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978-0-521-82557-3 - Political Topographies of the African State: Territorial Authority and Institutional Choice

Catherine Boone

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Political Topographies of the African State

Centralized political authority has come under ideological and political challenge almost everywhere. Nowhere have the issues been framed with more urgency than in regionally divided or multiethnic states, where state building and territorial integration are ongoing projects. How will the center govern the provinces? Will political authority at the subnational level compete with, or reinforce, power at the center? What explains variation in the autonomy of the provinces? When is the center likely to hold?

Political Topographies of the African State shows that central rulers' power, ambitions, and strategies of control have always varied across subregions of the national space, even in countries reputed to be highly centralized. Catherine Boone argues that this unevenness reflects a state-building logic that is shaped by differences in the political economy of the regions – that is, by relations of property, production, and authority that determine the political clout and economic needs of regional-level elites. Center-provincial bargaining, rather than the unilateral choices of the center, is what drives the politics of national integration and determines how institutions distribute power. When devolution occurs, will we get local democracy, decentralized despotism, or disintegration of authority? *Political Topographies* shows why and how the answer can vary across space within a single national unit.

This fresh analysis of state building in agrarian societies engages mainstream debates over the origins of political institutions and why institutions change over time. Boone's innovative analysis speaks to scholars and policy makers who want to understand geographic unevenness in the centralization and decentralization of power, in the nature of citizenship and representation, and in patterns of core-periphery integration and breakdown in many of the world's multiethnic or regionally divided states.

Catherine Boone is Associate Professor of Government at the University of Texas at Austin.

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TERRITORIAL AUTHORITY
AND INSTITUTIONAL
CHOICE

CATHERINE BOONE

University of Texas at Austin



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To Joshua and Alexander

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When a state accustomed to live in freedom under its own laws is acquired, there are three ways of keeping it: the first is to destroy it; the second is to go live there in person; the third is to let it continue to live under its own laws, taking tribute from it, and setting up a government composed of a few men that will keep it friendly to you. Such a government, being the creature of the prince, will be aware that it cannot survive without his friendship and support, and it will do everything to maintain his authority. A city which is used to freedom is more easily controlled by means of its own citizens than by any other, provided one chooses not to destroy it.

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Donno edition)

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Barrington Moore Jr. wrote that in modernizing Europe, methods of extracting the agricultural surplus formed the core of nearly all social and political problems. In studying rural marketing circuits and land tenure politics in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, I gradually realized the salience of this point for Africa, where general forms of the postcolonial state and political trajectories are usually seen as largely autonomous from the main currents of constancy and change in agrarian society. Modern African states have been understood as “bureaucratic states” or “postcolonial states,” but rarely as the agrarian states that they (also) are. This book adopts this perspective to rethink some key issues of state formation, territorial integration, and institutional development in modern Africa.

The main argument is that social forces have gone far in shaping and constraining patterns of state formation since the end of the nineteenth century, but that the full significance and implications of this are only revealed through development of appropriate spatial and temporal frames of analysis. We depart from much earlier work by highlighting the existence of geographically uneven patterns of state building within any given country; these uneven patterns are the “political topographies” referred to in the title. How and to what extent agrarian societies in Africa have been incorporated into the modern state are outcomes that have been determined by center-periphery struggles that are themselves shaped by local political facts. As Machiavelli pointed out in describing a different context, successful rulers devise governing strategies that take local opportunity and challenge into account. In Africa as elsewhere, structure and choice are both at work as rulers make states under circumstances not of their own choosing.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Although the errors and larger interpretations herein are solely mine, the reader will soon see that I am indebted to many others, and in this sense the work is a collective product. I owe most to those whose work is cited in the footnotes, and give special mention to the work of Paul Pélissier, Robert Brenner, and Peter Geschiere, which provided foundational ideas. For ideas offered in conversation and/or comments on earlier papers and versions of this manuscript, I would like to thank Musa Abutudu, Arun Agrawal, Anthony Appiah-Mensah, Atta Brou Noel, Gareth Austin, Joel Barkan, Robert Bates, Linda Beck, Michael Chege, Toyin Falola, Kathryn Firmin-Sellers, Joshua Forrest, Clement Henry, David Himbara, Norma Kriger, David Laitin, Barbara Lewis, Joel Migdal, Mick Moore, Martin Murray, Greg Nowell, Brett O'Bannon, Jesse Ribot, John Saul, James Scott, Ibrahima Thioub, Peter Trubowitz, Nicolas van de Walle, Leonardo Villalon, Brian Wampler, Jennifer Widner, Dwayne Woods, and Crawford Young. Kendra Bartsch provided research assistance for three years while she finished her undergraduate degree at the University of Texas at Austin. Jackie Johnson of the University of North Carolina Press drew the maps of West Africa.

The project was launched while I was an Academy Scholar at the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies from 1990 to 1992, and I thank Henry Rosovsky for his early interest in this work. Field research was funded by the Harvard Academy of International and Area Studies, the Social Science Research Council, Fulbright, and the McNamara Fellowship of the World Bank Development Institute. During the Ivoirian part of the research I was a visiting researcher at the Centre Ivoirien de Recherche Economique et Sociale and benefited greatly from the collegial support of Assalé Kouapa and Atta Brou Noel. The Centre des Etudes Supérieures en Gestion provided an initial base for research in Senegal and connections to the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar. I would like to thank all those who made these affiliations possible. Versions of the argument have been presented at the Yale Seminar on Agrarian Studies, the Kellogg Institute at Notre Dame, the University of Florida African Studies Center, the departments of political science at Northwestern University and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and annual meetings of the American Political Science Association and the African Studies Association. Early input I received from the Yale presentation added several years to the project by convincing me of the need for in-country comparisons (alongside the cross-country comparisons), and for that I thank James Scott and members of the Agrarian Studies Seminar. Thanks also to the University of Texas at Austin

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