation – that is the unmaking of an established regime of territorialisation such as the international order of (nation) states – have taken different forms: economic liberalisation and PRPS, the outsourcing of functional domains, violent contestation, etc. Different actors contribute to and participate in these processes: Africa's political elites, multinational companies, 'informal' traders, warlords and their middlemen, the so-called community of states which provide 'development assistance', imperial interventions such as the 'war on terror'-regime, international NGOs, etc. As a result considerable parts of the continent are facing the emergence of new regimes of territorialisation: re-ordered states, complex transnational regimes, sub-national entities, new localities and transborder formations. From a perspective of historicity of international relations, parts of the African continent have entered a phase of which the outcome is not yet predictable.

Since the end of the Cold War Africa's place in the international system, or the global order as it is often imagined, has been changing substantially. At a time when the majority of scholars working in the Political Science sub-discipline International Relations (IR) discusses globalization, the decline of a uni-polar power structure dominated by the US, the rise of the so-called BRICs (i.e. Brazil, Russia, India and the PR China; cf. Goldstein et al. 2006; Broadman 2007) as well as its implications for the West, parts of the African continent are showing signs of a different global sub-order in the making.<sup>1</sup> In the past the conventional wisdom has been that Africa's post-independent states were integrated into the international system by means of unequal exchange, as dependent clients of external patrons (Clapham 1996; Taylor and Williams 2004). Although these states exercised only limited forms of sovereignty, i.e. mainly displayed signs of 'juridical statehood' (cf. Jackson and Rosberg 1986), and were mainly concerned with regime security (Engel and Olsen 2005, 'Introduction'), IR debates still analyses them with a focus on states as units of analysis.

It is the argument of this working paper that the strong focus on the state as a core, and often only, unit of analysis is not necessarily adequate in the current phase of dramatic global changes. The nature of the state in Africa and Africa's re-integration into the international system has changed quite significantly during the years following the end of the Cold War. Today, authority in Africa is increasingly exercised beyond the state and thus the meaning of sovereignty is changing. After 1989 the combination of Africa's re-integration and the weakness of the post-independent states have contributed to the demise of the state as the major regime of territorialisation through which all authority seemingly is exercised. Therefore, the argument goes, a process of deterritorialisation is under way in Africa with the result that new regimes of territorialisation are emerging. The paper discusses these recent developments and presents a new research agenda on the trajectories of Africa's reterritorialisation.

This paper briefly summarises the empirical observations which have led to a re-assessment of the state in Africa and its place in the international system. Secondly, it analyses the body of academic representations about these observations as they have been produced in IR as well as in Comparative Politics on Africa. Thirdly, it discusses a research perspective which is informed by the more recent re-discovery of space as an analytical category, with reference to new debates in New Political Geography and Global History.

### **Empirical observations**

The nature of the state in Africa and its public perception is changing. Authority and governance is increasingly exercised beyond the state,<sup>2</sup> the locus of sovereignty is shifting. In considerable parts of the continent, where the post-independent state has been described as 'weak', processes of globalisation have contributed to the decline of this state as the dominant form of organising people – both in terms of public, political or academic perception and real-world practice. In Africa the neo-liberal agenda which was introduced through the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the International Finance Institutions (IFIs) and, later, their Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) regime has led, for instance, to the outsourcing of functional domains of the state (such as harbour management, fiscal management or presidential security) or simply their neglect – with the result that other actors have taken over core functions such as the provision of basic public goods. Even at a more central level the state has become an actor among others (an insight which at the local level has long been discussed by anthropological or sociological research; see Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1997; von Trotha 2000). In addition the state has been further weakened as an institution by forms of violent contestation (cf. Engel and Mehler 2005). Recently the preoccupation social science displayed in the 1990s with violent processes in Africa has been replaced by a new focus on borders, borderlands and the translocal or transnational dynamics around those borders – implying that the state as a unit of analysis is losing some of its appeal to social science.<sup>3</sup> These developments are most visibly displayed at the Horn of Africa where the former state of Somalia has broken up into several entities. Some of these – like Somaliland or Puntland – successfully claim to exercise *de facto* sovereignty over territory and people, but are not recognized by international law (with the borders between the two entities being disputed). But new forms of local and sometimes translocal or transnational authority – below the level of newly emerging 'statehood', and in many ways more relevant to local people than post-independent states – have also emerged in the borderlands of Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic or in the Eastern DR Congo.

These processes have prompted or have been accompanied by renewed external interests and interventions (cf. Callaghy, Latham and Kassimir 2001). Different actors contribute to and participate in these processes: multinational companies, the 'donor' governments of the OECD world, the United Nations systems and its agencies, 'humanitarian' interventions, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), etc. They all interact with new or revived forms of 'African agency' (cf. Chabal, Engel and de Haan 2007) such as informal trade as well as stock-listed African capital, the continent's rapidly growing cities etc., but also Private Military Companies, warlords and their commercial middlemen, new religious movements, area boys, child soldiers and so on. As a result, in parts of the African continent states have been re-ordered; transnational regimes have emerged to deal with issues such as HIV/aids, intellectual property rights, refugees, wildlife protection and the management of nature, sports and so on; sub-national entities have gained strength and new localities increasingly have come to the fore. Africa is being 'respaced' (Engel and Nugent 2009). As a consequence of these various activities and entanglements, the state in Africa has come under stress.

## Academic representations of African stateness

Academics have responded to these empirical observations by producing a broad range of paradigms. In addition practitioners have responded to real world developments and their academic representations by a distinctive set of policy choices. According to the analysis of most academics and practitioners African states are 'declining', 'failing' etc.; so-called 'new wars' have emerged and new forms of 'governance beyond the state' are in the making which call for new political-cum-security strategies: containment, state reconstruction and so on. In recent research most of the empirical observations which inform this kind of analysis have been attributed to the specific nature of the state in Africa (which is said to fundamentally differ from other states around the world) and the effects of the end of the Cold War (whose supposedly integrating effect on regimes and territories no longer works).

At first glance, post-independence Africa seems to confirm a traditional history of power whose spatiality can be conceptualised in rigid territorial terms: In Africa power, or the lack of it, has been described as dyadic, from person to person, person to state and state to state. Thus, 'big men' narratives have been developed and framed into a theory of neo-patrimonialism to understand the exercise of power in post-colonial Africa (cf. Clapham 1982; Medard 1982; Chabal 1992; Erdmann and Engel 2007). Likewise the decline of the state in Africa in the 1970s as well as the subordinate role of African states in international relations has been described with reference to the specific nature of the state in Africa (Clapham 1996; Taylor and Williams 2004). Ever since the Berlin conference of 1884/85 the state has been seen as the single most important form of territorialisation or spatiality, or unit of analysis, in Africa. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s the state in Africa has been described as 'overdeveloped' (Leys 1976), 'fictive' (Sandbrook 1985) or 'swollen' (Diamond 1987), nowadays it is imagined in different degrees of (non-)stateness (Clapham 1998a). Since the beginning of the 1990s when Africa was faced with a 'critical juncture' (Villalón and Huxtable 1998) between, on the one hand, a reconfiguration of neopatrimonial rule under conditions of political liberalization and violent disintegration on the other, debates on 'quasi states' (cf. Jackson 1990, 1992; Jackson and Rosberg 1982, 1986), 'shadow states' (Cruise O'Brien 1998) or 'weak states' (Reno 1997, 1999) increasingly have been replaced by debates on processes of 'privatization' (Hibou 1999; Tangri 1999), 'criminalization' (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999), 'state collapse' (Zartman 1995; Mair 1999), 'state failure' (Wunsch and Olowu 1990; Cliffe and Luckham 1999; Herbst 1996), 'state inversion' (Forrest 1998), state 'dysfunctionality', even 'state decay' (von Trotha 2000; cf. Boone 1998; Joseph 1999; and, very systematic, Erdmann 2003) – though some argued that 'Africa [still] Works' (Chabal and Daloz 1999). The empirical evidence provided by diverse cases like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia or the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1990s or Sudan and Chad in the 2000s indeed seems to justify this way of talking about 'the African state': Governments were challenged by armed groups while either losing control over large parts of state territory or losing power altogether. In these cases even the claim to fulfil key state functions such as the provision of security were given up (for detailed descriptions Clapham 1998b; Dunn 2001; Reno 2004). Yet, we would claim, it was not the 'African' state which has 'failed', but the post-independence social construction and related academic imagery of 'the state' in Africa. This theme is not entirely new, but has some aspects still worthwhile to be discussed in more detail.

The former colonial powers and other countries of the Global North, the increasingly important international aid agencies, and the nature of the international system of sovereign nation states in general contributed to a reproduction of the 'stateness' of the new African quasi-states. The effects of international norms on the sovereignty (and thus external legitimacy) of what political scientists often call the Westphalian state, on the sanctity of national borders, and on non-intervention into the internal affairs of other states has been sufficiently described (on the distinction between 'empirical' and 'juridical' statehood see Jackson and Rosberg 1986; Jackson 1990, 1992). The Cold War has had an

additional stabilizing effect and prevented de jure changes of the post-independence state system in Africa (cf. Clapham 1996; Young 1998). Within this set of institutions, the aid regime played a particularly crucial role, first in stressing and later in reinventing the centrality of the state. Either the state was seen and had been treated as a vehicle for 'development', or as an obstacle to 'development'. In any case, financial and personnel support for national development plans, SAPs or, more recently, post-Washington consensus PRPS-packages shares one crucial point of reference: the notion that, at the end of the day, the state is the only actor one has to deal with. By the same token, the international aid regime defined itself in relation to what was (and still is) perceived as the main challenge in Africa, i.e. as an instrument to repair, change or reinvent the 'African' state.

Against this background the British scholar Christopher Clapham has discussed examples of different degrees of African stateness, though he stopped short of developing a systematic typology (Clapham 2001). The German political scientist Gero Erdmann has tried to close this gap (Erdmann 2003). He combined territorial and functional variables to define three degrees of incomplete stateness: state failure, state decline and state decay.<sup>4</sup> The Great Lakes region provides a strong empirical background for this discussion. Callaghy, Latham and Kassimir (2001: 7) are utilizing this example to argue for the increasing importance of what they call 'transboundary formations' which are 'directly involved in the constitution of order and authority in various social and political contexts'. This includes rebel militias, international humanitarian operations, refugee camps, INGOs and donor agencies, armed merchants, transnational corporations, UN transition authorities, and the like. The existence of these transboundary formations, one might argue, actually predates their discovery in post-Cold War times (and, to some extent, they have been discussed earlier in terms of informal trade, armed insurrections or international regimes etc.).<sup>5</sup> The emphasis now seems to shift from states towards other, decentralized institutions of authority.

There are two important academic debates feeding into this argument. The first is interested in the historicity of the new social institutions of domination in Africa. The second, is trying to reconstruct socio-anthropological bottom-up perspectives on how public authority actually works in an environment of weak stateness (on the latter see Lund 2007). This kind of research discusses a broad spectrum of empirical types of authority, ranging from stateless societies (Ellis 1999), decentralized power (Le Roy 1997), power "besides the state" (Bellagamba/Klute 2008), local polycephaly (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1999), oligopolies of power (Bangoura 1996), to pre-colonial empirical statehood (cf. Warner 1999, 2001; and critical to her argument Hopkins 2000). States and stateless societies coexisted. Historically, decentralized use of force and local pluralism in law seem to be the standard case, not the exception (cf. Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1997; Blundo 1996). Bayart (1986) stresses the autochthon foundations of the African state and the successful appropriation of colonial institutions.<sup>6</sup> In local arenas the post-independent state is just one actor among many others. A wide range of other actors practice forms of what has been described as para-sovereignty (von Trotha 2000). Sociologists have conceptualized the *longue durée* of exercising authority as a process of sedimentation in which historically grown and practiced claims of domination are continuously superimposed by new generations of social institutions of domination.<sup>7</sup> In this context the recent realignments between local warlords and foreign companies, such as in Liberia or Sierra Leone, have been described in terms of a *déjà-vu* of alliances which were fostered in the 19th century between fragmented authorities and commercial entities of European origin (Reno 2004).

To conclude this section on academic representations of changing stateness in Africa, we will briefly refer to the question of how these changes are integrated into mainstream IR. The changing nature of the state in Africa and its place in the global order is now mainly conceptualised in terms of the emergence of a 'new medievalism', i.e. a system of overlapping authority and multiple loyalty (for an overview on the debate see Friedrichs 2001), or simply as the establishment of a 'post-modern international

order' (Sørensen 2001). And international politics have responded to these developments at various levels, most importantly with policies of 'humanitarian intervention', 'conflict prevention' and, after 11 September 2001, securitization through the 'global war on terror' (Anderson 2005; Keenan 2009). The common denominator of mainstream academic as well as political representations on Africa is the reference to the notion of the (nation-)state as it seemingly has developed in Central Europe since the 17th century, the so-called 'Westphalian' system of sovereign nation states (for critiques see Jackson 1999; and Osiander 2001), and the apparent political need to restore order along these lines.

### **New perspectives on authority, sovereignty and territoriality**

Obviously the notion of sovereignty underlying this debate differs from conventional wisdom, mainstream IR notions where sovereignty is seen as the ultimate ordering principle of international relations which separates the inside and the outside (cf. Walker 1993; and on the persistence of legal state sovereignty Kurtulus 2005; and James 1999).<sup>8</sup> The notion of sovereignty which is constitutive for the alternative perspective described above mainly is concerned with the social production of sovereignty (see, for instance, Bartelson 1995; and Biersteker and Weber 1996). Hence sovereignty, 'most generally defined as the recognition of the claim by a state to exercise supreme authority over a clearly defined territory, is not a single norm, but an institution comprising several, sometimes conflicting norms, and is associated with a bundle of properties, such as territory, population, autonomy, authority, control, and recognition' (Zaum 2007: 3). The different ontological properties of 'sovereignty' in fact need to be deconstructed in their specific historical and geographical contexts. Against this background the central methodological preposition of this chapter is that 'sovereignty is neither inherently territorial nor is it exclusively organized on a state-by-state basis' (Agnew 2005: 437). In parts of Africa we can observe the 'unbundling' of sovereignty and territory. And as a consequence of these recent forms of de- and reterritorialisation in sub-Saharan Africa new and fairly basic forms of mapping authority and territoriality are called for. In the final section of this chapter five different attempts of mapping are discussed.

Certainly in our times the Westphalian system of sovereign nation states, as it is frequently imagined by political scientists, still is very strong in most, but precisely not in all parts of the world. In this perspective post-Cold War Africa can be characterized as an arena where different forms of spatialisation are competing (cf. Mbembe 2002). The post-colonial regime of territorialisation has been challenged in substantial parts of the continent. This is not to say that the state has been or will be replaced by something else throughout Africa. But clearly in substantial parts of the Africa continent where the state as conceived in the Global North no longer is the main or the dominant form of organizing people in a given territory (this position is disputed, for instance, by Kahler and Walter 2006 who insist that despite globalization territorial attachments are still very powerful, also in constituting people's identities).

No doubt, in any given historic period one specific way of aligning authority to territory has been dominant. The American historian Charles Maier (2000) refers to these dominant forms as 'regimes of territoriality'; the British geographer Alan Hudson (1999) describes a similar phenomenon which he calls 'regulatory landscapes'. In order to stress the processes involved in the construction and permanent re-negotiation of forms of spatialisation we prefer the term 'regime of territorialisation'. Historically these regimes have taken very different forms, including decentralized chiefdoms, centralized kingdoms, nation states, empires such as the Roman or the Ottoman, and so on (cf. Opello and Rosow 2004). The period of change from one dominant regime of territorialisation to another, and the struggles in specific social arenas between the proponents of different regimes of territorialisation can be conceived

as a 'critical juncture of globalisation' (Middell and Engel 2005). This implies an understanding of globalization processes which differs from, for instance, the perspective taken by the US sociologist and economist Saskia Sassen or others who basically describe globalisation merely as a process of denationalisation (Sassen 2006). In our view, processes of globalisation are indeed characterised by forms of de-territorialisation, including voluntary sovereignty transfers by states to supra-national organizations, new regionalisms (e.g. the enlarged Europe or the revived African Union), the emergence of 'global cities', state loss of control over the economy through the activities of multi-national companies and hedge funds, waves of migration and other Appadurainian 'flows' (Appadurai 1996). But at the same time there is a dialectic between these de-territorialisations and permanent attempts of re-territorialisation (cf. Brenner 1999: 43). The latter can be found in re-nationalised identity discourses (like, for instance, in all the states of the former Soviet empire), in nationalised strategies to deal with the effects of globalisation (e.g. instance with regard to the restructuring of major car companies such as General Motors and the race for state guarantees this has led to in order to save jobs at GM's international production sites) or the recent financial crisis (with new forms and arenas of crisis control such as the G20), in anti-migration legislation (as introduced by the EU vis-à-vis Africa over the last decade) or in the re-emergence of the local (for instance in response to discourses on climate change and energy scarcity as a site of production preferred over carbon dioxide-intensive ways of production), and so on.

Authority and sovereignty are two core concepts which are being renegotiated under conditions of increased globalisations processes. In the words of the American geographer John Agnew (2005: 439) 'state sovereignty may be understood as the absolute territorial organization of political authority' (2005: 439, emphasis in original). In African Studies, the central problem of this assertion first has been discussed in essence in terms of 'juridical' vs. 'empirical' statehood (see above, Jackson 1992; Jackson and Rosberg 1986). Agnew's proposition about the 'territorial trap' of political science's state centrism (Agnew 1994) was later taken up by Michael Barnett who develops a notion of authority which captures some of its Weberian roots by postulating that 'authority only operates as a legitimate force and can be sustained when claims are grounded in established values of the community' (Barnett 2001: 56). In this line of reasoning in some areas in Africa the state as an organizing principle no longer plays a key role.

## **A new research agenda**

Against this background, we would like to introduce another analytical perspective on the changes in parts of Africa – a spatial dimension. The argument is borrowed from recent debates in the emerging field of Global History and a sub-field of geography which is labelled New Political Geography. In both debates space is privileged as an analytical category. This kind of research discusses the implications of the so-called spatial turn on the social sciences and humanities for their respective constituencies. The agenda for this meta-theoretical debate has been sketched by the French philosopher and Marxist Henri Lefebvre ([1974] 1991). The spatial turn is a set of propositions about the production of theory and, thus, an epistemological position. Proponents of the spatial turn claim that space is made through social practice. The arguments, as far as they pertain to the state, by now are well known. We will just repeat a few core elements: The central critique to the conventional wisdom is that the state as a unit of analysis has been privileged to an extent that it has been essentialised, with the result that many disciplines have unlearned to conceptualize transnational and other forms of social action which do not have the territorialized state as their fixed point of reference. This is what John Agnew (1994) has called the 'territorial trap' of, for instance, political science. In this perspective, as the New York-based political scientist Neil Brenner (1999: 40) argues, 'space no longer appears as a static platform of social relations, but

rather as one of their constitutive dimensions, itself historically produced, reconfigured, and transformed.' Along the same line of argument, the Finn geographer Anssi Paasi (2003: 110) stresses that territories 'are not frozen frameworks where social life occurs. Rather, they are made, given meanings, and destroyed in social and individual action.'

When we take these claims to the study of the changing nature of authority and sovereignty in Africa, one can argue that current developments in substantial parts of the African continent cannot be adequately understood in academic terms of state collapse (Zartman 1995), complex political emergencies (Cliffe and Luckham 1999) or new wars (Kaldor 1999). Neither can they be conceptualized in political terms of fragile states, failing states, difficult partnerships or terrorism (cf. Andersen 2005). Rather, these developments represent a larger process of changing regimes of territorialisation. In fact, this change can be conceptualized as a dialectic process of *deteritorialisation* and *reterritorialisation* (Engel 2005). From a perspective of the historicity of international relations, Africa has entered into a new phase which outcome is not yet predictable. The interesting questions from an IR point of view then are: how permanent will this process be, and how do predominantly non-nation-state regimes of territorialisation integrate with the rest of the global order?

It seems that some of the familiar analytical concepts – the state, the nation, etc. – only make limited sense when it comes to the analysis of Africa's present state. So what's next? To us the most promising way ahead would be a very modest attempt in mapping out and describing in greater detail the dynamics which we see unfolding. So if one accepts the central methodological assumption of this chapter that 'effective sovereignty is not necessarily predicated on and defined by the strict and fixed territorial boundaries of individual states' (Agnew 2005: 438), disentangling sovereignty and the state makes sense.

At least three proposals have already been made to this end, but not yet been translated systematically into a visible research program. And we will add two more proposals to this end. One suggestion has been made by Agnew (2005: 456) who invites to analyse different sovereignty regimes, 'or combinations of degrees of central state authority and consolidated or open territoriality' (which, in principle, is not too different from Clapham 1999). For Africa an operationalisation of this proposal still has to be done. Secondly a target-aimed proposal has been made by Callaghy, Latham and Kassimir (2001) who want to concentrate on 'recognition' and 'permanence' as major analytical vectors. And, thirdly, it has been proposed to study functional claims or equivalents to core state functions. The second and the third suggestion shall be outlined briefly as they have already been described with a view to applying them to the situation in sub-Saharan Africa.

In an edited volume, whose case studies rest on the experience of the Great Lakes and the DRC in the 1990s, Callaghy, Latham and Kassimir (2001: 16) have sketched a classification of institutions based on two distinctions: whether they are part of the state or not, and whether their existence rests on some form of legal expression (juridical vs. non-juridical). They claim that, through this approach, 'institutional innovations in the non-juridical realm' can be conceptualised alongside the old orthodoxy. The four possible combinations of the two categories will illustrate the approach:

- The combination 'state + juridical' refers to proper 'Weberian' states, i. e. the standard model of the Global North, as well as to formal economies.
- The pair 'non-state + juridical' entails diverse entities such as villages, NGOs, religious organisations, international organisations and mercenary (or private-military) companies.
- The combination 'non-juridical + non-state' allows to looking at 'shadow economies' and 'rebel militias'.
- And finally 'state + non-juridical' constellations include informal networks and Reno's (1995) shadow states, i.e. informal commercial orientated networks.

In this context sovereignty in the traditional IR sense, i.e. authority over some areas or symbols of the state and the use of this authority in an arena of international relations which is still dominantly organized in the Westphalian sense, can in fact still be important as it provides important material and symbolic resources (with respect to Africa Reno 2001, 2004; and more general Slaughter 2005).

In a second suggestion, Latham conceptualizes his 'international arenas', 'translocal networks' and 'transterritorial deployments' (2001: 71) with a similar heuristic tool, based on status (temporary vs. permanent) and scope (narrow vs. wide). Again, a part of the matrix is reproduced (ibid. 78): constellations can be either permanent and narrow (such as extraterritorial offices, religious missions etc.), or temporary and narrow (e.g. humanitarian operations, fact finding missions) – or they can be permanent and wide (such as organs of colonial state or annexation) or temporary and wide (e.g. occupation forces, UN transition authorities). African social institutions of domination, we assume, can be mapped according to these criteria. And, in the same edited volume, Kassimir and Latham (2001) pose the question, what forms of authority and governance exist in social spaces where state legitimacy is challenged or declining or has already gone? This refers to political and cultural strategies aiming at the creation of counter-hegemonial legitimacy. The conventional political science wisdom would hold that in the past a mix of clientelism, patronage, elite diffusion and/or identity politics, citizenship discourses etc. has been employed by Africa's neopatrimonial elites to construct or maintain legitimacy.<sup>9</sup> What are then the strategies and cultural resources of alternative and competing claims?

In academic debates on Africa different legitimacy strategies of alternative authorities are described:

- they can act as a protector against the state (Elwert 1997; von Trotha 2000);
- they may organize security and provide public goods (Bakonyi 2001; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1999; Bates 2001; Mair 1999; Kopytoff 1987);
- they portray themselves as a legitimate continuation of past political forms of representation (like traditional chiefs);
- or they waive any claims to legitimacy and employ a coercive strategy by violent means and intimidation (Mkandawire 2002; Waldmann 2002).

Depending on the extent of these new claims to legitimacy and the functions performed, sociologists have discussed these formations in terms of 'proto-state' or 'non-state' institutions (on the latter Bakonyi 2001; Bierschenk 1999; Kassimir 2001; Mair 1999; von Trotha 2000).

In addition to these strategies of mapping the new empirical situation in Africa, two more courses of action seem feasible: Since the social institutions which challenge state monopolies of legitimate use of force are operating at different levels, according to spatial and functional claims, a typology can be designed along two axes, one ranging from territorially limited to unlimited claims (i.e. the state-level), the other from functional limited to widespread claims (the latter could be as wide as the functions described in standard World Bank texts on the role of the state in Africa, including the provision of security and public goods such as health and education). Along these axes different empirical types can be collated:

- some actors make only limited territorial claims, such as urban militias, self-defense units, private security companies;
- others assert multi-functional regional roles, for instance religious authorities or traditional chiefs;
- there are also regional-based warlords with unlimited functional claims; and
- warlords with counter-hegemonic claims to state control, and so on.

Needless to say that, in this case, the 'translocal' has to be conceived as something which is not necessarily confined to national space. In contrast, these claims can easily transcend boundaries (and

affect more than one established or claimed monopoly of legitimate use of force).

And, finally, it does make sense to order empirical observations along a divide between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. The main point here would be to map the forces and resources of either making or un-making new spatial references of social order. What are the social, symbolic and imagined resources in constructing or deconstructing new spatial orders? What determines the successful implementation of a new spatial order? How do these new orders relate to already existing order(s)? How do concepts of order travel in these processes? Focusing on the dialectic of de- and reterritorialisation would be a first step out of the 'territorial trap' the social sciences are facing with regard to the analysis of Africa. It would allow to transcend simple containerized 'domestic' vs. 'foreign' imaginations and open up the way towards a de-essentialisation of space as a given. This very basic suggestion does not privilege a specific method, other than the ones different disciplines have employed to look at their object of study. It merely calls for more modest descriptions and, based on this, systematic mapping of empirical observations. These systematizations will then inform perspectives from which major analytical concepts such as the 'state', 'sovereignty' and even 'power' can be reconsidered. They will provide new insights into how order and disorder in Africa is created and signified. Our guess is that in this process IR as a theory will be changed, though we don't have any prediction of as to how this will play out in detail. But a look into the development of human geography clearly demonstrates the effects of the introduction of the spatial turn on disciplinary identities and methodological debates. IR (and Comparative Politics for that matter) as it is practiced simply has become an unreliable tool when it comes to the study of the state in Africa and its global entanglements. And from the point of view of the utility of IR theory, spatial turn driven research certainly will result in insights on the interplay between local and transboundary authorities, multiple sovereignties and their external environment which help to understand why the toolbox of international interventions to fix the state in Africa so often is inadequate.

## Conclusion

In summary, it has been argued in this paper that in parts of Africa the nature of the state is fundamentally changing and that this has consequences, firstly, for Africa's integration into and interaction with the international system and, secondly, for the way in which International Relations as an academic exercise can analyse these processes. In the current processes of deterritorialisation of parts of the African continent, sovereignty and territory are unbundled. Therefore, we propose different analytical ways of re-mapping authority and sovereignty. As a result of these efforts, the assumed hierarchy of a general spatial order around the nation state will be challenged and, ultimately, deconstructed. Since social life no longer can be conceived on a vector within a containerised world of nation states from 'the local' to 'the global', a variety of old and new spatial orders will be discovered in which different social actors exercise authority and express sovereignty. Finally, Africa's place in the international system will no longer be discussed in terms of an assumed general quality of stateness of all African states, but with a view to highlight the different regimes of territorialisation which are emerging on the continent, which exist side by side and which interact with the various components of the international system in very different ways.

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## Endnotes

- 1 The term 'global order' refers to dominant imaginations of and discourses about 'order', i.e. spatialised power distributions. These orders are constantly produced by politicians and academics.
- 2 In contrast to the conventional wisdom in IR and Comparative Politics, but also in public administration and development thinking, in which governance is based on a functionalist, instrumentalist and normative understanding of the state in which governance usually is equated with the practice of or the quest for *good governance*, we are favouring a notion of governance which is different from governing, administering or managing. In our reading, governance encapsulates complex dynamics of shaping binding rules, procedures and behaviour in different social spaces. It is intrinsically relational as it involves the practice of both constructing rules (as social process) and imposing rules (as the exercise of authority). And the units of governance are social spaces whose territoriality can be identical with a bordered state, but which may also cut across states or which may be confined to far smaller, sometimes functional, territorialities (Engel and Olsen 2005: 9).
- 3 Two indicators for this trend, both from 2007, are the institutionalisation of borderlands studies on Africa in a mainly European network called Aborne (African Borderlands Research Network; [www.aborne.org](http://www.aborne.org)) and the establishment of the African Union Border Programme (the latter starting on the observation that only 25 percent of Africa's national borders are properly demarcated and aiming at conflict prevention and regional integration).
- 4 *State failure* is characterized by structural deficits in terms of service provision (public goods and security), without loss of the monopoly of legitimate use of force or permanent loss of sovereignty over parts of the state's territory. State failure can take the form of collapsed health or education systems, high levels of corruption, decline of the public infrastructure, privatization of public security, etc. *State decline* is conceptualized as a territorial restriction of the state monopoly of legitimate use of force, usually preceded by state failure, but without the threat of secession. Von Trotha terms this para-stateness or para-sovereignty, respectively (von Trotha 2000: 269ff.). *State decay* signifies the total collapse of stateness and can take two forms: partial or total decay. While the former represents the total loss of the monopoly of legitimate force, including a threat to the territorial integrity of the state, the latter characterizes countries with no or little central authority over the former state territory, like Somalia, Sierra Leone or Liberia at a certain point in history.
- 5 While Callaghy et al. conceptualize transboundary formations in opposition to 'patrimonial networks or communal leadership', this divide seems slightly artificial, particularly since these transboundary formations are not entirely new phenomena (Callaghy, Latham and Kassimir 2001: 12).
- 6 This line of reasoning is based on Gramsci's 'historic bloc', Braudel's 'longue durée', and Foucault's 'gouvernementalité'. The historical institutionalism reflected by this approach is also prominently at the heart of Chabal (1992), Hibou (1999) and Kopytoff (1987).
- 7 Forrest (1998) assumes that after incidents of 'state inversion', these historic and indigenous forms of authority networks reappear. This is said to be the case in Somalia or Rwanda.
- 8 We would like to thank Adèle Garnier (University of Leipzig) who drew our attention to this discussion.
- 9 Englebert (2000) argues that pre-colonial legitimacy has been the key for post-colonial legitimacy.

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