

03.2018



Brief

The Hybrid State Destatization and Neopatrimonialism: key concepts for understanding international relations

Veronica Ronchi

Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei (FEEM)

Abstract

FEEM Brief

Substantial changes in the recent history of international relations between global economic and political forces call for a reflection on the reconfiguration and reorganization of the international political system. Typical of this context is the complex process of destatization, described by Linz, which stems from the crisis in the State and the concept of sovereignty determined by the growing interdependence of international relations. Key to the understanding of destatization is Eisenstadt's concept of neopatrimonialism: institutional modernization is not a linear but a multiple process that nurtures hybridization and the selective absorption of change. These concepts form the basis for a reflection on the topics currently characterizing political shifts in sub-Saharan Africa, a subcontinent that is experimenting with some of the most original forms of governance in the world.

01

The Weberian state

The Weberian definition of the State dominated theoretical debate and social sciences in the 20th century. This definition preserves the fundamental features of the concept of statehood. An institutional undertaking of a political nature is a state “if and insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds a claim on the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order”. According to Weber, a modern state is an institutional power group that has successfully achieved a monopoly over the use of legitimate physical force as a means of power within a given territory and to this end has concentrated the objective means of exercising power in the hands of its leaders.

However, in the 1970s, some pillars of this definition started to crumble, beginning with the concept of monopoly.

Nowadays, the focus is on the multiple legal systems that support or replace the monopoly of state law.

In particular, in the words of Shmuel Eisenstadt, “while the political centre of the nation state continues to be the major arena for the distribution of resources, it no longer constitutes the major focus of the charismatic dimensions and utopian orientations of various social movements – or of large sectors of society”.

02

Destatization

In the noughties, the proliferation of imploding states overwhelmed by conflict, interference of all kinds and the simultaneous, paradoxical emergence of a “terrorist” state that turns its back on international law and seeks legitimacy in religion are symptomatic of a radical change that can be referred to as destatization.

The phenomenon has extremely diverse

repercussions stemming from a general meltdown of the State and the concept of sovereignty resulting from a loss of order that makes international relations even more interdependent. In particular, for non-Western states, destatization accentuates problems that became established in the period of decolonization. This process led to the creation of officially independent states with clear

references to Western models of governance but did not encourage the economic independence and administrative autonomy typical of such systems.

The distinguishing feature of destatization is a failed attempt to impose (often through “humanitarian” wars) principles declared by the West to be universal – primarily democratic values – even though they actually favour the construction of systems that are economically dominated by Western countries. One typical outcome is individuals and legal entities being deprived of collective rights and economic

freedoms during the process of globalization in decolonized countries.

Many of the “imperfect democracies” or “quasi democracies” catalogued in recent years by international research institutes have also undergone a decline in quality or have become populist electoral regimes, losing any trace of liberalism. Illiberal political cultures very often develop in the opposite direction to democratic institutions and end up by smothering and distorting the latter.

03 A new phase



Although such processes have been on the radar since the early 1970s, the momentum of contemporary events has now carried us to a new phase: destatization is no longer a phenomenon affecting isolated cases but the prevailing trend in international relations. While destatization was typical of specific geographic areas or specific economic characteristics (for example in oil exporting economies), nowadays the phenomenon is fundamentally independent, general and widespread within the context of international relations.

The failure of non-Western state systems in recent years (Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Ukraine, Afghanistan and so on) clearly highlights a phase of destabilization and

applies to entire areas. We need only think of the Middle East and the recent and dramatic actions played out with the aim of imposing Western dominion over areas in that destatized arena.

The State is therefore affected by increasing fragmentation and above all (this is something new) a composition that shifts constantly according to which actors and regions have an impact on the international scenario at any given time. Although we have not yet reached the point of questioning the relevance of the State in the international political arena or suggesting that it has had its day, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the current disjointed configuration opens up significant

opportunities for a multifaceted world of actors that bears no relation to the structure of the

State as it was defined during the mid-19th-century.

04 Lack of global governance

The “cohesion” referred to when speaking of globalization is finely balanced on economic and financial issues. Goods and capital therefore circulate with ease (despite the long crisis we are experiencing that has proved resistant to enforced protectionist measures). On the other hand, specifically liberal and democratic forms of the international political system have been derailed by a failure to share solutions and even the way problems are perceived in the great global maelstrom that emphasizes differences and schisms within different international state contexts instead of similarities and convergences.

The world is pervaded by the rules of market economy, yet lacks equally resilient political values. Peculiarities, regionalisms and local political identities inevitably take precedence over shared systems and a unified State approach. The only element that still seems to be universal is religion or a moral belief system (for example Confucianism), which nowadays appear to be much stronger factors of identity than Western political systems.

Economic and financial globalization unites the world but the governance movements that have arisen from this process are multifaceted

and polycentric. It is hoped that these political configurations and the “emerging countries” where they are taking place will rise up and lead us out of the serious global crisis toward solid and lasting overall recovery.

The segmentation and polycentrism characteristic of political systems today challenge the common theme of global governance and world order so aptly outlined by Kissinger. Many actors are involved and the idea of a single centre based on the US empire or the bipolar world of the Cold War is being swept away by a multipolar process built around several players subject to changing allegiances and sudden swerves of direction. Globalization has always sought a centre, but nowadays “independentist” forces break away from this perspective and global challenges do not give rise to global policies or responses: there is no unity of action because the available political instruments are inadequate. Even though States understand current trends, they are often unwilling to pay the price of presenting a united front (the issue of migrants in Europe is one example of this).

05

Neopatrimonialism

As we question the legal concept of state sovereignty, we have moved from a transitive concept of power (power as a command that travels from a prevailing will to a submissive will, whatever the reasons for that submission) to an intransitive concept of power (power as a fluid that flows through subjects but is not used by them as a resource – according to the opposing definitions proposed by Arendt and Foucault).

The Weberian approach nevertheless lives on, albeit in somewhat battered form (and moves to redefine the “Weberian paradigm” are apparent from several quarters).

One example of its survival is the concept of neopatrimonialism and related studies. Neopatrimonialism is a hybrid form of administration in which elements of traditional (patrimonial) authority blend and merge with elements of legal and rational authority as well as those of charismatic power.

This amounts to the private appropriation of public rights (Breuer 1996, 532).

State administrations also ultimately have a private side, particularly when recruitment is not based on specific qualifications and competences but on trust, nepotism and patronage. This presupposes that decisions are guided not by objective written rules but

by personal discretion. This means that the State is administered through misappropriation of public means, rules and rights, with concessions allocated as perks instead of through official channels.

Weber and the classical analysts believed that this type of administration, typical of relationships prior to the Bismarckian concept of State, was destined to become outdated with the advent of modernity (rule of law, market economy, bourgeois and industrial society) and the spread of a rational and legal model of bureaucracy centred on the impersonality of command (principle of legality) and specialist competence (principle of effectiveness). They believed that such elements would eventually be extended to systems recognized as less-developed and untouched by the rise of market economy and modern institutions. However, key features of patrimonialism have proved to be very resilient, even in modern bureaucracies and businesses, since they depend to a significant extent on cultures and symbolic systems of reference that are not the exclusive preserve of developing countries (the Mafia are a good example).

Back in 1973, Eisenstadt warned us that institutional modernization is not a linear process but multiple, and fuels hybridizations and selective absorption of changes. According to this approach, the specific disease of

constitutional democracy is not authoritarian regression but the patrimonialization of power (appropriating parts of the state apparatus for personal ends, while maintaining the form of a “democracy”).

Espousing the concept of neopatrimonialism therefore means rejecting a unilinear view of Western modernization and attempting to find

a new way of accounting for the complex way big public and private organizations operate in contemporary society. Traditional and modern powers combine to create mixed groupings. The risk of distortion is high, as we can infer from the constant reference to degenerate phenomena such as nepotism, cronyism and corruption, conflict of interest, bending the law to obtain privileges and so on.

06

The strength of tradition as a political vehicle

Traditions never disappear altogether. They fall in and out of favour and are reinvented, but in the melting pot of globalization they can nevertheless add legitimacy to cases of community identification (ethnic factions and groups, not state or national collectives).

Faith in the impersonality and rationalism of monocratically-organized arrangements (based on a model of classic bureaucracy) collapsed when faced by a world that values cross-contaminated, fragmented subsystemic approaches that give rise to a variegated and patchy structure that determines the fate of world governance and power systems.

Recent history suggests that the time is ripe for the emergence of non-legitimized powers that openly challenge techniques for neutralizing and controlling conflict developed by modern states on a legislative, administrative and legal level as well as on a symbolic level.

Uprisings by regions, metropolitan areas, ethnic enclaves, impoverished suburbs and rootless populations will represent a great challenge to State orders that cling onto Weberian modernity and they will ultimately lead to scenarios that offer a better fit than the formal rigidity of those tired old structures.

07

Sub-Saharan Africa

State resistance

References to Africa as a future development ground for the global economy are pointless and often trivial: it is over simplistic to say that the demographic boom creates new markets to support development. It certainly encourages internal growth and attracts investment, though this is commonly characterized by confusion, particularly from a Western viewpoint, which is often influenced by proto-colonialism.

Africa is growing – in a tumultuous, disorderly and often violent fashion. Yet it is growing in more than size: its population, economic capacity, infrastructure and GDP are getting bigger while its politics, policies and models of democracy and governance are trying to keep pace with the growth through a process of trial and error that is often controversial but can still be justified because the history of autonomy and independence is still fresh in everyone's minds.

Although extensive literature on the subject has challenged the idea of Western-style states in African contexts, the Weberian state model lingers stubbornly on. Despite the short history of independence and the difficult legacies of colonialism, which still dominates economically, the subcontinent is still officially controlled by state systems. Only Somalia has broken down into different entities and its hoped-for recomposition is still the subject of continuous

negotiation. Authentically secessionist movements are rare in the recent history of independent Africa even though some have returned (Katanga, Biafra). However, there are many cases of resolved conflicts (Mozambique, Angola), although the resulting peace is sometimes precarious (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo). In Sudan, there have been regional conflicts (South Sudan) and some are still ongoing (Darfur).

African patrimonialism

Africa remains a continent scarred by conflicts, most of which are devastating and long-lasting, thus emphasizing the problems suffered by those who are the losers in globalization. In such contexts, wars over raw materials (for example the Ogoni in Nigeria) are important because they destabilize States that are rich in natural resources through progressive socioeconomic impoverishment, deepening great inequalities where there is already a gulf between the wealth and privilege of a few people in positions of power and authority and the many who are increasingly caught up in an unstoppable drift toward poverty. At the same time, we are seeing the consolidation of divisions and hierarchies of identity that often underlie fierce competition over resources.

This competition forms the basis of “African patrimonialism”. This type of regime assumes that the head of government (usually a president) retains authority through a system of patronage. The payoff for public officials is the chance to take advantage of opportunities offered by public institutions and the control of society (“prebendal regime”). Some variants of African neopatrimonialism stemming from this symptomatic situation have been identified in public life and history: “personal dictatorships”, “military oligarchies”, “mono-party plebiscite systems” and “competitive one-party systems”.

Forms of representation and new scenarios

Alongside these classic systems of neopatrimonialism, Africa is also increasingly seeking forms of government that combine representativeness and efficiency, especially regarding the spread of market economy and the role of companies and economic activities. One such example is the construction of Silicon Savannah, a state-of-the-art technological ecosystem that reaches out effectively to all of Kenya (businesses, universities and local institutions). State transformation is awaited in Africa; the relationship between tribes, regional autonomies, the Nation-State, supranational organizations and businesses is ever-shifting and characterized by a grass-roots, non-ideological quest for effectiveness and efficiency with the exception of certain differences of opinion that have had their day.

This overlapping of “structures” leads to “fluid” consequences in the words of Zygmunt Baumann: the sense of tribal belonging is still strong, especially in social and familial relationships. This perception is reinforced by the language that each tribe retains and still uses, particularly in “closed” relationships within a limited social group. The sense of belonging affects personal events, from marriages to funerals, but also strengthens business relationships and, all too often, political groupings. The sense of tribal belonging is becoming diluted through the generations but is still strong and widespread.

The tribal system and the relationship between African intermediary bodies and the institutions are the focus of debate between anthropologists and political scientists, who are curious to see which governance models are being adopted under the auspices of the central state as an alternative to power systems historically characterized by nepotism, patronage and clan alliances. One interesting case is the return of chefferie in Ghana. This phenomena is linked to the diaspora and the return of people educated abroad who take on the symbolic role of mediators between communities and prevailing development systems.

Tribes, states-in-waiting, federative autonomies, historical and cultural ties with colonizers, international roles, participation in the development of global capitalism: everything is going on at the same time in Africa, making for very interesting scenarios of change.

It would be worthwhile to revisit the history of interactions between Africa and Europe to highlight the consistent agency of the Africans and their ability to create new forms by reviving and reworking elements borrowed from outside. We are accustomed to thinking of Africans as dominated and exploited, but this viewpoint highlights the benefits of contact, cross-contamination and cultural relations.

Given this scenario, FEEM seeks to reflect on the most innovative aspects of power systems in sub-Saharan Africa.

FEEM's contribution to the reflection

To this end, FEEM is organizing a lecture cycle. The first is entitled “Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: the Role of Intermediate State Powers in Economic Growth” and will take place on 24 May. The lecturer is Funké Michaels, Edward S. Mason Fellow at Harvard University and Nairobi University. Abstract of the lecture: Over the last decade, the important economic growth of the African continent, in terms of significant increase in foreign investments, digitization and domestic markets, is seen with hope. However, there are many countries scarred by permanent conflicts, in others the cultural and educational structures of the State or civil society are weak, while in the more stable countries there are important imbalances and inequalities that clash with the Sustainable Development Goals contemplated by the 2030 Agenda. Within this vast scenario, the role of the state in Africa is hybrid and changing: the tribal system, the chefferie and the relationship between intermediate state powers and institutions are the central theme of this lecture. The focus is on governance models adopted under the aegis of the central state with respect to power systems historically accustomed to nepotism, patronage and clan alliances and their relations with the penetration of the market economy.

In autumn 2018 there will be a second lecture entitled “Power systems in Ghana: the chefferie and its mechanisms”. The lecturer is Naruja Kleist, Senior researcher, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) -Global Transformations research unit. Abstract of the lecture: Appointment of traditional authorities with an international migrant background has become an important trend in Ghana. Such ‘return chiefs’ are expected to bring development and modernization, but as former international migrants they are also seen as potentially estranged from local customs and realities. As presumed guardians of tradition, they are thus placed in a situation that poses a range of dilemmas over legitimacy and public authority. Return chiefs are in an ambivalent position between the domains of tradition and modernity and they endeavour to overcome this dilemma through emphasizing their foundation in tradition as well as by using their professional and international experience to spur local development and modernize the chieftaincy institution. Return chiefs thus simultaneously practise and invoke the traditional and the modern. In this way, the transformation of chieftaincy is embedded in both local and global contexts. Return chiefs go beyond local customs to bring development and innovation to their areas, mobilizing international networks, touring European and North American countries, and collaborating with international development agencies, NGOs, and migrants. Their practices are thus at once local and global, and the lecture calls for inclusion of both perspectives in contemporary chieftaincy studies.

The FEEM journal *Equilibri* is another tool for expanding on themes of destatization and neopatrimonialism. The 2/2018 issue aims at analysing these processes of transformation to explain the complex dynamics that lead the political elites to voluntarily reform the system or to

create social, economic or cultural areas that are out of the State's control, based on studies on the transformation of democracies by Juan Linz.

The academics involved in this issue of the journal are Italian and foreign analysts discussing topics of destatization and neopatrimonialism. In comparative studies, neopatrimonialism has been seen as a variant of non-democratic regimes and it has recently been related to an analysis of democratic transitions and hybrid regimes. The issue will focus specifically on sub-Saharan Africa with a comparative section on Latin America and Asia.

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Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei

Corso Magenta 63, Milano – Italia

Tel. +39 02.520.36934

Fax. +39.02.520.36946

E-mail: letter@feem.it

www.feem.it

