THE PRECARIOUS BALANCE

STATE & SOCIETY IN AFRICA

EDITED BY

DONALD ROTHCHILD
AND NAOMI CHAZAN

The Precarious Balance

State and Society in Africa

African Modernization
and Development Series
Paul Lovejoy, Series Editor

About the Book and Editors

Since independence, the political institutions of many African states have undergone a process of consolidation and subsequent deterioration. Constrained by external economic dependency and an acute scarcity of economic and technical resources, state officials have demonstrated a diminished capacity to regulate their societies. Public policies are agreed upon but ineffectively implemented by the weak institutions of the state. Although scholars have analyzed the various facets of state-building in detail, little systematic attention has been given to the issue of the decline of the state and mechanisms to cope with state ineffectiveness in Africa.

This book focuses especially on the character of the postcolonial state in Africa, the nature of and reasons for state deterioration, and the mechanisms and policies for coping with state malfunction. Scholars from Africa, the United States, Europe, and the Middle East combine a broad understanding of African political processes with expertise on specific regions. Their analytic and comparative perspective provides a comprehensive and timely treatment of this vital and heretofore neglected theme in African politics.

Donald Rothchild is professor of political science at the University of California, Davis. He is the author of *Racial Bargaining in Independent Kenya* and coeditor of *State Versus Ethnic Claims: African Policy Dilemmas* (Westview, 1982). **Naomi Chazan** is senior lecturer in political science and African studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She is the author of *An Anatomy of Ghanaian Politics: Managing Political Recession, 1969– 1982* (Westview, 1983) and coauthor of *Ghana: Coping with Uncertainty* (Westview, 1986).

The Precarious Balance

State and Society in Africa

edited by
Donald Rothchild
and Naomi Chazan

Preface

Contemporary research on state-society relations in Africa has been almost as elusive as its subject matter. Much of the literature on African politics, reflecting a concern with stability and economic development, focuses extensively upon aspects of state consolidation. After independence, African leaders concentrated upon securing, extending, and transforming the institutions of rule they had inherited. Hence they impeded certain institutions that placed checks on their power while facilitating others that they thought would increase their control. Some leaders (Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Felix Houphouet-Boigny in the Ivory Coast) have proved reasonably successful in building a coherent framework. In other countries, however, the results have been disappointing. Very different regimes were unable to stop the gradual erosion of state capabilities and a concomitant loss of legitimacy, authority, and power. As specific groups came to question the validity and viability of state institutions and organizing rules, state structures were undermined.

Those focusing on the twin processes of state consolidation or deterioration, whether approaching the subject from a modernization, Marxist, or neo-Marxist conceptual framework, have tended to make some similar assumptions: that political, social, and economic development are valued preferences in and of themselves and that participation at the political center is desirable because the state constitutes a superior mechanism for the fulfillment of economic and social aspirations. However, in recent years doubts have been cast on these assumptions. Many processes, such as the expansion of nonformal socioeconomic and political activities, could not be understood easily within the consolidation paradigm. Moreover, the premise of the centrality of the state could no longer be glibly corroborated in practice.

Consequently, a new research focus centering on the dynamic processes of interaction between state and society is now emerging and gaining scholarly attention. Remaining attentive to the operations of public institutions and official agencies while highlighting coping mechanisms in the informal sector, this approach attempts to uncover where and why transactions occur and to pinpoint areas and spheres of separation. The message emanating from Africa today is one of straddling—of constant movement between the official and unofficial, the private and the public, the rural and the urban. The result is a precarious balance between state and society. This book explores the rhythm of this changing relationship. In this respect,

it seeks to gain an understanding of the historical context, the current manifestations, and some of the possible socioeconomic and political ramifications of these interactions. It is a study of shifting power relations and the complex exchanges that are essential to a more comprehensive understanding of the contemporary African scene.

This book took shape in the course of an international workshop on "The Reordering of the State in Africa" that was held July 1–8, 1985, at the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. It brought together a diverse group of scholars from Africa, Europe, North America, and the Middle East who spent the week engaging in a lively interchange on the issues at hand.

We wish to express our very great appreciation to the Truman Institute for making the conference possible. Its administrative staff—especially Dr. Edy Kaufman, Dahlia Shemer, and the library staff (Cecile Panzer, Katya Azoulay, Eti Yakobovich-Abu, Becky Rowe, and Drora Shihuda)—gave indispensable assistance in preparing and organizing the conference. Professor Zvi Schiffrin, the institute's academic chairman, backed this undertaking throughout. Professors Nehemia Levtzion, Michael Wade, John Voll, Dov Ronen, Michel Abitbol, and Galia Golan and Drs. Steve Kaplan, Yekutiel Gershoni, and Mordechai Tamarkin joined in the discussions and thereby contributed significantly to the molding of this work. We also wish to express our appreciation to Professor Paul Lovejoy for his careful analysis of the entire manuscript and to Professor Cynthia L. Brantley for her helpful suggestions on revising the chapters.

Preparation of this book for publication was overseen by Norma Schneider, director of publications at the Truman Institute. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to Siva Azulay for her careful editing of the entire manuscript and to the University of California, Davis (particularly Caroline Hartzell and Eunice Carlson), for providing assistance and facilities that made work on this volume possible.

Donald Rothchild
Naomi Chazan

Contents

PART FOUR
The Changing State in Africa: Government
and International Perspectives

PART FIVE
Conclusion

Introduction

1

Reordering
State-Society Relations:
Incorporation and Disengagement

Victor Azarya

State Centrism in Current Research

The declining performance of the postcolonial state has been a recurrent theme in the social sciences literature on Africa in recent years. After focusing for a decade or more on the capabilities of the state in its incessant efforts to mold society in its image, scholarly debate has shifted to the state's *incapabilities*, its functional decline, instability and inability to bring about intended changes in society. The state has been variously characterized as "soft," "weak" or "overdeveloped" by scholars seeking to explain its apparent failure to meet the aspirations not only of the civil society at large but even of those occupying central political positions.[1] The postcolonial history of African states has been marked by conflict, turmoil and stagnation. State leaders have been unable to extricate themselves from powerful domestic and international interest groups. State control over the society has diminished despite increasing repressive and extractive tendencies. Corrupt and inefficient administrations have led to great waste. Compliance with the law has declined and state institutions have lost legitimacy in the eyes of large segments of their population.

Jackson and Rosberg doubt that many African states can meet an empirical definition of the state based on its ability to exercise control (i.e. to articulate, implement and enforce commands, laws, policies and regulations)[2] over the people in the territory under its jurisdiction. What has maintained them as states, they claim, is a more juridical definition which identifies them as the recognized territorial unit of the international community.[3] Thus, such states have been more relevant in the international arena than within their own territorial borders. Jackson and Rosberg are concerned with instances in which states have lost effective political control over substantial segments of the population, such as coups d'état, internal wars and regional separatism. They have found that even in cases where political control has not been

lost and states have maintained a monopoly over organized means of coercion, they have been unable to solve basic economic problems or prevent the emergence of alternative systems which flout their laws and principles and circumvent their inefficient channels.

Observers have looked for reasons beyond specific government policies, personal failures of leaders and ideological considerations for the equivocal performance of certain African states. They have attempted to discover inherent structural weaknesses of the state, ingrained in the very process of postcolonial political development in Africa. Some attribute the present weakness to the legacy of the colonial state which, despite its very authoritarian nature, touched only intermittently the lives of the people within its boundaries.[4] Others relate it to international dependency or see it as an outgrowth of the class structure and internal conflicts.[5] Whatever the preferred explanation, emphasis on such general underlying causes has tended to represent the state's weakness as a universal African phenomenon. While the more historical or structural roots of the problem cannot be disregarded, we should also note that some African states clearly exhibit greater weaknesses than others, even though they all share common underlying factors such as dependence on the global system or a similar colonial legacy. The turnabout in the fortunes of the states may also stem from specific current difficulties that are partially the result of policy decisions made by contemporary rulers. Hence the decline of and differences between African states cannot be ascribed only to long-range historical factors.

The increasing preoccupation with the decline of the state in Africa marks a sharp departure from the earlier scholarly interest in state consolidation, which emanated from the underlying assumption that the state is a major means of bringing about societal change and fulfilling economic and social aspirations. At first, in the heyday of the modernization studies (in the 1960s), this assumption had a strong integrative and developmental connotation. Observers traced the process of "nation building" which was expected to follow decolonization. They were concerned with analyzing the mechanisms by which viable political entities responsive to their social and economic environment were formed on broader bases of solidarity and collective action. Scholarly emphasis was placed on the formation of central institutions (the term "state" was not yet fashionable) and their ability to transform civil society.[6] Later, as the initial enthusiasm of decolonization waned and the postcolonial political crises and instability became more visible, the state came to be seen as an arena of struggle between different groups vying for control over its resources. The integrative connotation of earlier studies was replaced by a conflict connotation. Pluralists drew attention to pressures rooted mostly in ethno-cultural primordial sources, whereas Marxists sought to identify the contending parties in terms of class differences and to show how the new state apparatus became a major vehicle for new class formation. State positions, however, were still regarded as the main channels of resource control. Furthermore, since the state was assumed to

expand its control over the entire society, the stakes of the political struggle were much higher. The state apparatus was expected to enable the control over peripheral resources as well as central ones. By the same token, a failure to share power in the center could also endanger a given group's grip over its own peripheral resources.[7] In Geertz's words, "it is the very process of the formation of a sovereign civil state that, among other things, stimulates sentiments of parochialism, communalism, racialism and so on because it introduces into society a valuable new prize over which to fight and a frightening new force with which to contend."[8] When it appeared that the shape of the polity was being settled rapidly, perhaps once and for all, a multitude of groups began to stake their claims for the protection of their way of life and for a more satisfactory distribution of benefits.[9]

The shift in emphasis from state consolidation to decline also hints that perhaps the state has played a lesser role in African social life than was previously assumed. Suddenly, the state did not seem such a formidable force in determining economic and social well-being. On the contrary, in many cases the vulnerability attendant upon exposure to pressure and insecurity (physical as well as economic) outweighed the spoils of association with the state. It was belatedly realized that influence and authority were not the exclusive domain of the state and that the earlier studies of state consolidation often mistook for fact the aspirations of the political elite. However, despite the acknowledgement of the state's more limited social role, scholarly interest still focused on the state itself; it tried to explain what went wrong with the state and the reasons for its weakness. When the society was brought into the analysis, it was usually in order to explain why the state did not function properly. The focus has thus remained state-centric. With some notable exceptions, such as Goran Hyden's work on peasant responses to state policies and some recent studies on the parallel economy, relatively little attention has been paid to how societies cope with the state, rather than how the state acts upon the society.[10]

It is also interesting to note that the earlier image of a strong political center being the motor force behind the society's rapid transformation was espoused by the very scholars who avoided the use of the term "state" (perhaps they took it for granted). They used instead such terms as "central institutions," the "rulers" and the "elite." Just as the focus shifted to the weakness and decline of the state, the term "state" paradoxically started to come into vogue and scholars increasingly referred to the state's autonomous actions.[11] The very concepts of state consolidation and state decline indicate, of course, that the phenomenon studied is the state, not the society. However, by thinking in terms of incorporation into or disengagement from the state, greater attention may be drawn to what happens to various groups and sectors in the civil society as they respond to whatever the state is able or unable to achieve. An examination of incorporation and disengagement can thus lead us to the long-neglected society end of state-society relations in contemporary Africa.

Incorporation and Disengagement

Incorporation and disengagement denote societal responses to state actions (or anticipated state actions) which lead to a perceived change in the field of opportunities of given groups or individuals. They are the counterparts of state consolidation and decline when the focus is shifted from the state to the society. Incorporation is the process whereby large segments of the population associate with the state and take part in its activities in order to share its resources. It follows a perception of an expanded field of opportunities linked with the state.[12] Such incorporation might be initiated by the individuals or groups in question or might be solicited by the state itself as a means of expanding its penetration into the periphery. Indeed, I use the term "incorporation" rather than "engagement" or "participation" because it seems more neutral regarding initiation of the association. In any event, the result is the same: the state is a magnet; substantial segments of the population find it desirable, for whatever reason, to have close ties with the state.

Incorporation may manifest itself in population migration from rural to urban areas and from remote regions to economic and communication centers. It may include greater receptivity to mass media and an influx of immigrants from neighboring countries. In more specifically economic fields we are likely to find an increase in the production of goods and services, a larger wage-labor force, greater commercialization of agricultural products and the emergence of new forms of entrepreneurship encouraged and subsidized by the state.[13] Farmers move from subsistence to cash and export crops and increasingly become state-supported entrepreneurs whose wealth depends on certain state-determined price arrangements which yield them high returns for their crops. Their surplus is invested partly in acquiring more land, expanding their agriculture and hiring more manpower, and partly in commerce, transportation, construction and other business activities, probably again entailing an arrangement with some state agency and the receipt of some kind of state subsidy. Some farmers might move to the city, invest part of their capital in urban businesses or accede to government positions and gradually become absentee landlords. Many urban dwellers, on their part, take advantage of state loans and investment incentives to buy land and enter the agro-business. Urban-rural differences are thus mitigated at the highest income levels though not at the lower levels.

Government employment is highly valued, and many people seek public administrative positions as a further means of accumulating resources. The central administrative machinery penetrates the local community and is welcome there since it is regarded as an important distributive agent. Traditional structures and authorities are incorporated into the state; traditional chiefs and leaders become state agents and their status is preserved and even enhanced by being made part of the state symbol. Local elites or strongmen increasingly depend on a share of state resources to distribute them further to their segment of the population in order to maintain their

allegiance; they are thus bound to state resources and personnel in order to maintain their local control.[14] Even self-help schemes, which in theory are supposed to be autonomous, vie for association with the state, under the assumption that that would ensure higher quality performance (e.g. better teachers), greater resource allocation and greater respectability.[15]

Common to all these activities is a perception of the state as a center of attraction and superior means of resource distribution, which also includes the more symbolic resources of identity and legitimacy. In stressing economic resources I do not mean to uphold a narrow utilitarian view of state-society relations. As Rothchild and Foley have rightly pointed out, some other issues, such as group status, identity and preservation of culture, may form the basis for rather inelastic and nonnegotiable communal claims.[16] In these respects, too, incorporation will occur if the state, because of its efforts to represent and balance such claims, is considered by the parties involved to be an appropriate channel to promote these more symbolic and ascriptive objectives and perhaps to amalgamate communal identities into broader bases of solidarity.

Great differences may obviously exist in the extent to which various groups are incorporated and accede to state resources. Incorporation is likely to be accompanied by greater inequality. A landowning capitalist class may emerge above the rest of the peasantry. The income gap is likely to widen in both urban and rural areas. Regional inequalities may be exacerbated and foreign immigrants who perform the most menial tasks and lack the basic protection provided by citizenship might form a new underclass. Incorporation does not necessarily create a better social environment and is not free of intergroup tensions or social unrest. Incorporation may also be higher in, for example, economic spheres than political and cultural ones. It is not necessarily accompanied by greater political participation. People may wish to be associated with the state as "consumers," because of the state's distributive capacities or because they identify with the ruler, even if they are allowed only a minor share in state decision making. It is not clear, however, how long such a passive consumer attitude can be sustained, and the more educated segments of the population would probably be less content with it.

Disengagement, in contrast, is the tendency to withdraw from the state and keep at a distance from its channels as a hedge against its instability and dwindling resource base.[17] As skepticism rises concerning the effectiveness and legitimacy of state actions, they are undermined by subtle means of popular evasion and dissimulation. Typical forms of disengagement include moving away from the state-cash nexus to a subsistence economy or to alternate channels such as black markets and smuggling. Economic activities turn to outlets less easily regulated by the state. Production either falls or is diverted away from state control. State enacted laws and ordinances and the judiciary system lose their credibility and noncompliance with laws become commonplace. Cynicism, satire, ridicule of both the state and the difficulties of everyday life, and a whole array of popular art forms that