ETHNOGRAPHIES OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN AFRICA: AN EMERGING RESEARCH PARADIGM

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THE STUDY OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN AFRICA: AN INVISIBLE COLLEGE?

This book is at the heart of a new and rapidly growing field, in which conventional anthropological methods (qualitative approaches, fieldwork, participant observation, interviews, etc.) are used to investigate topics usually taken up by political science, the administrative sciences or management studies.

Empirical studies of public services and ‘the state at work’ (von Stein, see Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, introduction) have, of course, been carried out for a long time. They mainly concern the Global North, where they are a focus of the political and administrative sciences and sociology rather than social anthropology. The situation with respect to the Global South, and especially Africa, is different: a comparably rich research tradition does not exist there. At the same time, however, in recent years, anthropological and ethnographic approaches have gained a special importance in the study of public services in Africa.

This chapter is about what we have learned from the literature, and how it has influenced our perspectives. We do not aim to provide a comprehensive literature review; instead, we describe the emergence of a particular research paradigm in which this book participates. The process involved could also be referred to as the formation of an invisible college of researchers who share important theoretical references and empirical perspectives on public services in Africa.

STUDIES OF PUBLIC SERVICES, PUBLIC POLICIES AND PUBLIC SERVANTS IN THE GLOBAL NORTH

Public services, public policies and public servants have been extensively studied in countries of the Global North.
In fact, specialized academic disciplines like the sociology of organization and bureaucracy, the administrative sciences, and public policy studies, developed for that very purpose since the second half of the 20th century. Here, we would like to draw attention to three works that have had a particular influence on us, directly or indirectly. Inspired by an already very productive American sociology of organizations (Simon 1957, 1978, March and Simon 1958, Cohen, March and Olsen 1972, see also March and Olsen 1984, 1989), Crozier (Crozier 1963, Crozier and Friedberg 1977) was one of the driving forces behind the introduction of an actor-centred approach into the study of bureaucracy in France. He showed that a formal organizational structure never completely limits actors who retain room for manoeuvre and strategic games in line with their own interests and situational definitions. Hence, the so-called ‘dysfunctions’ of a bureaucracy must be interpreted as the result of these strategies and games. In the absence of progressive reforms, these dysfunctions become an essential element of the system’s equilibrium, resulting in deep, recurrent crises.

Second, Lipsky (1980) focused on ‘street-level bureaucrats’, e.g. those public servants who deal directly with the public. As the demand for their services is not fixed but tends to increase with supply, street-level bureaucrats face a chronic lack of resources, one of the reasons for the high level of employee dissatisfaction and frequent burn-out among them. Their relation to their superiors is marked by ambiguity and contradictory goals, the difficulty in measuring performance and, therefore, low accountability. As for their clients, these are mostly involuntary and consequently do not serve as primary reference groups. Against this background, the work of street-level bureaucrats is characterized by broad discretionary scope and huge autonomy from and resources for resisting organizational control. In particular, street-level bureaucrats develop strategies for rationing services, e.g. through favouritism and/or stereotyping, strategies which invariably lead to discrimination. The important conclusion drawn by Lipsky was that street level bureaucrats are not simply policy implementers but policy makers. Policy is not what is written in policy papers and organizational regulations but what street-level bureaucrats do: they, and not the administrators and politicians, make the everyday decisions about what really constitutes policy in the field. Bureaucrats have greater margins for manoeuvre than officially prescribed by the rules and they make extensive use of them.
Third, in a study aptly sub-titled “How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland; or why it is amazing that federal programs work at all”, Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) argued that full implementation of a policy is extremely unlikely. The chances of implementation decrease with the rise in the number of actors involved and in the decision points that have to be successfully navigated. Therefore, the most likely outcome of a complex policy is partial or selective implementation, the unpacking of policy packages, re-purposing and other actor strategies which convert the end result into something very different to what the policy-makers had in mind. In other words, any empirical study of the translation of a policy into practice is likely to discover what has been described as the “implementation gap” (Lane 2009: 47 et seq.) in recent policy studies.

Among other works that have influenced us, especially in relation to the areas of justice and education which were at the core of our research, we need to mention the highly ethnographic—and historically informed—research carried out in France and Germany on the police, teachers and justice. For example, the empirical sociology of justice has developed important ideas like the difference between the ‘formal’ and ‘informal programme’ of judges when they take decisions (Lautmann 1972), Blankenburg’s (1995) observation that law and the apparatus of justice are not just ‘there’, working according to their formal programme, but are resources which actors first have to mobilize (for which not all social actors are equally well equipped), and the ‘funnel model’ as a mechanism for keeping the justice system working despite constant overload (cf. Rehbinder 2000).

‘Northern’ Anthropology of Organizations, Bureaucracy and Public Policy

While the aforementioned studies essentially originate from the fields of political science, the sociology of organizations and policy analysis, it should not be forgotten that an—admittedly minority—field within anthropology has also shown an interest in bureaucracy for a long time.

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1 This idea was applied by Bierschenk (1988) and Olivier de Sardan (1988) to development projects in Africa and has recently been adopted and refined by Mosse (2004).
In fact, from as early as the late 1920s, certain anthropologists turned their backs on ‘primitive societies’ to carry out research on organizations in ‘developed’ countries, in particular in the USA (Schwartzman 1993). William L. Warner (1941) and Eliot Chapple (1953) were pioneers in this field; Chapple was also the founding president of the Society for Applied Anthropology (later presided over by Margaret Mead), which published the journal ‘Human Organization’, originally called ‘Applied Anthropology’. The famous (and controversial) ‘Hawthorne studies’ triggered the implementation of various ethnographic studies in industrial and bureaucratic work environments prior to the Second World War. Chapple (1943) also developed the concept of ‘anthropological engineering’ as a variant of social engineering (Bennett 1996). In the 1950s, these approaches were radicalized by the ‘action anthropology’ of Sol Tax (1975).

In the UK, from the late 1950s, the American Hawthorne Studies inspired ethnographic research in English factories, which has become known as the “Manchester shop floor studies” (Emmert and Morgan 1987). However, mainstream anthropological circles considered these studies as too close to the theories of management and concerned with human relations within companies.

Hence, the world of work in the countries of the North only received “sporadic attention” (Schwartzman 1993: 27) up to around the 1980s when it began to attract the interest of American anthropologists with the development of research on organizations, public services, offices, hospitals, schools, companies, etc. (cf. for example, Van Maanen 1973, 1979). However, as noted by Bate (1997: 1150), this anthropology of organizations was often marked by a predilection for colourful and marginal topics: “‘Organizational’ often turns out to be yet another marginal group: football hooligans, Greenham Common protestors, divorce court personnel, cocktail waitresses, Olympic organizing committees, funeral directors, girls scouts, dance companies, or LA punks. I mean where are the ethnographies of the health services or modern ethnographies of the shop floor?”.

Nonetheless, numerous ethnographies of the ‘shop floor’ or the health services and other state agencies have been produced since then (and some before, for example Van Maanen 1973 on the police), and the public services in the North are now the subject of numerous publications of an anthropological (or qualitative sociological) nature. Of greatest appeal for our approach are those that develop emic perspectives and accord a central focus to the representations and practices of actors (Van Maanen 1973, 1979, Richman 1983), and those that focus on the informal face of organizations and the dialectic between formal rules and practical organizational...
cultures (Britan and Cohen 1980: 14–21). While some of these studies are neo-Marxist in orientation (Burawoy 1979, Nash 1981), others focus on the mechanisms of power (Heyman 1995, 2004). Others are inspired by the cognitive sciences (Spradley and Mann 1975) and others, again, originate from ethno-methodology (Haines 1990, Cicourel 1968). Finally, others take their inspiration from actor networks and the sociology of translation as promoted by Callon and Latour (Riles 2006, Rottenburg 2009).5

Nevertheless, due to their enormous conceptual and empirical heterogeneity, these studies did not prompt the emergence of a specific scientific field. In any event, as attested by various comparative collections (in addition to the pioneering work of Britan and Cohen 1980, see Gellner and Hirsch 2001), the vast majority of these studies concerned the Global North. Until recently, organizations in Africa remained marginal to anthropological research and received little interest.6

HOW AND BY WHOM RESEARCH WAS DONE ON PUBLIC SERVICES IN AFRICA, AND HOW ANTHROPOLOGY BECAME INVOLVED

A huge number of publications have been produced about the state in Africa from the 1970s to the present day. Most of them originate from the political sciences and try to characterize the specificity of ‘the African state’ and African politics7 in one way or another. Nevertheless, the pungent question asked by Copans in 2001 remains fully relevant, that is whether African states are “states without civil servants?” Empirical studies about administrations, state professions, service delivery, public policy implementation, and street level bureaucrats are spectacularly lacking for Africa. Africa obviously does not have the rich tradition that Europe has in research on bureaucracy and organization, to which we referred above. Instead, in the case of Africa, we find a small and heterogeneous body of studies by various disciplines on the history of the public services, the

5 The frequently quoted study by Herzfeld (1992), the title of which highlights one of the ideal-type properties of bureaucracy (“the social production of indifference”), presents very few ethnographic data on Greek bureaucracy.

6 However, some interesting recent work in the anthropology of Southern organizations and bureaucracies exists, e.g. Fuller and Benéi (2000), Fuller and Harris (2000), Hull (2003), Nuijten (2003), Eckert (2004, 2011); for an older study, see Conkling (1984).

administrations of development and underdevelopment, the elites, and public service reforms.

Historical Studies on African Public Services

Of particular importance to the authors of this book are the existing historical studies of African colonial administrations as this is where we locate the genesis of the specific operating modes of contemporary African state administrations and their articulation of formal and practical norms (Bierschenk, Olivier de Sardan, this volume). Notwithstanding the punctual existence of patrimonial bureaucracy in pre-colonial states like Danxome and Buganda, the modern bureaucratic state was introduced during the colonial period in sub-Saharan Africa. This modern colonial state was not simply a copy of the European bureaucratic state. Rather, it combined bureaucratic modes of operation with despotic and intermediate ones (Spittler 1981, Olivier de Sardan 1984, Trotha 1994, Young 1994). At the same time it largely lacked the elements of citizenship and the legal form (Rechtsförmigkeit) of administration that had marked authoritarian modes of government such as Napoleonic France and Prussia, even in the 19th century. Naturally the colonial state also delivered—albeit limited and selective—public goods and services: mainly infrastructure, but also education and vocational training, health services, animal health, etc. However, due to the special conditions of colonial domination, these public goods were delivered in a special form, wrapped, so to speak, in practices of patronage, privilegism, corruption, contempt of anonymous customers—practices that differed significantly from the Weberian ideal-type of bureaucracy (see Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, introduction, this volume) and established lifestyle routines of officials that remain virulent to the present day (Olivier de Sardan 2009). The possibilities for the uncontrolled exercise of power by colonial officials, who notably combined executive and judicative functions, were far greater than those enjoyed by their colleagues in European administrations, their privileges (official residence, cars, servants, etc.) were comprehensive and largely out of proportion to their often limited education. These privileges were scarcely merit-based, but primarily markers of social distinction. The

actual ‘under-administration’ of the colonies weakened both the possibilities of internal control of the subaltern African staff, and made it necessary to outsource many governance functions to informal—and unpaid—subcontractors, auxiliaries of the administration. Both the weak internal control and outsourcing of governance functions created a hotbed of small everyday corruption of officials (Cohen 1971, Lackner 1973, Lawrance, Osborn and Roberts 2006).

The central gateway of patrimonialism into the bureaucratic mode of government, however, was the institution of the chieftaincy. Chiefs were the street-level agents of colonial rule. Because of the under-administration already referred to, they were a necessary part of the colonial administration, which would not have been able to function without them. At the same time, however, they were held officially, as it were, to following a patrimonial logic. The practices instituted in this way still characterize African chieftaincies today and have infiltrated the public services (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, with N. Bako-Arifari and M. Tidjani Alou 2006, Bayart 1993).

Studies on African Elites

There is very little information on the professional practices of African colonial bureaucrats in the period immediately leading up to independence and in the post-colonial period.9 The African officials of the post-independence period have been mainly studied under the label of ‘African elites’ (Behrends and Pauli 2012). These studies were particularly popular in the 1960s and 1970s; however the topic has also remained of interest to the present day (although the concept of ‘elite’ is increasingly replaced by that of ‘middle class’). Due to the political-economic structure of many African countries, the social groups referred to as elites were overwhelmingly products of modern, Western-style education, and, in the French colonies, consisted almost exclusively of (higher) officials, whereas in the British colonies they also included members of the free professions, in particular lawyers as well as teachers and nurses employed by the missions. Up to the 1980s, the vast majority of secondary and university graduates went into government service. However, the studies on the African-educated elites pursued a different interest from that on which this book is based, and must therefore be regarded as a largely separated research tradition.

9 Some information can be found in Cooper (1996). For Ghana, see Lentz in this volume, for East Africa, Eckert.
These studies were less concerned with the working conditions and professional practices of officials than with their social and political role in the modernization process. The main interest was in the question as to whether the Western-style educated elites would play a central role in the modernization of the newly independent states. Their lifestyles and values were seen as modern and as representative of the newly independent Africa. Issues of class formation came into focus at a later stage (do we observe increasing self-recruitment and class closure or continued high social mobility?) along with topics like urban-rural relations, clientelism, neo-patrimonialism and ethnic mobilization.

The moral connotations of the elite literature are striking; both extreme idealizations and condemnations of African elites can be found (Cohen 1981; for a more balanced view, see Werbner 2004). In the 1980s the optimistic view of the role of elites was reversed, and political science authors, in particular, highlighted the problematic role of elites and ‘big men’ in ‘neo-patrimonial’ political systems (Médard 1992) and the “reciprocal assimilation” of different categories of elites (Bayart 1993). The criticism was directed against corrupt political elites, tyrannical dictatorships and the economic self-interest of those in power, which were deemed as threatening the development of independent African states. However, the elites were not investigated ‘at work’, nor in their relations with administrative bodies. Leonard (1987, see below) is a rare and early exception of an author who attempted to integrate an organizational perspective with insights from these elite studies. In this book, Lentz’s chapter and, to a certain extent, Eckert’s show how a perspective on elites can be fruitfully interlinked with a perspective on public bureaucracies (see also Budniok 2012).

Early Administration Studies in Africa:
The Bureaucracy of Underdevelopment and Development

In the 1960s and early 1970s, we also witnessed the beginnings of an African administrative science, mainly in the Anglophone regions of the continent. However, it remained embryonic, and had difficulties in shedding its normative orientations. In fact, a large part of the literature consisted of textbooks for use in the classroom at African universities and intended for the transmission of basic concepts from the administrative sciences to African administrators (cf. Adu 1964, Harris 1965, Blunt 1983, Koehn 1990). If African bureaucracies were studied empirically, more often than not it was from a deficiency perspective: the focus was on what
African bureaucracies were not as compared with an idealized notion of Western bureaucracy (e.g. Oyugi 1985).\textsuperscript{10}

However, a limited number of more empirically grounded works on the ‘bureaucracy of underdevelopment’ also existed which followed the lead given by Riggs (1964) and Kasfir (1969) in comparative administration studies. In terms of their orientation, these works fall into two camps (Leonard 1987: 905): on the one hand were the ‘universalists’ who held that the basic principles of organizational behaviour were the same everywhere, and, on the other hand, there were the ‘environmentalists’ who held that African administrative systems could only be understood through reference to their cultural and political environment (e.g. Price 1975, Hydén 1984). At their most extreme, the universalists would plead for the turn-key import of Western-style management techniques into African bureaucracies. The more extreme environmentalists, on the other hand, saw African public services as essentially unreformable. This led some of them (Bates 1981) to conclude that the only way forward was to reduce state activities to a minimum: public services were not the pre-condition for, but the main barrier to development and had to be replaced, wherever possible, with market mechanisms. This position—later labelled the Washington consensus—was gradually espoused by the World Bank in the 1980s following the so-called Berg report (World Bank 1981).

Adopting a more nuanced position, which integrated ‘universalist’ and ‘environmentalist’ perspectives, and which is compatible with the approaches favoured in this book in many respects, Leonard (1987) pleaded for taking the realities of African public services as well as their social environment into account when proposing reforms from the outside rather than the wholesale import of Western-style management systems. The improvement of existing systems, he argued, was a more promising approach than wholesale replacement.\textsuperscript{11} In this, he argued against the structural amnesia

\textsuperscript{10} The irony here is that this is a contribution to a book which is very critical of over-efficient and over-powering bureaucracy in the West and tends to blame it for all the evils of the modern world, including the impending nuclear holocaust. Oyugi argues the opposite case, however: i.e. that an inefficient and powerless bureaucracy is not a good thing either.

\textsuperscript{11} The dominant form of development intervention is ‘starting from a clean slate’, whereas Leonard argues that it might be more productive “to swim with the current of indigenous morality” (p. 904), a position recently labelled as “going with the grain in African development” (for a similar argument, see already Bierschenk and Elwert 1988). Obviously, the problem is what exactly is meant by “the grain” (or “the current”): traditionalist-culturalist visions (Kelsall 2008) can coexist with much more complex and nuanced ones (Booth 2013).
of the development discourse and for the use of the chequered history of European administrations as an inspiration. A direct influence can be traced from this approach to the focus on ‘pockets of effectiveness’ as discussed by Roll (this volume; see also Roll [forthcoming]).

These early empirically-oriented administration studies are not only interesting because the structuring of the debate does not appear to have changed that much since the 1970s and 1980s. They also gave some interesting methodological leads: at best, we have quantitative studies in which, for example, the Nigerian ombudsman system was compared, in its personnel inputs and its outputs, i.e. in terms of complaints settled, with other such systems in the world (Ayeni 1987).

In any case, this small tradition of organizational studies largely dried up in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is possible to cite three reasons for this: the Marxist paradigm, which became increasingly hegemonic in development sociology, generated more interest in theories of the state than in their empirical analysis; the nationalist one-party systems which dominated Africa at the time rendered access difficult for researchers; and the increasingly severe economic crises that hit the continent made the undertaking of research at many African universities an increasingly unrealistic ambition.

**Recent Studies Carried Out in the Context of Civil Service Reforms**

In the 1990s, the anti-statist Washington Consensus was nuanced by an emphasis on ‘good governance’. Consequently, various attempts were made at implementing public sector reforms in practically all African countries, all of which were essentially donor-driven. The first round of reforms, which was still inspired by the structural adjustment policies imposed on almost all African countries by the IMF since the 1980s, had led to a considerable downsizing of a supposedly overgrown civil service. With the new emphasis on good governance, attempts were made to reform supposedly ‘Weberian’, if imperfect, bureaucracies in accordance with the norms of New Public Management. The principles of tenure and career appointments, promotions based on qualifications, knowledge and seniority as well as that of a unified national civil service were to be

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12 For an example, see the book by Godin (1986) on the “logic of the African state” which is entirely based on Beninese official government pronouncements (e.g., the idea which the Marxist-Leninist regime had of itself) rather than on an empirical investigation of how the Beninese state functioned.
replaced with performance-based pay linked to specific results specified in agreement or quasi-contracts, fixed-term contracts, in particular for top officials, flexible procedures for recruitment and remuneration, the decentralization of management functions, and the unification of private and public labour regimes.

Today, even their promoters generally acknowledge that these reforms have failed (Evans 2008, World Bank 2008). However, this has not stopped the international promotion of the New Public Management package (McCourt and Minogue 2001). Although New Public Management claims to be inspired by a coherent ‘neo-liberal’ ideology, the techniques developed are a stack of disparate prescriptions and axioms arising from the world of Western private enterprise, American economics departments and circles of international experts (Bezes 2008). It is equally surprising how little the reformers know about the public services that they wish to reform, starting from the basic question as to whether these bureaucracies may be called ‘Weberian’ at all—which is, after all, the point of departure of all New Public Management reforms. Most contributions written about public service reforms in Africa over the last 20 years as reports or publications in academic journals have adopted a normative point of view, or rely on non-reliable empirical material like surveys. In many cases, even the statistics are dubious. More often than not, they are also based on poor conceptual approaches, stereotypes about culture, or very aggregate and highly disputable categories.

In other words, the reformers are at a loss to understand the organizational processes concealed behind the perceived deficiencies in the African public service. Bad reform policy is rarely acknowledged and the admission of “weak diagnostic work on the civil service” is even rarer (World Bank 200: xvi). Civil service reform turns out to be a highly ideological enterprise with only a slim empirical basis. It is not at all an example of evidence-based policy, in which the exact identification of problems leads to tailor-made proposals for reform. Instead, it is an attempt at the full-scale transposition of organizational models. These models had been developed elsewhere as a solution to specific problems found elsewhere. Leaving aside the open question as to just how successful New Public Management reforms have been in other parts of the world, it can be argued for the African context that the reforms are a case of solutions looking for problems (Naudet 1999). Bezes (2008: 20) rightly concludes that “New Public Management is often ill-suited to the institutional contexts it is supposed to reform and generates considerable adverse effects in the course of its implementation”. Moreover, with regard to Africa in
particular, it fosters “the development of bureaucratic enclaves in symbiosis with the international consultants but who leave the remainder of the administrative system intact” (ibid.).

This unsatisfactory situation has recently led to calls by political and administrative scientists for a more empirically grounded and more theoretically relevant study of African bureaucracies (Darbon 1985, Copans 2001). While only a few political and administrative scientists (Rzafindrakoto and Roubaud 2001) have responded to this challenge, it is taken up by the authors of this book, most of them anthropologists. The paradoxes of reform in particular are dealt with by several of the authors (Anders, Bierschenk, Chabi Imorou, Charton, Hamani, Muñoz), while Bergamaschi examines the ambiguous role of outside intervention in the reform process.

Anthropology and African Public Services

Within anthropology, up to the early 1990s, the few studies dealing directly and, more often, indirectly with African administrations or, more generally, the administrations in countries of the South, focused on the colonial state and its post-colonial extension in the early years of independence. It was only from the 1980s, and particularly from the 1990s, that a larger number of studies emerged, very often from the new anthropology of development, that approached various aspects of the state and public services from an empirical perspective and along the same lines as the work undertaken for this book.

In post-evolutionist anthropology, starting with Malinowski and Boas, the state was not initially an explicit topic. The great merit of this anthropology was to have shown, instead, that—contrary to what the European state theorists believed—political order is possible without the state. This anthropological discovery was made by Evans-Pritchard in southern Sudan (Evans-Pritchard 1940, see also Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940) and Edmond Leach (1954) in the highlands of Burma (see also Middleton and Tait 1958). Therefore, while not an explicit object of research, the state was always present as a major philosophical issue in the background of this early political-anthropological research. In this philosophical and indirect sense it may be said, therefore, that the state was the midwife of modern political anthropology. However, in line with the original—19th century—division of work between sociology and anthropology (see the introduction to Wolf 1982), most anthropologists, in continental Europe at least, remained much more interested in ‘traditional’ forms of politics. As
George Balandier (1951) expressed it in his thundering critique, they were “fleeing the present”.

Since the 1930s, however, British anthropology had extended its range of interest from ‘traditional societies’ to more contemporary topics based on a mixture of practical concerns (of colonial rule) and academic interests (Asad 1973, Parkin 1990). (As we have already pointed out, a similar shift towards the modern world took place in North American anthropology, albeit directed towards US society.) This growing concern with social change in the colonies was accompanied by a shift of attention from the Pacific to Africa, and from economic to political anthropology. The shift was indicated by the establishment of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (now known as the International Africa Institute) in 1926, and by Malinowski’s growing interest, in his post-Trobriand phase, in issues like “practical anthropology” (Malinowski 1929), “culture contact” and “culture change” (Malinowski 1938, 1945). In the wake of this movement, and with the object of scientifically accompanying the modernization of colonial rule, the Rhodes Livingstone Institute was founded in Northern Rhodesia (today’s Zambia) in 1938 for the purpose of studying social change in the colony. This was followed by the foundation of the East African Institute for Social Research (EAISR) in Kampala in 1950. In other words, anthropologists in both the RLI and the EAISR tried to work out a scientific base for public policies.

However, these ‘modernist’ British anthropologists were not interested in the (modern) state as such, but studied around the state, at its margins. When they were interested in modern forms of politics—as was the case with the Manchester school, whose shop floor studies have already been referred to above—it was mainly on the local level and with a focus on the articulation between traditional and modern forms of politics (Evens and Handelman 2006). The transformation of the chieftaincy and its conflictive relationship with modern government structures was a favoured subject (Mair 1936, Gluckman 1948, Fallers 1955, 1956, Southwold 1960). This is also true of French Africanist research, in any case the studies developed under the influence of George Balandier (1951), who drew a

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13 The question of the origin of the state remained a topic tackled by evolutionist anthropologists like Elman Service (1962), Robert L. Carneiro (1967) and Lawrence Krader (1968). For an overview of this field, see Wright (1977). There were also anthropologists like Nadel (1942), Goody (1971), Terray (1974, 1988) and Southall (1988) who were interested in pre-modern states. This sometimes led to a search for the ‘survival’ of certain of their traits in modern times and their colonial or pre-colonial origins.
large part of his inspiration from the Manchester School. In the course of this research, political anthropology developed important concepts like clientelism, networks, political arenas, etc., which were later adopted by sociology and political science. Anthropology also developed particular competence in the study of the informal side of politics (Olivier de Sardan, this volume).

Ethnographic accounts of African public services, on the other hand, were rare. One exception is Eames’s (1986) highly personal, ethnographic account of encounters in the Nigerian bureaucracy, in which she developed a notion of neo-patrimonialism, independent of Médard’s (1982) famous conceptualization which the latter had adopted from Eisenstadt (1973) (see also Therkildsen, Willott, in this volume). Another early example of an ethnographic approach to African public services is found in the work of Cohen (1980), who identified the different ‘patterns’ characteristic of the Nigerian bureaucracy and demonstrated their links with the former colonial state.

Indirectly influenced by the Manchester School, the anthropology of development constituted another door to the empirical study of the state and public services in Africa. Anxious to break away from the culturalist-traditionalist tropism of main-stream continental anthropology, some researchers took the interventions associated with development as their main points of access to the study of African modernity. They were thus reacting to the omnipresence of development discourses among public actors, the controlling of the rural population by development projects and a growing demand for expertise in the social sciences by the development institutions. Hence, a new research paradigm emerged, in particular in African studies, that considered the development projects as arenas, in which different strategic groups confronted each other (Bierschenk and Elwert 1988), analysed the interfaces between two worlds which mobilized very different types of knowledge (Long 1989, Long and Long 1992), and applied a deliberately non-normative, non-culturalist and empirical perspective (Olivier de Sardan 2005a). While the old anthropology of development was centred on ‘culture contact’ (Malinowski 1945, Herskovits 1958, Bastide 1973), this new anthropology of development was characterized by an approach centred on the ‘entanglement of social logics’, which included both the development institutions and the target populations as objects of study. It differed markedly from other types of anthropology of development that were emerging at the same time and were based either on a ‘deconstructionist’ or normative approach (Bierschenk 2008a).
The new anthropology of development, which mostly concerned African contexts and initially focused on development projects as the archetypal form of development mechanism in the period 1970–80, gradually expanded to encompass the entire palette of development interventions, from the ‘brokers’ to the agents of development and development bureaucracies, and from NGOs and decentralized cooperation to decentralization and public policies. However, in the face of the continued tendency of aid flows (particularly since the Paris Declaration in 2005) to pass through the states and their machinery, the overlaps between development interventions and state interventions, the growing adoption of a policy approach by donors, and the entanglement of state and development bureaucracies, the anthropology of development in Africa expanded quite naturally and has gradually transformed into an anthropology of public spaces and public action, which adopts both public policy interventions and the interventions by development institutions as the same object of study (Olivier de Sardan 2005b). After all, development policies are merely a particular form of public policy that are designed, managed and financed from outside a country but implemented within it with the direct or indirect support and instrumental use (and sometimes resistance) of national public actors (Bergamaschi, this volume).

From the 1990s, an increasing number of empirical studies emerging from the anthropology of development were carried out on African administrations. In other words, the classical methods of anthropology (qualitative approaches, fieldwork, participant observation, interviews, etc.), which were used in the context of development studies, are now used to investigate topics that are usually the concern of political science, the administrative sciences and management sciences. Some of this

14 On brokers, see Bierschenk, Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan (2000), Lewis and Mosse (2006); on development agents, see Long (1989), Olivier de Sardan and Paquot (1989), Arce (1993), Mongbo (1995); on development bureaucracies, see Quarles van Ufford, Kruyt and Downing (1988), Harrison (2003), Rottenburg (2009); on NGOs and decentralized cooperation, see Jacob and Lavigne Delville (1994), Marie (2005); on decentralization and public policies, see Laurent (1995), Blundo (1998), Mosse (2004, 2005), Fay, Koné and Quiminal (2006). This progressive expansion is mirrored by the content of the APAD Bulletin (Euro-African Association for the Anthropology of Change and Development, Ed. Lit, Münster), which is representative of a considerable proportion of this new anthropology of development in various respects. While the history of APAD is relatively well documented, the parallel and partly overlapping history of the EIDOS network in development anthropology still needs to be recorded in writing.
recent anthropological research has focused on specific areas of public action and the state like health, education, the judiciary, the police and others.\textsuperscript{15} Other studies also based on ethnographic fieldwork present, instead, cross-sectional analyses of the ‘everyday’ life of African administrations and states.\textsuperscript{16} This book is a direct extension of these recent studies and benefits from their findings.

This emerging anthropology of public policies and state bureaucracies is based on theoretical and methodological perspectives which are similar to those that marked the ‘entanglement of social logics’ paradigm in the anthropology of development: i.e. the focus on the diversity of actors’ rationales, the non-normative perspective, the primacy accorded to empirical investigation, the use of multi-site team-based research.

There is another advance that is also worth highlighting. Following some of its precursors, the European anthropology of development had become interested in, among other things, the gap between a development project on paper, i.e. the way in which it presented itself in its documentation, its planning and methods, on the one hand, and the actual development project as it unfolded ‘for real’ and on the ground, on the other. In other words, it demonstrated the divergences between the objectives of a development project and its actual implementation. One of the most interesting mechanisms it discovered in this context was the ‘hijacking’ of development projects under the impact of different logics and multiple actor strategies (Bierschenk 1988, Olivier de Sardan 1988, Smith 2003). The emerging anthropology of public action has likewise taken the policy-implementation gap as one of its main topics of interest.


The importance of the divergences between the official norms and the behaviour of public actors is, in effect, a frequently highlighted characteristic of African bureaucracies and is particularly evident in the case of the ‘interface’ or ‘street-level’ bureaucracies. However, this is nothing more than a particular instance of the universal divergences that can be observed between all kinds of social prescriptions and actor behaviours (Olivier de Sardan, this volume).

Concerning Africa, the social sciences, in general, and anthropology, in particular, remained particularly reticent when it came to investigating the unexpected effects of state intervention. It is true that the creative or adaptive practices of actors developed in response to the constraints imposed on them, their tactics and strategies, their ruses and disputes, and their non-conformist, deviant, or marginal behaviours, have been studied nonetheless by anthropologists, but such a perspective was largely restricted to the domain of informality (Meagher 2010), in other words outside bureaucracies or formal organizations. The emerging research paradigm advocated in this book involves studying informality inside the state as well as the gaps between public policies and their implementation or between official norms and actual behaviour.

**Anthropology of Public Bureaucracies or Anthropology of the State?**

While anthropologists have been working on state-phenomena one way or another for a long time without calling it an ‘anthropology of the state’ (apart from the evolutionist anthropologists, see footnote 13), articles and

17 There are two books that used the term ‘anthropology of the state’ in their titles at a relatively early stage, however they both use this term differently to the way it is used here. Fallers (1974) is an attempt to show what anthropology can contribute to the comparative perspective on nation-building, which had become the interest of the new discipline of comparative politics, indicated by names like Shils, Almond, Verba and (the early) Geertz. The interest of this book for the perspective pursued here lies less on a thematic than on a methodological level: First, in his definition of anthropology as “science of the everyday, the ordinary” (p. 10) by which the anthropology “take(s) note of matters…that to other social scientists may seem trivial” (p. 11), second, in his refutation of the common assumption that anthropological methods are particular suited to “traditional” (in the sense of “custom-bound”) societies while those of the political scientist and the sociologist are more appropriate to “modern” societies” (p. 17), and, finally, in his plea for the interdisciplinary cooperation of anthropologists with what he calls “comparative macro-sociology” (in his case largely inspired by Weber) (p. 15ff.): “One cannot”, he writes, “study an elephant armed only with a microscope” (p. 20). Abélès’s (1990) book likewise is
books in which the terms ‘anthropology’ or ‘ethnography’ are combined with that of ‘state’ have become somewhat more common since shortly before the turn of the millennium; these started with articles (Gupta 1995, Masquelier 2001, Trouillot 2001, Ferguson and Gupta 2002) and were followed by several edited volumes (Hansen and Stepputat 2001, Das and Poole 2004, Krohn-Hansen and Nustadt 2005) and a topical reader (Sharma and Gupta 2006). We share an interest in establishing and defining a new field for anthropology with these authors. However, the research stream of which this book is an expression differs from the theoretical orientations and methodological approaches adopted in many of these texts. In particular, these studies do not all share our empirical focus. While we are interested in state apparatuses and their actors, their practices and their emic point of view, most of the recent literature on the ‘anthropology of the state’ prefers to stay in the ‘margins’ of, or ‘beside’, the state (Das and Poole 2004, Bellagamba and Klute 2008). Thus, it follows a classical reflex of anthropology which has always favoured the periphery. This has resulted in interesting work which draws attention to the governmental and non-governmental continuum as well as formal and informal political structures. The state (with a varying presence and reach) exists within this continuum as one of several actors, in addition to and/or in interaction or confrontation with a range of other political actors (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1997, 2003). However, to subsume all these actors under the heading of ‘state’ renders the notion of the state co-existent with all political forces, if not society itself.

In other words, starting from the valuable insight that the borders of the state are contested, some authors appear to conclude that there are no borders at all, and that an anthropology of the state in a stricter sense (as attempted in this book) might as well be replaced by an anthropology of governing processes in general. We argue that in such an approach the notion of the state becomes a totalizing concept by which, in the final analysis, it is impossible to think the ‘outside’ of the state, or the ‘non-state’. Used in this broad and overextended fashion, the concept of the state is not a tool for empirical analysis, as the authors in this book try to employ it, but, to paraphrase Martin (2002) and his search for OPNI, ‘objets politiques non identifiés’, it becomes instead a UTO, i.e. an ‘unidentified theoretical object’.

not on the state, but is an introduction to (and plea for) political anthropology ‘at home’ (in this case, France), with examples drawn from the author’s own research interests, e.g. elections, local politics, rituals and political language.
The theoretical referents for these totalizing approaches are, of course, mainly Foucault (2007) and his concepts of bio-power and governmentality, and sometimes also Gramsci (1971) with his notions of hegemony and the integral state. These were authors who were less interested in the state as an ensemble of concrete actors, institutions and practices, however loosely articulated, but instead in broad macro-historical processes with a clear focus on Europe. Foucault’s totalizing concept of power is particularly resistant to operationalization for empirical research. One of the effects of the predominant reference to Foucault found in some of the recent ‘anthropology of the state’ literature has also been to reduce the notion of the state to its political, regulatory and disciplinary practices as opposed to other functions like service delivery. This gives the impression that, in some works, the excessive referencing of Foucault and other master-thinkers, taken out of time and place, does not connote a critical and productive use of theoretical categories for empirical analysis (Bierschenk 2009). Instead, it serves the function of labelling as a strategy of academic identity politics. This becomes particularly obvious when the reference to Foucault is paralleled by an occasionally obsessive attempt to ‘disprove’ Weber, within a frame of reference in which Weber is presented as an ‘affirmative’, Foucault as a ‘critical’ thinker. This strategy is often based on an ignorance of Weber’s original texts, and can only be explained by the very selective and biased reception of Weber in the US where his oeuvre is often reduced to Parsonian functional sociology (Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope 1975; on Weber, see Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, Introduction, this volume). The differences between Foucault and Weber are also more often than not overstated in this form of academic identity politics, whereas in fact they share many perspectives.18

As far back as 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (p. 146f.) criticized an overly philosophical, essentializing tradition in (US) anthropology and

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18 For both, the empirical referents are late capitalism and the advanced liberal societies of Europe (not of the Global South); for both, state power is part of a wider regime of power; for both the macro-historical process of state-formation is perceived as being embedded in larger processes of disciplining and social control; for both, regimes of rules are largely actor-less; for both, consent (Weber: legitimation, Foucault: fashioning of subjectivities) is a central problem of domination; and both see the rule of the expert as a signature of modernity. As we have already pointed out (Introduction, this volume), Weber was very critical of modern bureaucratized capitalism (an “iron cage”) but, unlike Marx, he saw its dominance as inevitable (thus again resembling Foucault). It could also be argued that, without more precise operationalization, Foucault’s concept of governmentality is of limited use for empirical analysis as it conflates three pre-existing concepts which had been well established in sociology or psychology (‘domination’, ‘social control’ and the ‘super-ego’ of Freud) in one rather diffuse complex.
argued for the study of social behaviour (‘customs’) which were seen as “variable, particular, plural, and empirical”. It is remarkable how much an important strand of contemporary anthropology continues to shy away from empirical engagements but instead aims to produce an often second-hand philosophy. In any case, among the social sciences today, anthropology is probably the one that refers the most to the philosophical fashions of the moment: Agamben and Butler today, Foucault, Deleuze, Gramsci yesterday or the day before yesterday, and Wittgenstein the day before that. We interpret this as a strategy for defending the discursive authority of a discipline which, in the aftermath of decolonization, has lost its ‘natural’ object and a unifying theory (Asad 1973). In the case of the anthropology of the state, this dissolution of anthropology into a more or less speculative social theory is all the more remarkable as it shows no interest in, or is simply unaware of, major achievements in the empirical sociology of organization and bureaucracy in the Global North (to which we referred above). This ignorance appears to us to be largely the effect of a peculiar, North American disciplinary constellation. It has, however, the unfortunate effect of creating within some of ‘the anthropology of the state’ literature a tendency to re-invent the wheel and to present certain truisms of organizational sociology as more innovative findings than they really are: i.e. that organizations are not regulated exclusively on the basis of their formal rules, but that informal state actions are always based on a combination of formal and informal practices; that there is a difference between policy formulation and implantation, or between the formulation of law and the application of law; that state agents interpret new rules in the light of their professional experiences and corporate interests; etc. In our view, this ignorance of empirical organizational and professional sociology leads to a tendency to exoticize states of the South by comparing actual practices in the South with an idealized notion of how things work in the North.

Conclusions: Towards an Ethnography of Modern States in Africa

Over the last two decades, an interest has progressively emerged in more empirically grounded analyses of statehood in Africa, in ethnographic studies of state actors, state institutions, state professions and state-making and unmaking processes, and in investigations of the many logics underlying these practices and interactions. Both the growing attendance at
panels we organized on such topics at international conferences between 2007 and 2011 and the increasing number of doctoral theses compiled and defended by African and European scholars on these themes testify to this emerging research paradigm.

This chapter has attempted to localize this emerging paradigm within academic debates and the achievements of social science. The objective of this book is to respond to the call made by Lorenz von Stein to empirically study the state at work, from a neo-Weberian perspective and using ethnographic methods (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, Introduction, this volume). Irrespective of the undeniably changing configurations of governance, law and the state, we believe—to paraphrase Karl Marx—that people have spent too much time essentializing or deconstructing the state in Africa and beyond in search for an evanescent entity, and that it is time to study it empirically. What we are interested in are the apparatuses of states, the practices of public bureaucrats and their emic perceptions, and the implementation of public policies. We are not interested in finding out ‘how the state sees’ (à la Scott 1998), but how public bureaucrats see their world, how they are perceived by the citizens to which they deliver services (Blundo, this volume), and how they deal on a routine basis with their hierarchy, their colleagues, other non-state institutions, and the users of public services.

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