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Africa's illiberal state-builders

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List of abbreviations

EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola)
RPF	Rwanda Patriotic Front
TPLF	Tigrayan People's Liberation Front

1 Introduction

The African state has long been at the centre of debates among scholars and policy-makers, whether in trying to explain the broken postcolonial dreams of inclusive development, the surge in violent conflict in the 1990s, or Africa's troubled engagement with the outside world. The African state is almost universally considered to be a failure; antagonistic state-society relations and an inability to maintain control and implement policies over the entire territory are linked to the weakness of the state. The ambitions of the decolonisation era of the likes of Nkrumah, Nasser and Nyerere were painfully derailed from the late 1960s onwards, before being liquidated in the economic storms of the '70s and '80s. The initial renewed euphoria after the end of the Cold War and the spread of multi-partyism on the continent soon subsided; elections brought novelty, but seldom fundamental change. Despite rapid economic growth in the first decade of the 2000s, the 'problem' with the African state remains; faltering leadership and a lack of vision rank as the most commonly heard complaints among Africans and outsiders alike.

Since the early 1990s, three paradigms on the trajectory of the African state have competed for academic and policy pre-eminence. They are different in every regard (and doubtless have explanatory power for some experiences) except for their collective understanding of contemporary sub-Saharan Africa as a context where serious state-building agendas have no place. Firstly, there is the liberal paradigm. In its Panglossian versions it portrays African states marching inexorably towards a bright future, temporarily slowed by violent growing pains, but converging on the liberal-democratic model. Even more realistic narratives show a remarkable poverty of ideas about contemporary Africa and an inability to think of it in less clichéd ways. This is typically the case of Western donors privately sceptical about Africa's potential for liberal-democratic convergence but who nonetheless invariably recommend (and ostensibly give donor money towards) the expansion of markets and democracy. This perspective always makes sense of African domestic politics through the prism of the democratisation paradigm[1] and presents economic policy prescriptions as centred on iterations of the (post-)Washington Consensus.

The liberal paradigm is particularly applied to countries recovering from conflict, to the extent that it is uncritically assumed to be the only game in town: as a major survey recently argued, 'there seems to be no viable alternative to some version of liberal peacebuilding.'[2] When thinking about post-conflict reconstruction, peace-building and state-building, policy-makers and academics focus on international conditionality and/or intervention to a remarkable degree. More than twenty UN peacekeeping missions have assisted in entrenching liberal values in Africa alone.[3] Liberal discourse and prescription imposes limits on what is politically acceptable for African leaderships to aspire to. Even when the agency of Africans that dissent from liberal precepts is recognised, the existence of alternative state-building agendas remains unexamined. This is furthered by African leaderships' ubiquitous, instrumental use of

[1] Thomas Carothers, 'The End of the Transition Paradigm,' *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002).

[2] R. Paris and T.D. Sisk, *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2009).

[3] Pierre Englebert and Denis M. Tull, 'Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa: Flawed Ideas About Failed States,' *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008).

'development-speak', which often creates the impression amongst outsiders that their interlocutors share liberal reformist goals.[4]

The corollary is that when the realities of illiberal politics and violent conflict that actually characterise large swathes of Africa are to be accounted for, this is primarily done in terms of the 'failed state' paradigm, particularly following the breakdown of order in Somalia, Sierra Leone and Zaire/Congo in the 1990s.[5] African states are to be understood not in terms of what they are, but what they fail to be[6]: much that passes for analysis ends up as an (often factually accurate) chronicle of the decline of African states that offers little understanding of their actual dynamics. A sophisticated literature on the 'shadow state' pushed the analysis of the political economy of war-torn states and provided nuanced accounts of their workings.[7] But most of these notable studies focused on 'warlords' with often-inchoate ideas of the state, short-term planning horizons and personal rule operating without bureaucratic institutions. While representative of trends in places like wartime Liberia, they cannot be made to stand for African state trajectories as a whole.

A third paradigm more accurately captures the dynamics in African states. Drawing on the oft-used metaphor of the African state as a ship that isn't seeking to go anywhere but rather stay afloat, proponents of this view highlight neo-patrimonial management strategies of elites and the attempted stabilisation of the polity through temporary alliances, ethnic coalition-building and the cynical manipulation of electoral systems and federalism.[8] Ruling elites are untroubled by persisting state weakness and seek no lasting transformation of society or fundamental change of Africa's marginalisation in the international system.[9] The Mobutus, Mois and Compaores of the continent consciously reproduce dysfunctionality because this prolongs their grip on power.[10] The problem is that this paradigm ignores the political imaginations of these elites. The very possibility that they may have state-*building* aspirations is occluded. Put differently, states and elites engaging in anything more than the management of decline will inevitably be overlooked.

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[4] Jean-François Bayart, 'Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion,' *African Affairs* 99, no. 395 (2000)., p.259

[5] Jennifer Milliken, *State Failure, Collapse & Reconstruction* (Blackwell Pub., 2003).

[6] Robert Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

[7] See for example William Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[8] Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder As Political Instrument* (International African Institute, 1999).

[9] René Lemarchand, 'The State, the Parallel Economy, and the Changing Structure of Patronage Systems,' in *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Afric*, ed. Donald Rothschild and Naomi Chazan (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988).; Bruce Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism,' *African Affairs* 97, no. 388 (1998).

[10] Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (Longman, 1993).

We argue that between the liberal convergence paradigm, the failed state narrative and neo-patrimonial seamanship, important experiences that fit none of these remain unexamined.[11] Yet the existence of alternative agendas appearing out of the ashes of war in places like Sudan, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Angola is, we argue, part of a major emerging mode of illiberal state-building.

These states are ruled by unified and well-organised movements that have, in the aftermath of conflict, captured the state and established durable political order, building a core of functional institutions. Their aspirations go beyond a short-term resource grab, as they use the state to centralise resources and create and/or strengthen a robust edifice of control. The Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, MPLA), the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF/Ethiopia), the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and the Al-Ingaz (Salvation) regime (Sudan) share the background of a well-organised guerrilla and/or political movement with a strong degree of indoctrination and internal discipline as well as an articulate developmental discourse. While some of the states they control have a high degree of leeway on account of their resource endowment, others buck their aid-dependency by constructing considerable space for political autonomy. All four regimes rule in defiance of liberal peace precepts, having first used war and then the post-conflict situation to establish a hegemonic order and a stranglehold over the political economy.

Despite major historical and contemporary differences between the four cases, they share important traits in their thinking about, and implementation of, state-building. Their projects are statist and illiberal, even when engaging piecemeal with a costless mimetic liberalism. Their elites originate from narrow social bases and belong to relatively well-organised and politicised former liberation movements, ensuring tight links between political, military, and business constituencies. Having secured control of the state through violence, the MPLA, Al-Ingaz, TPLF and RPF have constructed an apparently effective political order that aims to be autonomous from internal and external threats, and builds on a sovereignist claim to absolute authority to conduct their domestic affairs as they please. All four movements share high-modernist imaginations that underpin their normative, institutional, and policy priorities. In this preliminary study of the phenomenon of illiberal state-building in Africa, we focus exclusively on 'sameness' rather than 'difference', i.e. we explore the empirical wealth of the case studies to define the contours of an under-researched macro-development. The fully comparative exercise we will be undertaking in future work will examine the cases to understand the specificity of each.

This paper unpacks illiberal state-building projects in three parts. We begin with a discussion of how these regimes think politically. All four ruling movements came to power through clandestine means and underline their revolutionary character – a claim that should be assessed seriously. We emphasise their hegemonic aspirations, their illiberalism – even if aspects of liberal thought remain an important point of reference from Khartoum to Luanda – and, critically, the role of violence in their political praxis and vision. Subsequently, the analysis moves to the neo-developmentalist model of political economy that is embraced by

[11] This is of course not to deny the existence of excellent scholarship on these cases and the post-conflict order, but to underline that the experiences under analysis here have not been investigated from a comparative angle looking at them as state-building experiments.

Africa's illiberal state-builders. In their attempts at establishing hegemony, they seek to persuade a 'substantial minority' of their population of the benefits and legitimacy of their rule through statist, but not anti-capitalist, policies. High-modernist ideology underpins the belief that bureaucratic enclaves of excellence and huge infrastructure projects can qualitatively reconfigure domestic political-economic systems. Thirdly we examine the new relationship with the outside world sought by these regimes. While radically criticising Africa's traditional engagement with the international system, they have long had ambivalent relationships with the Great Powers. The TPLF, RPF, Al-Ingaz, and MPLA have also selectively deepened the integration of the countries they rule into the global economic and political order. Their complex foreign policy is remarkably autonomous and dissident in some respects, but also exhibits all the extraversion dynamics that have historically characterised African states. We conclude by briefly drawing attention to what may be different weaknesses of Africa's illiberal state-building projects.

2 The political vision: violence, authoritarianism and elite competition

Any discussion of Africa's illiberal state-builders and their political ideas must start from a simple but important observation: Angola, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Sudan are all states in which protracted violence and military activity has plays a central and ongoing role. They are ruled by elites who undertook clandestine action (a coup in the case of Sudan's military-Islamist regime, civil war for the other three, preceded by anti-colonial war in the case of the MPLA) in order to arrive at their present regime. Their respective 'struggles' have, on the one hand, forged deep, enduring links between military and other elites, and, on the other, begat a troublingly untroubled belief in large scale violence as a legitimate means of escaping from political impasse.

The Rwandan army has been near continuously deployed since 1994: fighting counter-insurgency in the northwest in the late 1990s, making repeated entries into Zaire-Congo and now reincarnated as globetrotting peacekeepers.[12] These military operations have, in various ways, been central to the advancement of state agendas, with the armed forces retaining a core position in much of 'civilian' life: inter alia, the Rwandan Defence Force engages in policing, but also implementing development projects, running financial services and funding *grands projets*.[13] In Angola, the 120,000-man armed forces never demobilised; their budget has more than doubled since the end of the civil war a decade ago, and army generals were essentially given a free hand in large swathes of the interior to engage in resource extraction and land grabs.[14]

[12] F.K. Rusagara, G. Mwaura, and G. Nyirimanzi, *Resilience of a Nation: A History of the Military in Rwanda* (Fountain Publishers Rwanda, 2009).
[13] Will Jones, 'Between Pyongyang and Singapore: The Rwandan State, its Rulers, and the Military,' in *Rwanda Fast Forward: Social, Economic, Military and Reconciliation Prospects*, ed. M. Campioni and P. Noack (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).
[14] Didier Péclard, 'L'Angola dans la paix: autoritarisme et reconversions,' *Politique Africaine* 110(2008).

Violent transitions to power inform the political psychology of illiberal state-builders. Paranoia and chronic distrust of the world outside the movement – the direct products of years of underground operations before coming to power – explain much of otherwise seemingly overblown actions. The election victory in 2005 of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the coalition through which the TPLF rules the country, was regarded by the regime as an unacceptably fragile result.[15] Missing a two-thirds majority and opposition calls for mass protests explain their decision to react violently to early demonstrations in Addis Ababa, opening fire on the crowds and imprisoning 60,000. The 'better-than-Soviet' result of the TPLF/EPRDF in the 2010 elections and the continuing crackdown on even the most marginal opposition groups underscore the movement's sense of entitlement and intolerance for politics outside its big tent, and its unchanged belief that coercion is a legitimate political instrument.[16] In Kigali, the RPF breaks up rallies of political opponents, muzzles journalists and other dissidents, and even attempts the assassination of perceived threats outside Rwanda, despite its solid grip on the armed forces, all major political institutions, and the mainstream media.

Secondly, there should be no doubt that these systems of political order are *authoritarian* and *illiberal*. They are authoritarian in that they exhibit extremely unequal relations between rulers and ruled; political authority is highly centralised and exercised by a small number of people.[17] The centralisation of the Rwandan political system is well-documented. The dominance of the Presidency over the legislature or organs of local government is near total: policies are formulated and approved by the core elite round the president, and the rest of the state is understood as a vehicle for their implementation. The contemporary Angolan state is similarly designed to foster an authoritarian hegemonic dispensation centred around President Dos Santos and his inner circle,[18] though the elaborate pretence of internal MPLA pluralism is carefully maintained. In Sudan, the Al-Ingaz regime was in a first phase from 1989 to 1999 led by Dr Hassan Al-Turabi who, as a political godfather, took all strategic decisions from his house in downtown Khartoum, with his lieutenants seated on the floor, praising their Sheikh's wisdom. After Turabi's ouster, power shifted to the Presidency of the Republic which yields nigh-total control over the armed forces, security services and key patronage mechanisms.

These political systems are illiberal both in that they do not in practice uphold the full laundry list of rights and freedoms that liberals contend they ought, and in that the ruling ideas of these elites are far from conceiving of liberty and pluralism as central or overriding political goods, despite a sophisticated discourse which claims to put freedom at the heart of their agenda.[19]Although the Rwandan bill of rights and the 2010 Angolan constitution enumerate most of the freedoms of a liberal state, it is made perfectly clear – most obviously through

[15] Merera Gudina, 'Elections and Democratization in Ethiopia, 1991–2010,' *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 4 (2011).
[16] Kjetil Tronvoll, 'The Ethiopian 2010 Federal and Regional Elections: Re-Establishing the One-Party State,' *African Affairs* 110, no. 438 (2011).
[17] Guillermo A. O'Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism: Argentina, 1966-1973, in Comparative Perspective* (University of California Press, 1988).
[18] Christine Messiant, 'The Mutations of Hegemonic Domination,' in *Angola: The Weight of History*, ed. Patrick Chabal and Nuno Vidal (London: Hurst, 2007).
[19] M.H. Ḥāmidī, *The Making of an Islamic Political Leader: Conversations with Hasan al-Turabi* (Westview Press, 1998).

provisions such as Rwanda's Genocide Ideology Law[20] – that where there are important trade-offs between freedom and other aspects of the programme, there is little anguish as to which is to go. Whilst the Rwandan state undertakes countless projects of neo-traditional popular mobilisation on a grand scale (gacaca, umuganda, then yakatsi eradication programme), their conception and their implementation operates according to a centralised 'grand plan' with little room for deviation.[21] Even the government's 'decentralisation' programme has in reality extended the authority of the central state by creating new regional organs of state directly answerable to the Presidency.[22] This is very similar to decentralisation in post-war Angola, a misnomer for a process of expansion of central state power over a hitherto ungoverned periphery.

For Africa's illiberal state-builders, the appropriate role of civil society is not understood as counterweight to the state, but rather as collaborative partner in advancing the state's agenda: organisations which do not play this role are shut out, defunded, or dismantled.[23] All-important licenses to operate, bestowed by the government, place limits on their role and prevent foreign NGOs in particular from exercising an overly critical role. In Angola, the government allowed 'civil society' a modicum of leeway but simultaneously engaged in the massive creation of its own civil society organisations with privileged access to funding and social visibility, and defined a policy of consistent penetration of the remaining CSOs and professional associations, achieving political control while extolling their pluralism.[24] Organisations that were perceived as too independent had their activities circumscribed and in some contexts prevented altogether.

Thirdly, these elite projects are *hegemonic* without being *totalitarian.* They aspire to create a political order in which the supremacy of the ruling elite is unchallenged and unchallengeable, and with which they impose a social, political, and economic status quo. In order to do so, Africa's illiberal state-builders deploy a patriotic, 'broad tent' discourse and aim to bring a wide range of social groups into their fold, even when their material interests are manifestly contradictory: peasants and bankers; low-ranking bureaucrats and merchants; war veterans and aristocratic families of the previous regimes. Thus, although there is little love for the MPLA, rather 'weary acceptance'[25], party membership has exploded from 60,000 to an estimated 5 million between 1990 and the present time, in a country of some 20 million, creating a vast apparatus of top-down co-optation. The same dynamics unfolded in Ethiopia after the traumatic 2005 elections, with millions of new TPLF/EPRDF party members being

[20] Lars Waldorf, 'Revisiting Hotel Rwanda: Genocide Ideology, Reconciliation, and Rescuers,' *Journal of Genocide Research* 11, no. 1 (2009).
[21] F Golooba-Mutebi and V. Chambers, 'Is the Bride Too Beautiful?: Safe Motherhood in Rural Rwanda,' in *Africa Power and Politics Programme (APPP),* (London: Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 2012).
[22] Johan Pottier, 'Land Reform for Peace? Rwanda's 2005 Land Law in Context,' *Journal of Agrarian Change* 6, no. 4 (2006).
[23] Paul Gready, 'Beyond "You're With Us or Against Us": Civil Society and Policy Making in Post-Genocide Rwanda,' in *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights After Mass Violence*, ed. Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf (University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).
[24] Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, 'Illiberal Peacebuilding in Angola,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 49, no. 02 (2011): 292-3.
[25] Ibid.

recruited, especially from rural areas, in an unprecedented registration drive to solidify control.

However, the continuing hegemony of Africa's illiberal state-builders is not perpetuated through – to borrow from Mussolini – having 'everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state'. Rather, the focus is on making the regime's 'red lines' understood, and capturing select constituencies: a 'substantial minority' according to Al-Ingaz economic guru Abdelrahim Hamdi, whose allegiance grants elites both the resources on the one hand, and insulation from broader social pressures on the other, required to advance their self-declared transformative agendas.

For example, the RPF's dominance of Rwandan political space is indeed absolute: Paul Kagame's 93 per cent of the vote in the most recent elections reflects a system in which opposition parties are denied registration or broken up from within by agents of the state. The RPF holds 78 per cent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies – 100 per cent if you include parties which have committed to working with the Front. The administrative apparatus is stuffed with loyal cadres down to its lowest levels. What this does *not* mean is that Rwanda is a fascist state bent on the subsuming of all society into the regulatory apparatus of a party-state. Rather, this hegemonic control of the coercive apparatus of rule is built on a narrow social base and – if the political order necessary to implement the transformative vision is secured – the regime does not see the need to secure the support of what is euphemistically described as the 'rural majority'.

Mixed strategies of elite competition

Fourthly, the rulers of these states are more accurately thought of as mutually supporting constellations of elites rather than instances of party or personal rule. Fashionable as it is to attribute all events in Angola, good or ill, to the omnipotent personage of José Eduardo dos Santos, or to regard Ethiopian government policy as the product of a undifferentiated monolith called the TPLF, such characterisations obscure more than they illuminate, and occlude what unites these regimes: decisions of national importance are made not by one man, but by those occupying 'the strategic command posts of power'[26] at the helms of those mutually interdependent hierarchies – the party, the bureaucracy, the military and the major commercial organisations – in a position to exercise control over the lives of citizens. These institutions link their individual members to one another, not least through marital and other connections. The countries are ruled by 'power elites', defined by who they are, how they depend upon and relate to one another, and what enables them to determine political outcomes.

The logical outcome of such a form of rule is that the new authoritarians may deploy resources from any or all of these hierarchies in order to maintain control. Unlike the stereotype of the African autocrat seeking to destroy the impersonal bureaucratic apparatus in order to remove potential threats (in the manner of Amin, Bokassa or Mobutu), these regimes work through legal-rational systems of control. However, unlike totalitarian regimes where all potential levers of power must be brought within the state, they also work through complex, opaque webs of commercial, military, and party fixers. These regimes simultaneously operate mixed strategies: institutions *and* networks, juridical *and* illegal means, patrimonialism *and*

[26] C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

bureaucratic rule. Sudan's military-Islamist regime cannot be reduced to the ruling National Congress Party, the Sudanese Armed Forces, *Al-Harakat Al-Islamiyyah,* the transnational complex of Islamic charities, businesses and foundations, or the National Intelligence and Security Service. It works through all of these – and myriad other institutions and informal channels – to exercise power. Similarly, it must be highlighted that whereas the complex web of Rwandan involvement in Eastern Congo is well documented, what is often missed is that this is not an aberration, but rather entirely typical of the modus operandi of the Rwandan regime. It is this double character of illiberal state-building regimes (sometimes the product of shrewdly omnivorous political strategies, sometime the outcome of paranoia and chaos), which is so often misunderstood: formal institutions are real, but melt into each other and into the more fluid mechanisms of power.

A key question about these regimes, therefore, must be whether or not competition within that elite can be regulated. The losers of such struggles are generally left alive and occasionally even brought back into the fold after an appropriate period wandering the desert. Sudan and Angola present a picture of elite circulation that is remarkably bloodless (certainly when compared with MPLA elite disputes of the 1970s) with marginalisation normally entailing a lucrative sinecure. Even Rwanda, possibly the least charitable towards those that fall foul of the ruling dispensation (Seth Sendashonga's extra-judicial assassination in 1999 is only the most prominent of a series of cases), is a place where Pierre-Célestin Rwigema, the prime minister exiled in 2001,can be adroitly forgiven and rehabilitated as an RPF loyalist in the East African Parliament.

However, even if dissent within limited bounds can be tolerated, it is clear that in all of these states there are limits to how many pilots can be tolerated in the cockpit: dispute and disagreement can circulate below the presidency, but the position of the president as Schmittian sovereign is mostly paramount. While the power struggle between Turabi and his generals could have been won by the Sheikh, it is not a coincidence that the outcome has dramatically reinforced the Presidency of the Republic. As analysed by others[27], the key political fights within these regimes have been fights to remove potential rivals to the throne: Kagame against General Kayumba Nyamwasa, Zenawi against General Tsadkan Gebre-Tesane, and Bashir against Turabi and later spymaster Salah Gosh. Even dos Santos, who has not faced the same amount of challenges, has been careful to marginalise rival constituencies and the politicians, such as Lopo do Nascimento, who could emerge as alternatives. It is not accidental that almost all of these putative challengers emerged, much as the incumbents did, from the security apparatus and were co-conspirators during the struggle.

Put differently, the key political challenge for the new authoritarians is the management of secession. The RPF, Al-Ingaz and MPLA are acutely aware of this dilemma as it could lead to a personalised power struggle in which the lions tear themselves apart. In Ethiopia, the TPLF showed remarkable skill in remaining unified after the death of Meles in August 2012 and arranging for a peaceful transfer of formal authority to his official deputy, Hailemariam Desalegn, with the core group of TPLF vanguards retaining their grip behind the scenes. Predictions by external Cassandras of imminent chaos have so far proven unwarranted but doubts remain about the durability of this seemingly temporary sharing of power between the

[27] Philip Roessler, 'The Enemy Within: Personal Rule, Coups, and Civil War in Africa,' *World Politics* 63, no. 02 (2011).

old elite and relative newcomers. The tension between neutralising potential challengers and developing the mechanisms of accountability and control needed to safeguard the revolution long term is but one of many internal contradictions produced by Africa's illiberal state-builders.

3 Illiberal state-building's long-term strategy: building the 'new' political economy and the substantial minority

In their bid to establish hegemonic power, the four regimes have prioritised reconfiguring state-society relations. The political-economic strategies pursued by the TPLF, Al-Ingaz, RPF and MPLA are at the very centre of their illiberal state-building agendas. They are about redefining the core-periphery relationship and, to some extent, the unfinished integration of hinterlands into the heart of the state.[28] The new Rwanda, Sudan, Angola and Ethiopia are being created through crafting a (not so) new political geography; navigating the trade-offs between structural-historical factors (including the nature of the state and geography), movement ideology and pragmatic short-term coalition-building; and capturing constituencies identified as key to regime survival, while ruthlessly excluding others.

We argue that these visions of reconfiguration are simultaneously about hard, material power but also about identity and regime legitimacy, domestically and externally. The TPLF's claim to put an end to Ethiopia's famines of the 1980s and to bring social services to the countryside is critical to its self-image and to its outside brand of a governing elite that 'gets' development.[29] Similarly, Sudan's Al-Ingaz openly emphasises that, after its first decade of jihad and state-sponsored terrorism, today 'you shouldn't like us because of our ideas, but because we put more food on your table than any other regime in Sudanese history.'[30] In Rwanda and Ethiopia, the argument about an economic legitimacy to rule also helps offset irritating Western criticisms about curtailed personal freedoms: what the people really want, it is argued, is material progress and stability.[31] Here we discuss both the objectives of illiberal state-building's political economy and the instruments used to entrench regimes in power for another generation.

The argument that economic factors are vital to keeping ruling elites in power is not something that sets our cases apart from other African countries. The deliberate creation of limited access orders and associated rents is essential to most developing countries, as it helps elites temporarily resolve the question of violence through building coalitions in the capital

[28] W. James et al., *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After* (J. Currey, 2002); John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (James Currey, 2011).
[29] Interview with former TPLF chairman Sebhat Nega in Addis Ababa, May 2010
[30] Interview with a prominent Islamist in Khartoum, April 2010
[31] Filip Reyntjens, 'Constructing the Truth, Dealing with Dissent, Domesticating the World: Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda,' *African Affairs* 110, no. 438 (2011).

and tying the peripheries to the core through patronage systems.[32] These arrangements are inherently unstable in the long term, but enable rival factions to escape Hobbesian confrontation for a while, not least given that the African state is the prime site for the accumulation of wealth and power and being denied access to its privileges can have existential consequences.[33]

Nevertheless, the sophistication with which the illiberal state-builders have thought about economic success as a determinant of political power is remarkable. Although they too rely on rent-creation and rent-distribution to build key support bases, the continuing, self-described desire for 'revolutionary transformation' and/or 'speedy modernisation' imply that they seek more than temporary neo-patrimonial alliances. Dynamics of primitive accumulation orchestrated from the centre[34] are intended to permanently change the state-society relationship and to promote the economic rise of new social groups that will underpin the pursuit of other regime priorities.

This idea has perhaps been most explicitly spelled out in military-Islamist Khartoum, where Al-Ingaz' economic guru, former Minister of Finance Abdelrahim Hamdi, has tirelessly advocated the 'emancipation' (*tamkin* in Salvation parlance) of a 'new Islamic middle class' to liquidate the old Sudan.[35] Hamdi's vision is that of a 'substantial minority' of Sudanese whose economic fortunes are closely tied to the political flourishing of the Salvation regime. This substantial minority is supposed to be a quasi-Weberian class, seeing material success and religious piety as mutually reinforcing, resident in the traditional core of the Sudanese state, the so-called Hamdi Triangle between Dongola, El-Obeid and Sennar.[36] This idea is at once revolutionary – the lightening mobility of new social groups at the expense of others – and deeply conservative, in that it entrenches the dominant position of Sudan's riverain core through investment, subsidies, political appointments and government services. In Angola, this substantial minority of civil servants, armed forces personnel and middle-class urbanites is normally referred to as the 'national bourgeoisie', but the logic echoes that of the Sudanese case.

Economic development and political hegemony thus have a particular ethno-geography and social constitution in African illiberal state-building; the illiberal state-builders are at once at home in the globalising world and its cosmopolitan enclaves of luxury in London and Dubai, but are also firmly linked to the nation's historical centres of state power. Coastal Angola, home to the more culturally Europeanised elites, has boomed spectacularly after 2000 with Luanda becoming one of the world's most expensive cities, while the RPF has sought to strengthen the grip of Anglophone urban constituencies (often Tutsi, with extensive Diaspora experience) and some powerful Hutu business interests on the Rwandan economy, not least

[32] D.C. North, J.J. Wallis, and B.R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[33] Christopher Clapham, *Third World Politics: An Introduction* (Croom Helm, 1985).p.41.
[34] Mushtaq Khan and Jomo Kwame Sundaram, *Rents, Rent-Seeking and Economic Development: Theory and Evidence in Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[35] Interviews with Abdelrahim Hamdi (and other regime ideologues) in Khartoum between April 2010 and June 2012.
[36] Abdelrahim Hamdi, *Al-waraqa al-iqtisādiyyali'l-mu'tamaralwatani al-hākimbi'l-Sudan*. Manuscript, Khartoum, 2005.

through promoting service sector development in Kigali.[37] The TPLF has especially tried to deliver in its ethnic homeland of Tigray and in Amhara-dominated Central Ethiopia – the historically powerful highlands where the genesis of the state lay – where economic growth has averaged 10 per cent or more in recent years.[38] Inequality in all four cases is rising rapidly – between urban and rural areas, the capital and the peripheries, the new middle classes and ordinary citizens – which is an inevitable consequence of a political-economic model that seeks to empower new key social groups and firmly entrench itself at the state's historical seat of power. In all of these cases, the state is not conceived as merely enabling a positive business environment; rather they revive an earlier conception of the state, most famously associated with Latin America in the '60s and '70s, in which a bureaucratic, authoritarian state is the activist handmaiden of development.

The notion of advancing *substantial* minorities is smart politics, which strategically broadens the support for movements often accused of having a narrow ethnic base (e.g. the alleged dominance of Tigrayans in Ethiopia), but also a function of the ideological worldview of the rulers.[39] The Marxist-Leninist roots of the MPLA, TPLF and RPF, but also the Islamism of Al-Ingaz, is critical to these movements' reading of society and the mechanisms driving social change. Islamist success across the Muslim world has been a function of rapid demographic and economic change, with Islamism in Sudan and elsewhere itself an attempt to provide a politico-religious context for whirlwind transformation of traditional societies and a way of embracing, but also embedding, modernisation.[40] In order to realise its own revolution and speed up its inevitable triumph, Islamists, like Marxist-Leninists, have always thought carefully about building coalitions to overcome the hostility of the conservative political-economic establishment, trying to bind new social (and ethnic) groups to them with the promise of a reinvented state on the horizon. Turabi and his lieutenants thus focused on students and graduates in Khartoum, pious reformers in Western Sudan and expatriate businessmen in the Gulf to assist their rise to absolute power, in the process breaking the old sectarian networks that governed the country.[41]

In similar vein, activating the rural masses of Tigray, but also allying itself to other ethno-nationalist movements like the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, became central to the TPLF's promise of shattering the dominance of the Amhara and the omnipotence of Addis Ababa.[42] The RPF held out the vision of a non-ethnic Rwanda, highlighting that both ordinary Hutu and Tutsi were marginalised in a 'fascist' state that benefited a narrow *akazu* from the northwest (Gisenyi/Ruhengeri); the classic Marxist argument that ethnopolitics distracted the masses' attention from the real political-economic cleavages was and is central to the RPF's

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[37] An Ansoms, 'Re-Engineering Rural Society: The Visions and Ambitions of the Rwandan Elite,' *African Affairs* 108, no. 431 (2009).

[38] Paulos Chanie, 'Clientelism and Ethiopia's Post-1991 Decentralisation,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 45, no. 03 (2007).

[39] Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life* (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2003).

[40] Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (I.B. Tauris, 2002)., pp.66-67.

[41] Abdelwahib El-Affendi, *Turābī's Revolution: Islam and Power in Sudan* (Grey Seal, 1991)., pp.58-84.

[42] Aregawi Berhe, *A Political History of the Tigray People's Liberation Front* (Los Angeles: Tsehai Publishers & Distributors, 2009).

ideology and its commitment to Pan-Africanism. The MPLA has also spent a considerable amount of effort rooting the party across the country – if often symbolically – in order to dispel the notion, much popularised by UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi, that it was merely a Luanda-based, Creole concoction.

To bring about 'transformative' change through the 'new' political economy, Africa's illiberal state-builders rely on two main economic strategies. The first, unsurprisingly, is the creation of rents through limiting access, selective regulation of the economy, political appointments, etc. Classic patronage mechanisms ensure that there are clear incentives to cooperate with the ruling party and represent a direct push to improve the position of those identified as the substantial minority. The second strategy is more innovative for Africa: a series of audacious government initiatives, typically led by mass investment in large-scale infrastructure development and 'strategic sectors', to create new wealth and simultaneously ensure it benefits the right constituencies; some have theorised this as akin to sowing the seeds of capitalism through rent centralisation.[43] Perhaps the most spectacular such case is that of Angola, and its massive infrastructure programme. According to a 2011 World Bank assessment, the government invested an estimated US$4.3 billion, or 14 per cent of GDP, every year in ports, railways, roads and power generation.[44] Of these, the priority has been the road system. The past decade saw the rehabilitation of 8,000 km of asphalted roads, with US$2.8 billion spent yearly from 2005 to 2009.

In Sudan, the creation of the new Islamic middle class and the consolidation of power in the Hamdi Triangle are closely linked to the hyper-ambitious (and scarily expensive) Dam Programme and Agricultural Revival. The investment of up to US$10 billion in the construction and heightening of dams on the Nile, with the aim of generating electricity for Sudan's (urban) riverain core and of revitalising the irrigated sectors north and south of Khartoum, is the main channel for political-economic regime consolidation. As part of the Dam Programme, a whole range of 'associated projects' are underway within the Hamdi Triangle: bridge building, hospital and airport construction, and electrification. While the 'externalities' of Sudan's new dams and capital-intensive agriculture are mostly situated outside the riverain core, the benefits accrue to upper-class urban consumers and companies owned by the National Intelligence and Security Service, the Sudanese Armed Forces and regime fellow travellers.[45]

The big push for large-scale infrastructure development reworks the political economy and enables the provision of lucrative contracts and much needed public services to coalition partners, but is also a reflection of the high-modernist imaginings of development that illiberal state-builders often cherish. The TPLF's *Growth and Transformation Plan*, the MPLA's *2025 Development Plan*, Sudan's Dam Programme and Rwanda's *Vision 2020* echo

[43] Tim Kelsall, 'Rethinking the Relationship between Neo-patrimonialism and Economic Development in Africa,' *IDS Bulletin* 42, no. 2 (2011). Published as part of the African Power and Politics Programme (APPP), Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London.
[44] Nataliya Pushak and Vivien Foster, 'Angola's Infrastructure: A Continental Perspective,' in *Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostic Reports* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011)., p.11. Of this amount, a full US$1.3bn is lost to 'inefficiencies' (5 per cent of GDP).
[45] Harry Verhoeven, 'Climate Change, Conflict and Development in Sudan: Global Neo-Malthusian Narratives and Local Power Struggles,' *Development and Change* 42, no. 3 (2011).

classical modernisation theory and cornucopian vistas of rapidly moving through the stages of development via the taming of nature and swift urbanisation. In line with high-modernist ideology, illiberal state-builders strongly believe in 'bureaucratic enclaves of excellence' to spearhead their remaking of the domestic political economy.[46] The idea of omniscient, enlightened mandarins using 'sacred' knowledge to guide the backward masses is an enduring one, recently recycled in institutions like Ethiopia's Office of the Prime Minister, the Rwanda Revenue Authority and Sudan's Dam Implementation Unit (DIU).

Such 'islands of competence' are juxtaposed with conservative, enfeebled traditional state institutions. Their special politico-administrative status (often without accountability to the national assembly and directly linked to the presidency), virtually unlimited budget , technocratic discourse (which situates in itself in an apolitical universe of 'civilisation' and 'national interest') and recruitment strategies ('the best and the brightest' from local elites and international universities) all contribute to the perception that these are quasi 'un-African' bodies, cutting through the Gordian knot of problems that hold back the modernisation of the African state.

Take the Angolan example. Sonangol, the national oil company, has risen to become the country's dominant economic actor (with a better credit rating than the Angolan state) and a key player in Southern Africa's economy. Amidst the gradual deterioration of state institutions during the 1975 to 2002 war, Sonangol played the pivotal role in facilitating the survival of the state through the channelling of oil outwards and petrodollars inwards. The company (a sort of sovereign wealth fund in all but name) is now operating on four continents; its cadres are highly skilled engineers, savvy financial operators, and hardened negotiators; it functions as a powerful patronage machine, with extensive social and welfare benefits, educational opportunities, scholarship programmes, and well-endowed literary prizes. Rhetoric about the reinvention of the war-torn nation through technocratic wizardry may be hollow, but Sonangol remains an invaluable political instrument in the hands of President Dos Santos.[47]

The use of all-powerful interventionist 'offices' and 'units' to remake the political economy leads to a final important characteristic of Africa's illiberal state-builders: they are neither socialist planners nor free marketers but something in between.[48] On the one hand, all four regimes stress their liberalising credentials to international interlocutors, pointing out that the socialist (Nimeiri, Mengistu) or corporatist (Habyarimana) regimes that preceded them were antithetical to serious reform and good governance or the product of exceptional war circumstances (Angola). They underline their commitment to further integration into the global economic system, have adopted modern public finance techniques and are banking on attracting billions in foreign investment in irrigated agriculture (Ethiopia, Sudan), industrialisation (Angola) and IT and other services (Kigali's stellar performance in the World

[46] Harry Verhoeven, 'Hydro-Agricultural Savants and the Paradoxes of State-Building: The Dam Implementation Unit's "Mission of Rebuilding Civilisation" in Sudan,' *Third World Quarterly* (under review).
[47] Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea* (Columbia University Press, 2007)., pp.91-96.
[48] For parallels with developmentalism elsewhere, M. Woo-Cumings, *The Developmental State* (Cornell University Press, 1999).

Bank's *Doing Business* report is widely noted[49]). But on the other hand, their economies continue to be labyrinths of oligopolies, subsidies and licences in which powerful political actors collude with business interests.

Substantial rents are centralised by semi-private holding companies, trust funds and sprawling cartels which are controlled by senior regime figures or by political-ideological fellow travellers. The Dan Fodio conglomerate, owned by the Islamist welfare organisation Al-Dawa Al-Islamiyyah which has close links with Sudan's Al-Harakat Al-Islamiyyah, is a key beneficiary of dam construction along the Nile and oil exploitation in the hinterlands. Tri-Star Investments/CVL, wholly owned by the RPF, has majority stakes in a dozen leading national companies; some calculations suggest that 10 per cent of all taxes paid in Rwanda come from CVL.[50] Tri-Star has long symbolised the links between politics, business and conflict: having emerged from the RPF's wartime 'Production Unit' which funded the liberation struggle until 1994, it then directly contributed to the financing of the post-genocidal state as it secured its survival in continuing confrontation with the *génocidaires* in Congo. Through its subsidiary Rwanda Metals, CVL was involved in the exploitation of minerals during the Great African War; while Tri-Star, which today still funds the RPF, stopped its direct control of the resource flows from North and South Kivu around 2002, some of its key operatives and officers of the Rwanda Patriotic Army continued their involvement in illicit trafficking. According to some estimates, 6 per cent of Rwandan GDP came from the plunder of the Congo at the peak of the conflict.[51]

In Ethiopia, the TPLF dominated coalition of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front works through four large endowment conglomerates – each focusing on a particular region, following Ethiopia's federal system – to centralise rents and help steer economic policy. Endowment conglomerates, and particularly the TPLF's flagship EFFORT which operates in Tigray, employ thousands of people, are key providers of public goods and promote the overall developmentalist strategy of Meles Zenawi through leading by example.[52]They are not the only instruments the regime has at its disposal to maintain dazzling economic success – gross national income went from US$120 per capita in 2002 to US$390 in 2010[53] – and deliver public services to the masses: state-owned enterprises and domination of the financial sector, as well as extensive opportunities for local patronage through powerful regional development organisations, all operate autonomously, but work towards both the implicit and explicit goals of the *Growth and Transformation Plan*.

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[49] 'Doing Business 2011,' (Washington, DC: International Finance Corporation, 2011)., p.190

[50] David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, 'Developmental Patrimonialism? The Case of Rwanda,' *African Affairs* 111, no. 444 (2012)., p.11. Also published as part of the APPP, ODI, London.

[51] S Marysse, 'Regress, War, and Fragile Recovery,' in *The Political Economy of the Great Lakes Region in Africa*, ed. S Marysse and F Reyntjens (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005)., p.148.

[52] Sarah Vaughan and Mesfin Gebremichael, 'Rethinking Business and Politics in Ethiopia,' in *Africa Power and Politics Programme Research Reports* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2011).

[53] World Bank, 'World Development Indicators,' ed. World Bank (2012). Last checked 20 June 2012, http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do?Step=12&id=4&CNO=2

4 The external dimension of illiberal state-building: autonomy versus extraversion

State-building is not only a matter of internal elite politics, centralising resources and projecting power into the peripheries; these processes also have a crucial external dimension. Scholars have long noted the problematic engagement of African states with the international system, underlining their feeble, dependent position and inability to reshape the global agenda. Yet this has seldom simply been a case of unilaterally imposed dependency on the whims of capitalism. The weakness of African states has led elites to consciously link parts of the domestic political economy with international circuits to help win internal power struggles through external resources.[54] The reliance of states on outside resource flows has been critical in stabilising politics at the centre and managing core-periphery relations. But as Skocpol noted, this has important consequences in terms of what state-building projects can achieve: '...a state's means of raising and deploying financial resources tell us more than could any other single factor about its existing (and its immediately potential) capacities to create or strengthen state organisations.'[55]

Africa's illiberal state-builders maintain a complex, turbulent relationship with the international community and the West in particular. All have made extensive discursive and material efforts to increase their leverage in and autonomy vis-à-vis the international system: these initiatives are rooted in their histories of personal disappointment in the Great Powers; in the notion that previous regimes maintained deeply corrupting, exploitative ties with the outside world; and in a political-economic analysis of what has been holding back the national development potential.

The RPF, for instance, has never forgiven the international community for its shameful role during the Rwandan genocide and subsequent refusal/inability to disarm the *génocidaires* when they continued to threaten Tutsi and 'collaborating' Hutu from Eastern Congo.[56] This anger magnified older criticisms within the Front, which has always insisted on its leftist roots and its solidarity with the liberation struggle against white supremacy in Southern Africa.[57] Today's RPF leadership was socialised in Pan-Africanist milieus in Kampala, Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam and dreamed together with Nelson Mandela, Julius Nyerere and Yoweri Museveni of a transformation of Africa by Africans, removing colonial constructs like tribal and racial barriers from politics; this also explains their violent opposition to 'neo-colonial' regimes like that of Mobutu and Habyarimana. In Angola, relations with Washington (the major source of oil investment) are passable but the legacy of Cold War American support for UNITA is just beneath the surface of bilateral relations.

[54] Bayart, 'Africa in the World'.

[55] Theda Skocpol, 'Bringing the State Back In,' *Items* 36(1982). p.6.

[56] Linda Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* (Zed Books, 2000).

[57] Interviews inside and outside Rwanda with Patrick Mazimhaka, Joseph Mutaboba, Frank Rusagara, Joseph Karemera, Karake Karenzi and other senior RPF political and military leaders, 2010-2012.

The most openly 'revisionist' state among Africa's illiberal state-builders has been Sudan. The Al-Ingaz regime promised to rework Khartoum's dysfunctional foreign relations after the 1989 coup; Hassan Al-Turabi, the godfather of the Salvation Revolution, prioritised autonomy from outside meddling: 'Sudan should no longer be a slave to Egypt or the West'.[58] Al-Ingaz attempted to export the revolution, assisting regime change in Ethiopia (the 1991 TPLF capture of Addis Ababa) and Chad (Deby's victory in 1990) and harbouring a range of regional dissidents and terrorist groups; the highpoint of Al-Ingaz' challenge to the international system was the attempted assassination of Hosni Mubarak in Ethiopia in 1995, when Egyptian extremists and Sudanese intelligence operatives cooperated. Tough international sanctions were imposed on military-Islamist Khartoum and despite Turabi's fall from absolute power in 1999-2000 (and the subsequent end to exporting the revolution), President Bashir and his security cabal have retained pariah status in large sections of the international community.[59]

Ironically, despite this deep distrust of the international community, Africa's illiberal state-builders (with the exception of Al-Ingaz) are today known as close allies – even 'donor darlings' – of the West. Paul Kagame's lambasting of meddlesome NGOs and Meles Zenawi's virulent criticism of Western development paradigms certainly underlines the RPF's and TPLF's rejection of the liberal-democratic End of History. But they should be analysed in conjunction with the key roles played by Kigali and Addis Ababa in Washington's Africa policy. While Rwanda has for over a decade been seen as a beacon of stability and economic success in the Great Lakes and provides troops for difficult UN/AU peacekeeping in Darfur, Ethiopia is a central ally in the War on Terror in the Horn of Africa.[60] America's policy vis-à-vis Sudan and Somalia runs through Addis Ababa and has relied on Meles' high-level political mediation (between Khartoum and Juba), direct military confrontation (the war against Mogadishu's Union of Islamic Courts and Al-Shabab) and the use of bases on Ethiopian soil by American forces (for drone strikes and intelligence).

While nearly half of Rwanda's budget consists of foreign development assistance, it is estimated that Ethiopia receives about US$3 billion annually in outside aid. Rhetorical convergence to Western tropes – good governance (TPLF, RPF), transparency (MPLA), combating climate change (TPLF), women's rights (RPF) – and realpolitik alliances with Washington, London and Brussels have helped shield Africa's illiberal state-builders from stinging external criticism and provided ample resources to fund long-term strategies. The West is thus simultaneously rhetorically challenged but politically embraced; TPLF, RPF and MPLA strategists seek strong diplomatic partnerships and military cooperation but try to preserve a far greater degree of manoeuvrability than has been the case for predecessor governments.

The success of these 'third way' foreign policies is closely related to a shift in the international system, which is increasing African states' options. Africa's illiberal state-builders have

[58] Interview with Hassan Al-Turabi in Khartoum, December 2010.
[59] Harry Verhoeven and Luke A. Patey, 'Sudan's Islamists and the Post-Oil Era: Washington's Role after Southern Secession,' *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 3 (2011).
[60] Abdi Ismail Samatar, 'Ethiopian Invasion of Somalia, US Warlordism & AU Shame,' *Review of African Political Economy* 34, no. 111 (2007).

enthusiastically welcomed rising powers like China to the continent[61] and have developed a similarly complex engagement with them that encompasses pragmatic cooperation, rhetorical convergence and determined autonomy. This growing interest is contributing to growth rates not seen in Africa in 40-50 years. Indian, Malaysian and South Korean investors are flocking to Africa, interested in sugar, flower and fodder production and boosting hydrocarbon exploitation. In Sudan, Chinese technical expertise and labour have partnered with Gulf Arab multilateral funds and constitute the backbone of Al-Ingaz' hydro-agricultural mission of completing 10 dam projects and reviving capital-intensive irrigated agriculture.

The emerging new complex engagement is well illustrated by the MPLA's sophisticated resource diplomacy vis-à-vis China, the IMF and the West. After being spurned by Western donors unwilling to provide it with post-war reconstruction financing, Angola established a high-level relationship with Beijing that made available significant (oil-backed) credit lines in 2004. At that stage, Angolan leaders had been unwilling to cave in to IMF demands for transparency. But by 2009, Luanda was secure enough in its Chinese partnership and greatly enhanced oil production to engage with the IMF on a much more balanced level. The IMF, focused on entering Sub-Saharan Africa's third largest economy, had become far less demanding. As to Angola, it was now ready to both accept parts of the IMF reform agenda that it didn't see as threatening of its interests and keen on keeping a diverse pool of international partners.[62]

The growing influence of rising powers enables Africa's illiberal state-builders to engage with alternative investors, aid donors and trade partners, increasing their leverage in negotiations and reducing pressures to conform to the liberal agenda. Yet the impact of Beijing especially is not limited to material benefits. China is increasingly exerting an ambiguous ideological impact on the political-economic imaginations of African elites. Addis Ababa, Luanda, Kigali, and Khartoum are fascinated by the Chinese economic miracle, its apparent compatibility with relative political stability and the hegemony concocted by the Communist Party in the Cultural Revolution's aftermath. Moreover, Chinese political and commercial actors are increasingly assertive in advertising China's domestic achievements and suggesting to Africans that they too can transform their economies if they follow their model, the specifics of which are often left vague.

The engagement of Africa's illiberal state-builders with China's breath-taking success is highly selective and lacking in sophistication. The matter of whether this Chinese model is properly understood by African elites is a different matter; clearly there are variations here across our four case studies, but it seems fair to say that African governments have not engaged in great detail with the particulars of China's governance trajectory. With the exception of Ethiopia's TPLF, there is little interest in Chinese institutional development, agricultural reforms or how technology transfer was facilitated by the bureaucracy. Instead the Chinese example is refracted through the priorities of these regimes, and the emphasis is on building a middle class of sorts as a pro-regime bulwark. The MPLA, Al-Ingaz and RPF embrace modernisation theory discourse, the belief that a strong state is necessary to guide the economy and the

[61] Chris Alden, Daniel Large, and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, *China Returns to Africa : A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace* (London: Hurst and Co., 2008).
[62] Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land: Angola Since the Civil War* (London: Hurst, forthcoming).

associated focus on big development projects, not least massive infrastructure spending. Huge hydro-electric dams in Ethiopia and Sudan embody both the high-modernist, authoritarian inspiration from East Asia as well as the pro-active economic diplomacy by the likes of world-market leader Sinohydro and the rapid intensification of ties between Beijing and its African partners which is deepening the continent's integration into the global political economy.[63] This bricolage of modernities from which Africa's new state-builders draw is often shallow or incoherent (how, precisely, is landlocked Rwanda to become the African Singapore?). Nevertheless, these inspirations reconfigure politics, the economy and social life within these states; their widespread accolades as success stories, particularly on the continent, makes these visions sources of inspiration for others seeking to identify formulae of success.

5 Conclusion

This paper has argued that in a number of African countries state-building is not an anachronistic lens to analyse politics, but that, on the contrary, daring agendas are being pursued with the explicit aim of restructuring the political economy, reshaping society, and redefining Africa's external relations. We drew on the insights from four cases where we have done extensive fieldwork – Angola, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Sudan – to suggest that despite the unique trajectories of each of these, important similarities are shared between the projects ruling elites are pursuing. We suggested that the normative, institutional and policy priorities that define political power and the logic of governance in these cases should be approached comparatively, with a view to better understanding a range of regimes that can neither be subsumed under the failed/fragile state category nor an assumed inevitable transition to electoral democracy and capitalism.

The literature on non-liberal experiences remains small and often doesn't go much beyond positively comparing so-called 'local solutions' with blundering foreign attempts to create order, whether it's the Washington Consensus or the 'stabilisation' approach of liberal peace-building.[64] African state-building projects continue to be superficially explored less for the sake of understanding them in their own terms, than to critique liberal fantasies. Many perceive local projects as more credible than an internationally sponsored one carrying neo-colonial overtones[65], but they are seldom explicit about their authoritarianism, a key feature of Africa's illiberal state-builders as we have shown. Furthermore, while most consequential processes of state reconstruction are happening at the macro-level, this literature tends to prefer mesa- and micro-level dynamics and sometimes extols the virtues of stateless order, resulting in the romanticising of 'local solutions' and the overstating of their rootedness. Incidentally, this also 'over-Africanises' African politics and underplays the extent of

[63] Harry Verhoeven, '"Dams are Development": China, the Al-Ingaz Regime, and the Political Economy of the Sudanese Nile,' in *Sudan Looks East: China, India & the Politics of Asian Alternatives*, ed. Daniel Large and Luke A. Patey (James Currey, 2011).
[64] D. Curtis, G.A. Dzinesa, and A. Adebajo, *Peacebuilding, Power, and Politics in Africa* (Ohio University Press, 2012).
[65] M. Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

borrowing and external engagement – indeed, the cosmopolitan and modernist character – of African state-building agendas like that of the RPF, TPLF or Al-Ingaz.

Our future research agenda focuses in much greater details on the weaknesses of illiberal state-building in Africa. Throughout this paper, we have taken seriously the arguments of elites in Angola, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Sudan – that these are not yet just mere authoritarian governments engaging in neo-patrimonial business-as-usual. However, our engagement with self-proclaimed revolution and modernisation strategies does not imply either an endorsement or a particular optimism as to the effectiveness and durability of these projects. The neo-developmentalist initiatives are bold designs underwritten by huge financial and political capital, yet it is by no means certain that these bets will pay off and can actually sustainably move Ethiopia out of the low equilibrium trap it has been stuck in, banish the spectre of ethnic violence from Rwanda, or reverse the dynamics of extraversion that have characterised so much of Angolan and Sudanese history. The assumptions underpinning the grand visions of the illiberal state-builders are deeply flawed and the much-touted competence of their bureaucratic elites is highly questionable. Even if the economic masterplans for creating substantial minorities do deliver on the elites' wildest dreams, this will also not automatically translate into political stability and associated hegemony. To the contrary, it appears to us that the gamble of definitely subduing old ethnic and centre-periphery demons through rapid growth and efficient service delivery may be a costly miscalculation, typical of (former) Marxist-Leninists: while it may indeed materially change countries like Ethiopia beyond recognition, persisting identity questions around ethnicity, race, region and history are not mere false consciousness or simple derivatives of material processes. The *tabula rasa* illusion, which is so central to illiberal and liberal state-building projects alike, is likely to come back and haunt the brave new worlds the likes of the RPF have created.[66]

Like the future of these countries, the study of Africa's illiberal state-builders is open. By highlighting some of the paradoxes and ironies of illiberal state-building we hope to both foster debate and to stimulate deeper reflection on the opportunities and dangers that one of the most important developments in African politics of the last 20 years might hold. How durable are the edifices of political control that are being built? Can Ethiopia's new authoritarians withstand the eventual demise of Meles Zenawi? Could the RPF outlive Paul Kagame? Why are the 'new' political economies of Angola and Sudan so reminiscent of the old ones? How substantial is the influence of Africa's illiberal state-builders on the political imaginations and praxis other African countries? And will the changing international system be more or less likely to support, accommodate or repress these state-building experiments?

[66] Harry Verhoeven, 'Nurturing Democracy or into the Danger Zone? The Rwandan Patriotic Front, Elite Fragmentation, and Post-Liberation Politics,' in *Rwanda Fast Forward: Social, Economic, Military and Reconciliation Prospects*, ed. M. Campioni and P. Noack (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).

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