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Amy Niang, *Postcolonial African State in Transition*. Publisher: Rowman & Littlefield International, London and New York, 2018. 225 pages. ISBN 978-1-7866-0652.

Reviewed by: Alhagi Manta Drammeh, Associate Professor at the Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education, Visiting Professor at the University of The Gambia and Researcher at South Wales University, United Kingdom.

This book is composed of six chapters that includes an introduction and a conclusion. The author starts off in the introductory chapter by problematising the present notions of the state in the African contexts by dislodging the cultural and normative values of legitimisation at the advent of colonisation. The author argues that there is a need to consider the historicity of the state because of compromises with Europe because of the Westphalia agreement on one hand and to examine the internal dynamics and complexities of post-colonial Africa on another. She cites the example of West and Central Africa in state-building around sovereignty, identity, and co-existence.

She insists that framing the above questions should not necessarily be linked to the European historical particularities; rather, they should be examined in the contexts of innovative African political trajectories. It is argued that forms of governance reflect functions of values and ethics. For the Mossi people, sovereignty is a representation of customs and intellectual heritage reflected in the notion of *rog-n-miki*, which emphasises interdependence among members of society for a social and political order. Thus, it is important to consider diverse models of political formation, whether centralised or not, to capture nuances within society. On the question of the binary approach to political order in terms of state and stateless structures, the author suggests there can be multiple modalities dealing with each of the two categories.

The decentralised governance within African contexts as in the Voltaic region is embedded in the “everyday flow” of African life and the established African “polities.” She further examines the duality discourse on state/stateless and political/non-political in the context of construction and differentiation through misrepresentations with regards to order between society and nature on the one hand, and between different social components on the other. Therefore,

the need for deconstruction requires new categories and insights to go beyond this dichotomous approach to centralised and decentralised systems of governance within the African context.

This complexity can be attributed to the fluid nature of the relationships between nature and society, as well as the socio-political and socio-ritual spheres. Moreover, the author further debunks the suggestion that states evolved from small polities into centralised forms, citing the example of the Voltaic region where this differentiation can be blurred due to the complexity of political development in Africa, generally negotiating alliances through *ethnicity*, blood relations and *territoriality*.

The book propounds on the relationship between power (*naam*) and belief (*tenga*) for coexistence with regards to the Mossi people. In fact, the *tenga* contributes to social integration and state legitimacy. Overall, the author critiques the Western colonial and postcolonial models of formation of state and governance. The author argues that the simplification of political development based on conquest theories and cultural subjugation must be challenged by exploring new categories of analysis and new intellectual history of the oral and the written, as well as the political and the ritual.

She, indeed, deconstructs the colonial encounter with Africa in its effort to replace and delegitimise the precolonial leadership with postcolonial order and structures. This deconstruction articulates how a state is reduced to power. This emphasises the thesis of the book that there is coherence between the reality of politics and its representation in political *subjectivities*. Finally, the author buttresses her argument that the postcolonial articulation of governance in Africa must be revisited in terms of examining the relationship between state and society, in terms of different configurations of governance and other possibilities.

Arguably, the book contributes to the debate around precolonial, colonial and postcolonial scholarship on the relationships between state and society, and between culture and politics in the African contexts. This debate will encourage more academic work on governance and legitimacy in Africa leading to comparative studies within Africa and beyond. The author, therefore, urges scholars to explore the possibilities for institutional and constitutional structures to be inclusive and progressive in Africa.

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