African State Formations

Since independence, the state has had a complex and controversial status in the literature on African politics. Described as failed, weak, ‘of the belly’, extroverted, multiple, (neo)colonial, criminal - and sometimes all of these at once - defining the state has become a polemical and fraught terrain in African studies. The aim of this reading group is to survey some of the classic treatments of the African state, asking how they theorize the history and formation of the state, the relation between the state and the market, the place of violence in state formations, the boundaries and borders of states, the politics of informality, and the potential futures of the state in Africa.

Week 1
• Jean-Francois Bayart “The Politics of the Belly” (from The State in Africa 1993)
• Jean-Francois Bayart “Africa in the World: a history of extraversion” (African Affairs 2000)

Week 2
• Pierre Englebert “Introduction” and “State Legitimacy and Developmental Capacity” (from State Legitimacy and Development in Africa 2000)
• Crawford Young “The Imperial Legacy of State Traditions” and “The Afterlife of the African Colonial State” (from The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective 1994)

Week 3
• Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz “W(h)ither the State?” and “The Political Instrumentalization of Disorder” (from Africa Works 1999)
• Jean-Francois Bayart, Stephen Ellis and Beatrice Hibou “From Kleptocracy to the Felonious State?” (from The criminalization of the state in Africa 1999)

Week 4
• William Reno “The Privatization of Sovereignty and the Survival of Weak States” (from Privatizing the State 1999)
• Mark Duffield “Introduction: the new development-security terrain” and “Non-Liberal Political Complexes and the New Wars” (from Global Governance and the New Wars 2001)

Week 5
• Catherine Boone “Introduction” and “Mapping Political Topography in Africa” (from Political Topographies of the African State 2003)
• Beatrice Hibou “From Privatizing the Economy to Privatizing the State: an analysis of the continual formation of the state” (from Privatizing the State 1999)