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Transition and Legitimacy in African States: The cases of Somalia and Uganda

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Working Paper / Documento de trabajo
December 2005

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Transition and Legitimacy in African States: The cases of Somalia and Uganda

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This essay is part of a series of resources of the Responses to Failing States and Peace Building Project of the Peace and Security Area, FRIDE (www.fride.org). For more information on this project contact with Isabel Moreno, imoreno@fride.org .

Working Paper / Documento de trabajo

* An earlier draft of this paper was prepared for the conference on Legitimacy and Consensus, State Crisis and Political Transitions, organized by the Dipartimento di Politica, Instituzioni, Storia of the University of Bologna.

** Another version of this paper is published in Italian: Martin Doornbos, 'Transizione e legittimitanegli Stati africani, con particolare riferimento a Somalia e Uganda', in Anna Maria Gentili e Mario Zamponi, eds., Stato, democrazia e legittimità: Le transizioni politiche in Africa, America Latina, Balcani, Medio Oriente (Rome: Carocci editori, 2005).

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I. Introduction

With all the traumatic transitions that African states have been subject to in recent decades, it is only to be expected that these should have deeply affected the orientations on and appreciation of the state both by its citizens in Africa and by observers elsewhere. The transitions concerned have been no less than dramatic. African states at the time of independence had been the focus of high expectations about the developmental role they were going to play. They were then seen as 'prime movers' on many fronts, and on all kinds of issues it was the state which was expected to carry responsibility and take the initiative. For a whole range of reasons - lack of capacity, financial constraints, the nature of political processes, authoritarian rule, and many more - these expectations could not be fulfilled and in the eyes of many the African state in the 1980s evolved from 'prime mover' to 'prime obstacle' to meaningful development (Doornbos 1990). Many states in Africa have since been leading a precarious existence, subject to severe challenges from within and from outside, unable to fulfil basic needs and expectations, and in several instances coming literally to the point of collapse (Doornbos 2002). Inevitably, this will have affected appreciations of the African state both from within and from outside.

This paper seeks to explore this subjective dimension of the political transitions African countries have been undergoing. In turn this invites discussion about fluctuations in the perceived legitimacy of African states and their rulers. Legitimacy however is an elusive concept, and raises preliminary questions as to who constitute its presumed bearers in different contexts and whose assessments count most in determining its presence or absence. To that end, against a brief general background, we will first re-visit the notion of legitimacy and probe its relative merits as an analytical tool. Following that, some of the dynamics concerned will be illustrated at the hand of the experiences of Uganda and Somalia and of the fluctuations in academic-government relations in Eastern Africa, before trying to draw some tentative conclusions about the contemporary scope and limitations of analyses in terms of political legitimacy.

II. State and crisis, state in crisis

There has naturally been a good deal of debate around possible explanations for the dramatic developments many or most African states have been subject to in recent times. The debate has largely focused on possible internal and external causations of mal-development, and observers have often tended to privilege one or the other of these explanations, usually at the expense of the alternative explanation. A focus on internal factors has often highlighted instances of arbitrary rule, excessive personalized powers, lack of democratic accountability and respect for human rights, pervasive clientelism and corruption, and lack of capacity and appropriate managerial and technical skills. Internally, also, it has often been argued that the African situation has been strongly influenced by the historical fragmentation of the continent into arbitrary entities and the imposition of a wholly new and alien order by the colonial powers. The resulting 'gap' in state and society relations in the African context has never really been closed since, and arguably allows or promotes some of the political misconduct that has been noted. Thus, following a brief period during the immediate post-independence years when 'nation-building' was high up on the academic and international policy agenda, the idea that 'nations' could be forged out of the amalgam of ethno-regional groupings has been quietly dropped across the continent. Economic dynamics have not been able to counter these negative tendencies, but have, on the contrary, for a long time reinforced the presence and continuity of essentially fragile yet exploitative bureaucratic ruling classes. Thus, as contrasted to recurrent formative economic and

political processes in several of the larger states of Asia, Africa's state systems appear to have been bequeathed with a stronger vulnerability and propensity for collapse as well as some of the pre-conditions for arbitrary rule.

On the external side, the combined impact, magnitude and complexity of all the external demands put on African states as part of structural adjustment and beyond has placed an overwhelming weight on the policy-making processes of individual African countries. Given the limited financial and staffing resources *vis-à-vis* this collective external expertise, the role of the national government often became necessarily limited to accepting - or possibly refusing to accept - ready-made policy packages prepared elsewhere, or already agreed upon by the main donors. In most instances the state no longer figures as the final nerve center for policy making and coordination, as many policies are now being developed elsewhere: for aid-dependent countries particularly in Washington with the IMF and World Bank. Some governments sometimes managed to give a fresh meaning to the concept of 'the relative autonomy of the state' by skilfully playing off one donor against another (Alavi, 1972:59-81), but increasing insistence on donor co-ordination has also made this more difficult, closing off this limited room for manoeuvre. The scope for alternative development strategies in Africa has become severely reduced.

There has been ongoing debate about the extent to which globalisation has been impacting on the powers and capacities of the state in Africa and elsewhere. Though specifics will naturally vary from case to case, it is broadly argued, and largely agreed, that globalisation causes reduced distinctiveness of 'national' contexts, such as for the organization of production, the setting of norms and regulations, or as a venue for political debate. Closely related, it has been observed that there has been a weakening of state structures in a number of respects. For years there has been propagation of the rolling back of the state by the key international financial institutions. In not a few cases, the role of the state has thus been changing from one that supposedly serves as a centre of policy initiatives to that of an implementing agent of policies designed elsewhere. In the wake of far-reaching state restructuring taking place in terms of decentralization and other respects, over-arching state agencies often are no longer available or capable to carry out traditional functions such as interest reconciliation or protection of the weaker sections (Meynen and Doornbos, 2004). Instead, in an increasingly volatile global economic environment, various state-systems have themselves become more vulnerable, at times running the risk of collapse. Many African as well as other states have had to surrender several layers of their 'sovereignty' in the process, and a severance of the links between territory and sovereignty has been noted in several regards.

With the exponential increase of the incidence of African states in crisis, the number of states that in recent decades have gone through, are currently subject to, or might yet fall victim to, severe internal conflict and disintegration, is impressive and sobering at once. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, academic as well as more popular accounts have tended to sketch near-apocalyptic pictures of the continent's future political trajectory and condition (e.g. Bayart et.al, 1999). Yet, it is important to note that while most African countries have indeed been through, or are still in, periods of pervasive crisis, they happen to be located at very different points in any respective spirals of conflict, confrontations and recovery, as the cases of Somalia and Uganda will illustrate.

While these temporal dimensions call for differentiation when surveying the African political landscape, the range of issues and dimensions associated with state crises itself has also become manifold, indicative of significant variations as to what state crises may entail and comprise. Key words that have come into vogue to describe the African situation, rightly or wrongly, include state failure and state collapse, fragmentation, disintegration, criminalization, warlordism, and ethnocide. Nonetheless, at the same time there are also occasional upbeat references to grassroots technologies, 'bottom

up' administrative structures, informal economies, cultural resilience and more to depict the fluctuating conditions. Significantly in this connection, new, at times unprecedented forms of political engagement have been emerging, in which in some cases states may be seen acting as private bodies, while private actors may arrogate state-like powers. In not a few instances novel manifestations of the exercise of power, political violence and political processes have occurred in a kind of semi-public, semi-private, 'twilight state' sphere (Lund, 2001). Indeed, the notion of 'state' as such is questionable in some cases, let alone its legitimation. Still, although constituting part of an overall pattern of state malaise, each case will have its own distinctive features, following its own fault-lines and potential for specific kinds of strife and solutions.

III. On legitimacy

If in the light of these transitions we wish to better appreciate assessments made of African states and state performance, this implies asking questions about the perceived *legitimacy* of the state and its rulers. Legitimacy has for long represented a key concept in political theory and will necessarily remain so in one form or another. Interestingly, however, it does not seem to be used very often in contemporary studies and discussions on African states. This is a priori surprising, since with so much emphasis given to problems of economic (mal-)performance and failures of governance, one might have expected that more use would be made of the prism of legitimacy in assessing the role and position of African states. However, this is evidently not the case[1]. A relative *absence* of allusions to the idea of legitimacy in studies of African states, notwithstanding all the major transitions and conflicts they have been subject to, therefore, seems prima facie intriguing and to call for some explanation. In this connection, the initiative to forefront the concept taken by the *Dipartimento di Politica, Istituzioni, Storia* of the University of Bologna in its research program on *Legitimacy and Consensus, State Crisis and Political Transitions*, is certainly to be welcomed.

When searching for possible explanations for the relative *absence* of the use of the concept of legitimacy in discussions on African states, the complexity of the concept itself and the direction which discussion of it has taken in Western theorizing, could be one possible factor. For example, some recent debate, initiated on the basis of the work by Habermas and Offe, has focused on crises of state legitimation in developed capitalist societies, discussed in terms of 'state overload' and 'legitimation crisis'. 'Overload' occurs when the state system cannot cope with the magnitude of different demands it is expected to devote attention to, while 'legitimation crises' may result from contradictory policy responses to demands from different client groups, leaving the state in crisis. According to David Held (1987), "...both overload and legitimation crisis theorists claim that state power is being eroded in the face of growing demands: in one case these demands are regarded as 'excessive', in the other they are regarded as the virtually inevitable result of the contradictions within which the state is enmeshed." (p. 237). Whatever the relative merits of these theories, however, they both refer to conditions which seem to have only limited applicability to African states, which are characterized by lack of (implementation) capacity and are usually in the hands of restricted ruling circles. Hence this line of scholarship might not readily be pursued under the different circumstances of African and various other countries in the South. Still, this leaves unattended the question *what* other notions of legitimacy would seem applicable in the latter situations.

But even if we were to stick to the core of Max Weber's classical concepts of legitimacy and the state, certain problems of relevance and applicability would arise.

1 An extremely limited and cursory check in my own collection of indexed works on African states and politics published over the last few decades suggests that far more studies carry no entry for 'legitimacy' than those that do, and that among those that do only relatively few have included 'legitimacy' as an entry for further serious explorations. In the others, 'legitimacy' seemed to have been picked up more like in a word check, and to serve further analytical purposes.

While Weber's notions of legitimacy are largely focused on the state, a state in his terms is "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (Weber, 1958, p. 78). Legitimacy itself in Weber's conceptualisation may be viewed either as being derived from tradition, the ruler's charisma, or from broadly accepted legal-rational norms and procedures, but in each case it would essentially refer to the quality of the relationship between *rulers* and *ruled* within a given state framework. Within this relationship, rulers, or any state organs for that matter, earn their legitimacy in the sense of moral approval by most groups in society through the way they 'cope with whatever tasks they already claim smoothly and efficiently', in Skocpol's terms (Skocpol, 1979, p. 31). Legitimacy, in other words, is the judgmental by-product of the continuous interactions between state organs and diverse client groups, in which states are seeking to reconcile and satisfy contrasted requirements and the demands and expectations upon it from those clienteles. As such, it reaches beyond the question as to whether an incumbent's claim to a particular office is *legitimate* or not, that is, in accordance with prescribed rules for succession or election. However, it can be argued that the notion and focus on 'ruler-ruled' relations this embodies, even if transposed into 'state organs' vis-à-vis 'client groups' relationships, would call for some important qualifications within many African contexts.

To see this, it will be necessary to bring in the main factors and dimensions currently constituting the field of African politics and statehood. To be sure, the state framework, the government, as well as social groups of different descriptions, all constitute key elements within this field, even though, as was noted above, at times it is questionable whether one can (still; yet) speak of a 'state'. Still, identifying them and their interconnections will hardly be sufficient to provide a picture and understanding of the key issues at play within the political economy of African states, how these are currently being handled, and by whom. For that understanding it will be necessary to begin by adding external factors, and players, such as the main multilateral organizations and the donor front. In recent decades, as also noted, the latter have had a decisive influence over policy making in most African contexts, so much so that it just would not do to assess the degree of legitimacy and moral acceptance of African state leaderships strictly on the basis of the relationships between 'rulers' and 'ruled'. At least, this would appear to be the case when viewing the connection from an external 'academic' perspective. The 'ruled' may or may not consider the 'rulers' legitimate, depending on the concrete experience, but in either case they may not necessarily perceive the connections between their rulers and external powers which have a decisive influence over them. More generally, the inroads of globalisation into state autonomy cannot but affect the scope for analyses of state legitimacy in a conventional sense. Hence, the concept of legitimacy might retain its relevance only if it were so stretched as to be able to accommodate the external dimension into the relationship it is meant to refer to. But understandably many researchers and others would rather avoid this arduous task, which may be another reason why 'legitimacy' is not used too often as an entry-point or analytical instrument in studies of African politics.

A qualification is also in order with respect to the *ruled* in the African context, the other part of the classical legitimacy equation. Without asserting that most other states elsewhere in the world are homogeneous in social, ethnic, linguistic or religious respects, it will be evident that African states are particularly fragmented in these regards. The implications this has for gaining nation-wide moral acceptance and legitimacy for the state framework are vast indeed, especially since in most cases one has not really seen the emergence of a socio-political stratum which does *not* have its primary sense of affiliation with one of the fragments. A sense of being left out, or being politically and economically marginalized, is common among many groups in Africa. In the African case, therefore, the classical distinction between *levels* of legitimacy, that is, first with respect to incumbents of institutions whose acceptance and legitimacy (i.e. the institutions') is itself unquestioned, then with respect to an

institutional regime within a political community otherwise considered legitimate, and finally about the extent to which the political 'community' is or is not considered 'legitimate', retains an important validity.

We could take this argument yet one step further, though at the risk of running into additional complications. The above external dimension does not only refer to the key decision and policymaking mechanisms which African states must currently abide by, especially in matters of public finance. It is also a reflection on the nature of the African post-colonial state and the state framework itself, whose origins were essentially exogenous and have retained an 'alien' character in more than one sense, notwithstanding several generations of 'Africanization'. These circumstances tend to make it problematic to speak in terms of the more organic kind of state-society or state-citizen relationships which a concept of legitimacy would normally presuppose. In addition there is the fragmented internal legacy which virtually all African states have to content with. Sometimes observers therefore would say that African states are lacking in basic (moral) legitimacy when it comes to the kind of ruler-ruled relationships they involve. Countering this, others may instead stress the *legality* of the state frameworks concerned, especially in terms of international law. This particular given, important as it is by way of historical background, has generally not kept (external) commentators from passing judgment on African *rulers* using a legitimacy-illegitimacy scale, however. Ironically, the African *state* in some such assessments might be considered 'legitimate', but not its rulers. Yet others, for various reasons, might want to reverse that picture, such as some cultural anthropologists who might regard the state in Africa as of doubtful legitimation, but 'traditional' *chiefs* as the legitimate embodiment of culture and history (at times forgetting how much 'traditional' chiefs had become embedded in the colonial enterprise) (Cf. Oomen, 2004). In sum, while the conventional *locus* of legitimacy has become problematic with respect to the African situation, attributions of legitimacy and illegitimacy are at times extended to a variety of other actors and different social and institutional levels, turning the achievement of 'classical' forms of legitimacy difficult to attain by African states. Again, this may also have contributed to the eclipse of a focus on 'legitimacy' in African political studies.

Two final observations on the seemingly reduced use of 'legitimacy' as an analytical entry-point are still related to this. One is of course that a relative absence of *explicit* references to the idea of legitimacy does not necessarily mean that it does not play a role *implicitly* in various analyses. And second, other concepts such as 'good governance', 'human rights' and 'global justice' have in recent years come in, partly to replace, partly to complement, notions of 'legitimacy' and to give it a more specific content. Some of these, however, like the notion of 'good governance', will be readily recognized as having been externally inspired. Such shifts could be seen as both a cause and a consequence of the relative decline of a focus on 'legitimacy'.

In sum, these various observations point to a mix of perceptions about legitimacy and illegitimacy in connection with African political transitions. They may also help explain, first, why legitimacy seems to be used less as a lens for analysis than one might have presupposed in regard to a range of politically highly volatile situations, and second, whenever it *is* used, which actors or factors tend to be focused upon and which seem to be left out. Besides, it was noted that there are significant *a priori* variations as to which key variables - the state, state actors, non-state actors like chiefs - may be treated as legitimate or illegitimate, whether implicitly or explicitly: e.g. the state for some, 'chiefs' for others, etc. Evidently, there is an important element of differential perceptions and/or perspectives when it comes to attributing legitimacy to players within the broader political field of a state context. Moreover, there are significant variations as regards the *quarters* from which legitimacy or illegitimacy may be attributed, and to which actors or frameworks. These may include different sections of the population, holding their rulers in high or in low esteem as the case may be; external actors passing judgments on e.g. state performance (who at times may well be the same actors carrying final responsibility as to what is

demanded from the state organs concerned); and last but not least external and internal academic observers, making their own assessments as to the policy performance and legitimacy of the state and its rulers. In any concrete situation all of such judgments will somehow coalesce into some overall yet highly volatile assessments of state and regime (il)legitimacy.

IV. Somalia and Uganda

Turning now to Somalia and Uganda as our key examples, these are among the countries in Africa that have become most often associated with major political upheavals and traumatic conflicts in the post-colonial period in Africa. Over the years both countries have had major ups and downs in their respective political life histories, concerned either with their searches for national achievement, political unification or the consolidation of power, or with their experiences with internal war, ethnic violence or rampant corruption. Both in Somalia and in Uganda, successes and failures in these regards often came in rapid succession, leaving plenty historical landmarks to be remembered, or to be eradicated from the collective mind. And in both cases, the story is clearly 'ongoing', continuing to draw interest and calling for retrospective and where possible prospective analysis. Clearly, the two have many lessons to offer by way of assessments in terms of 'legitimacy' and 'illegitimacy'.

There are ample differences, socially and culturally, with important political ramifications for forms of legitimation, between the two countries. The Somalis have often been noted for their sharing one language, one culture and religion, Islam, and being all ultimately related through a common lineage and clan system, a point which was often emphasized in government ideology. Closer inspection, however, would reveal the historical significance of several Islamic orders, and surely also of the clan divisions which have often proved much stronger than they had sometimes been assumed to be (Lewis 1980, Laitin and Samatar, 1987). Uganda, instead, had been historically marked and divided by some major linguistic and ethnic cleavages, and even found several political kingdoms incorporated into its colonial-established body politic, each of which at different times became a focus of contention. Besides, competitive proselytism in Uganda added Protestantism versus Roman Catholicism to its fault lines with political implications, Islam for most of the time remaining relegated to a minor third position (Mudoola 1993, Mutibwa 1992). Initially, therefore, Somalia for many years after independence could come under the sway of pan-Somali aspirations and of externally focused political designs that would follow from them. Uganda instead found itself having to balance and accommodate kingships with claims to power, a North-South rift with potentially far-reaching ramifications, and religious divisions which further complicated the equation, all turning it quite vulnerable to challenges from within.

For all their differences in history and social context, Somalia and Uganda have nonetheless come to share some important features and experiences. They both form part of the Greater Horn as classified by various international agencies and in that respect they belong to a larger and quite volatile geo-political unit (Adam 1994, Doornbos and Markakis 1994). Specifically, following independence they have both gone through dramatic political trajectories, first of nationalist and sub-nationalist political engagement, then of aggravating conflict and crisis and ultimately the collapse or near-collapse of their respective state systems, from which only Uganda has since managed to recover. Surely, if 'legitimacy' and 'illegitimacy' were in some way measurable, the capacity of the political thermometer would definitely have been tested at both the upper and lower ends in the two cases. At different times both countries fell victim to repressive military regimes which for years on end held large parts of their populations hostage. In the end each became subject to various largely externally sponsored post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation strategies, trying to

give new contents to statehood and democratisation among other things (though in the Somali case as yet quite abortive) (Lyons and Samatar 1995, Heinrich 1997, Doornbos 2002, Hansen and Twaddle 1995). Conceivably, each may face renewed cycles of confrontation and violence in the years ahead.

Somalia's and Uganda's fortunes have both been strongly determined by Cold War and post Cold War global politics, albeit often in opposite ways. For years their respective political trajectories have formed part of the broader drama of conflict in the Horn, which also involved countries like Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan and which aggregated the various internal conflicts of these states into a wider and interrelated battlefield with multiple confrontations. Thus, Uganda over time has frequently been played out against Sudan, Sudan against Ethiopia, Ethiopia vis-à-vis Somalia and vice versa, while each has also been supporting opposition groups in the adjacent state, usually with powerful external backing from larger regional or global players. By coincidence, Uganda in recent years has been acclaimed an 'oasis of peace' by global players, who complimented it for getting its act together and bestowed it with a reputation of 'darling of the donors', clearly a token of externally accorded 'legitimacy'. Somalia instead continues to be depicted as an area of 'un-rule', 'civil strife', or as a synonym for 'anarchy', all evidently conveying a judgment of 'illegitimacy' for the Somali political context.

Generally, within the overall picture in the Horn, strongly influenced by Cold War politics and beyond as it has been, the crises pervading Uganda and Somalia during and after the times of Idi Amin and Syad Barre in particular have without doubt been among the gravest on the continent. But while Uganda and Somalia came to rank among the top problematic cases of state repression, conflict and collapse in Africa, they did not go through these cycles in tandem. Uganda was emerging out of its prolonged crisis (1986) by the time Somalia was yet to plunge into its own, or get into the deep of it. Within the general pattern of conflicts in the Horn, moreover, the two systems displayed striking differences in their specific experiences with the handling of conflict. Most notably, and paradoxically, despite Somalia's assumed homogeneity as opposed to Uganda's apparent in-built divisiveness, it was Somalia's state system that in 1991 fragmented beyond foreseeable repair, while in contrast in Uganda a unity of sorts endured against expectations of an opposite logic. Pan-Somali nationalism in the end fell victim to internal regional cum clan divisions, whereas in Uganda regional sub-nationalism (notably from Buganda), which had been posing limits to broader 'national' nationalism, had run up and finally lost out against 'national' powers at the political centre. In the two cases, each of the fault lines concerned also reflected different alternative political entities imagined more 'legitimate' than the state by different contending groups within the society, such as Somaliland in Somalia and Buganda within the Uganda context.

In Uganda, from about 1972 till 1979 internal divisions and the inability to organize any concerted action among opposition groups in exile caused Idi Amin's infamous regime to become prolonged for years. In Somalia instead a similar stalemate has continued but now to block the *re-establishment* of a common state structure as of 1991. Also, whereas Somalia dismally failed in its pan-Somali expansionist pursuits, it happened to be Uganda which for some time in recent years was getting away with its external military cum commercial designs in Congo, apparently seeking to carve out a niche of its resource-rich neighbour. There was a widespread assumption that Uganda was trying to create a broader sphere of influence and hegemony in the Great Lakes region for itself, just as its other neighbour Rwanda was doing. These contrasts may be partly explained by differences in the respective composition of the body politic in Somalia and Uganda. Basically the potential of Somali regionalism, closely linked to clan politics, for long appeared to have been underestimated, while in Uganda the resilience of a level of 'Ugandan-ness' at times has seemed to go unnoticed in the heat of internal conflict. Nonetheless, Uganda, too, has had moments when a 'national' question forcefully asserted itself and when its very cohesion seemed at stake

(Doornbos, 1988). Besides, with its internal war in the North still going on (for 17 years already), some of its political rifts have evidently remained entirely unresolved (Dunn, 2004; The Refugee Law Project, 2004). In both cases, therefore, it is of key importance to appreciate the interplay of the dynamics of regional conflict, movements and sub-nationalism with the trajectories of state politics.

V. Changing political fortunes

When looking back at the changing political fortunes in Somalia and Uganda and the way these would get translated into terms of 'legitimacy', one thing that remains striking is the succession of almost meteoric ups and downs that have occurred in the course of their respective trajectories of state formation and decline. In the two countries political leaderships at different times emerged amidst great popular enthusiasm, only to leave the scene years later intensely hated and after power having become highly personalized. But of course this has not been a phenomenon unique to Somalia and Uganda. In the Horn alone, the fresh governments of Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia and Isayas Aferworki in Eritrea in the early 1990s were also welcomed with great and broad enthusiasm before they began to sour and display comparable kinds of autocratic tendencies. In Weberian terms we would say they initially seemed to embody a strong element of charisma-based legitimacy, both in the eyes of their followers and of outside observers. They aroused high expectations and attracted internal and external attention in view of the novel starts they seemed to be enacting, - until it became evident that there had been a high degree of false promise in their announcements.

For Uganda and Somalia it now almost seems difficult to recall that Idi Amin was strikingly popular when he was first installed (with British and Israeli backing) as President of Uganda in 1971, or that Syad Barre during his first years as President of Somalia could count on similarly substantial popular support. Those were the years when the latter launched his project for socialist transformation of Somalia, beginning with mass literacy campaigns to try and bridge perceived widening urban-rural gaps. Somalia then enjoyed a 'progressive' image, and was even outbidding Tanzania in its bold designs for a new and alternative political future. Uganda under Obote's first presidency (1967-1971) also made a short-lived bid in this direction, though Obote's Common Man's Charter and related documents never became the inspiring texts that Nyerere's writings had represented in Tanzania. When contemplating these episodes and the responses each of these moves and initiatives encountered, it is striking to note how strongly person- and personality-oriented the respective judgments in terms of 'legitimacy' and 'illegitimacy' tended to be.

More recently in Uganda, Museveni during his first years and terms of government (as from 1986) similarly evoked broad popular support, at least in the southern and western regions, for having restored basic physical security and starting Uganda on a fresh track. These were important years instilling a fresh sense of confidence among broad sections of the population in the future, thus bestowing the new government, and Museveni himself, with a substantial degree of 'legitimacy'. Not unlike in Somaliland after it had left the abortive union with Somalia which had given it such traumatic experiences, in Uganda the upsurge of support at this time did not result from any collective enthusiasm for 'nationalism', or 'African socialism', but rather signified a deep desire for a 'never again'. However, it is not quite inconceivable that Uganda for one, like other countries in the Horn, before long may again find itself into a situation in which changing guards becomes a matter of armed opposition to personalized rule. Already, Museveni's challenger in the 2001 presidential elections, former Col. Kiiza Besigye, upon losing the elections which he felt had been biased against him, followed Museveni's own example given in 1981 under similar circumstances by moving outside the country with the intention to build up an armed

opposition force. Today again in Uganda, an illustration is offered of the extent to which the politics of power and legitimacy have become personality-oriented. This is that whereas new presidential elections are only scheduled for 2006, the main question that has been pre-occupying the media and other fora already from 2003 onwards has been whether Museveni would put himself up as a candidate for yet another term of office (which among other things has required a constitutional amendment allowing incumbents to stand for a third term). In this case, like in others elsewhere, the ruling group's determination to cling on to power is evidently very strong, stronger indeed than the wish to be seen building a stable constitutional framework.

The twofold question this leaves for further reflection, is why is it that many novel state trajectories apparently must somehow end in the growth of personalized power, and why is it that contenders come to feel that a change of government can only be realized by force of arms? Clearly, the questions are closely related. Whatever the answer, it is evident that in these conditions of relatively little basic stability and institutionalisation, 'legitimacy' represents a fragile and problematic proposition, and can be gained and lost very quickly. Still, a qualification must be added here, too. While these personality orientations concerned can wax and wane, there is usually a 'hard' core of more immediate followers from a common regional, clan, ethnic or religious basis. In turn this means that while a particular regime may (still) be popular and regarded as 'legitimate' from within a particular region or group, its decline in terms of legitimacy among other groups or in other parts of the country may already have become a fact. In principle it is possible for such dichotomies to become quite enduring.

VI. The research relationship

The conferment or withholding of 'legitimacy', as noted, may come from the population at large or particular sections of it, but also from specific circles each with its own particular vantage point and possibly strategic interest. Churches or religious orders, donor agencies and the military, among others, all represent such particular interests, each of which would merit closer attention. Another special vantage point has often been that of academic circles, which it will be worth paying some special attention to. After all, 'legitimacy' constitutes part of the stock in trade of social researchers and academics.

Such ups and downs in the political support and legitimacy of successive Eastern African leadership as were signalled above have often been echoed also in the academic environment. Early on, Nyerere's Tanzania in the late 1960s and early 1970s radiated an appeal to many researchers for the vision of an alternative development path it held out - until it sought to take a short-cut and implement a core part of this alternative, the Ujaama villagization program, by military means. Until then, development researchers, foreign and Tanzanian, had felt stimulated to inquire into the pros and cons of policies designed to get Tanzania out of a course of deepening dependency. They sought to identify obstacles to 'self-reliance', analyze the merits and scope for 'one-party democracy', or scrutinize the coordinating mechanisms for the 'district development front', all in support of what appeared as a bold and imaginative effort at constructing a different route to decolonisation and beyond. There was a sense, then, of research forming part of and potentially contributing towards a broader project of national transformation in Tanzania. Inasfar as academics could be said to have any role in granting 'legitimacy' to the state, they certainly seemed to be doing so during those early years in independent Tanzania (Cliffe and Saul 1972).

Similar episodes of interest and support, from an academic research angle, arose in other countries at other times. Somalia as such never attracted many researchers when it embarked on its own path of 'progressive' transformation in the 1970s - partly due, perhaps, to a relative lack of sophistication in outlining its policies, and to an impatient nationalist leadership which hardly invited policy 'debate'. Nonetheless, its alternative path was taken note of with interest among academic Africa watchers as long as it lasted. Again, Uganda much later (after 1986) attracted widespread international attention not only because it represented the first instance in which an oppressive military regime in Africa was overthrown not from within its own ranks but through a sustained and popularly supported guerrilla movement. Initially, Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime also spoke to the academic imagination on account of the austerity measures it imposed upon itself and the experimentation with grass-roots democratisation it undertook, notably the creation of the so-called resistance committees and councils at various levels. Likewise, when Eritrea in 1991 emerged from its 30-year struggle for independence as a rare case of a regime determined to defy donor-driven development, it gained much intellectual respect and legitimacy at least among 'Washington consensus' critics for its determination to pursue its own strategies for post-conflict development and reconstruction. Ethiopia's new EPRDF-based regime more or less at the same time also made a much applauded entry on the scene on account of its unprecedented constitution promising the option of self-determination up to the point of independence to its constituent units. This constitutional novelty stimulated lively discussion even way beyond the Horn in view of its potential relevance to multi-ethnic state systems elsewhere on the continent. Outside observers along with marginalized community members waited with interest to see what the next steps would be, in the end only to become disillusioned and embittered by the lack of implementation that followed. These were evidently 'good' years in terms of the credit and legitimacy bestowed upon the new governments, and as it seemed from internal quarters as well as externally.

In each of these instances a new vision of alternative directions seemed to signify a fresh political departure, potentially opening new realms of power and promising alternative futures. At each of such moments, questions of constitutionalism, democratisation, the handling of human rights, a fresh look at ethnicity as well as class, gender and environmental issues, usually figured on the agenda, to be picked up also in academic debate. Researchers would often indeed take an active role in articulating the issues concerned and spelling out options to resolve them. Thus it would not be uncommon to see dialogues of sorts following from this between new progressive leaderships and committed academics. Based on a shared vision on the key issues confronting national development and an overlap of ideas on the direction in which the transformation of society should go, such interactions represented one notable type of government-academic relationships emerging from time to time in 'exemplary' Horn countries. Again, legitimacy was rising 'high' during this interval, inspired as it was by different kinds of sources.

If and as state action took on a different form, and face, then in country after country the academia-government honeymoon usually soured, or dissipated, albeit at times with a delayed effect if or as long as researchers wanted to grant the government concerned the benefit of the doubt. Deteriorating political climates often caused researchers to feel they could no longer identify with that context, leading to intellectual crises of sorts like in Tanzania, Eritrea, Ethiopia and other situations at different moments in time. Government legitimacy in the eyes of observers as well as (sections of) the population then began to ebb away. Instead, academic researchers' initial enthusiasm and support would make place for concern and reservations over arbitrary actions, and critical researchers would be likely to re-orient their position. Expatriate researchers might simply drop interest, or move on to other pastures and situations. For some, tracking a state system in decline was likely to be less rewarding than engagement in imaginative sketches for the building up of a novel order. Others, with a basic loyalty to colleagues, counterparts or to the hapless victims of oppression of various kinds, would increasingly see

their role as oppositional, seeking to expose arbitrary decision-making and human rights transgressions in the absence of other platforms or media which could give this voice. Sometimes a 'dialogue' of sorts might then again be emerging between the state and academia, but now more likely in the vein of denial versus accusation. To the extent that research outlooks of social scientists are shaped by emancipatory motivations, attention might then get focused on the plight of victims of arbitrary power, ethnic inequalities, gender discrimination or other forms of injustice. But it would be wrong to assume that all academics would be 'progressive', human rights oriented, and so on. While some would focus on the quest for equity, poverty alleviation and the chances for the empowerment of marginalized groups, others clearly would start from a basic preoccupation with the maintenance of order or the promotion of the market economy.

In recent decades, however, the research relationship has become much more complex due to the increasingly dominant role of a third (now virtually 'first') factor, that of international agencies setting the terms for policy-making as well as for policy and policy-oriented research in most parts of Africa. Notably, the main international financial institutions have effectively eclipsed the role of progressively oriented academic researchers, mainly economists, who were once found prepared to act in advisory capacities for governments which were beginning to chart out their own development strategies. That kind of role was meant to strengthen the hands of the governments concerned vis-à-vis uncertain if not hostile global environments. In lieu of that, international consultants now point to the kind of priorities and criteria the institutions they represent expect to be met by 'recipient' governments in an age of structural adjustment and beyond. If that were cast in 'legitimacy' terms, it would mean a drastic shift in the quarters from which legitimacy is accorded as well as an equally drastic shift in terms of the criteria to be applied for such assessment. Moreover, international agencies have increasingly taken the initiative to launch intellectual themes and concepts intended to guide mainstream research in directions reflecting the global policy concerns of these agencies. Direct and indirect funding mechanisms and a host of other incentives are meant to ensure a substantial degree of academic compliance with such directives. In the current era of globalisation, the capacity to establish a certain hegemony over the way social researchers view and define their problems when looking at state-society relationships, has thus moved into new directions. From Gramsci we have all learnt how close indeed are the relations between power, hegemony and legitimacy. Certainly, one can note an increasingly closer interest and watchful disposition on the part of external agencies of various kinds in orchestrating the developmental research field. Significantly, there are also a growing number of critical think tanks and research consortia to counter these trends and mobilize pertinent data on the nature of social developments. Also, various individual social researchers chose to critically look at the constant stream of global policy designs as much as at the immediate predicaments of the country or region they are working on. Indirectly, these different trends can be seen to be linked to, and feeding into, a 'battles over legitimacy' at levels ranging from the local to the global.

VII. Concluding remarks

If there is any single lesson that can be drawn from our discussion it is to underscore the importance of the broader context for an understanding of questions of legitimacy when looking at African states in transition. 'Context' must refer here to the external and internal dimensions in which African states have been embedded, both of which tend to turn the application of 'classical' legitimacy concepts problematic. A narrow 'ruler-ruled' paradigm is inadequate to grasp many of the broader problems African states (and

populations) find themselves confronted with. Instead, legitimacy must be conceptualised with greater flexibility, avoiding narrow or rigid definitions. We also need to bring in the historical context to see the space it has left, or created, for the exercise of arbitrary rule in various places. Still, while African states (and their leaders) may often lack 'clear' legitimacy, it does not necessarily follow that they are 'illegitimate'. Significantly, and consistent with the kind of context in which most African state systems find themselves, attributions of legitimacy as noted can rapidly fluctuate, but are more likely to be oriented on personalities than on state institutions. Besides, there is a likelihood of a plurality of claimed 'legitimacies' in various situations, co-existing or competing with one another. 'Battles of legitimacy' are not uncommon in Africa, with some contenders at times resorting to excessively legalistic arguments to defend their claims to power, as against others who may advance essentially populist claims to legitimate their role and position. African languages, and proverbs, provide a rich repository of expressions with which such claims can be advanced or opposed. Again, strong divergences of external and internal notions of legitimacy are part of this overall picture, at times giving rise to situations in which rulers are accorded legitimacy from outside while being denied the same from within, as against opposite situations elsewhere. Much of this picture is likely to remain valid given the broader context sketched, - which is shaped as much by the transitions to which African states have been subject as giving further shape to them.

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Africa's state systems appear to have been bequeathed with a stronger vulnerability and propensity for collapse as well as some of the pre-conditions for arbitrary rule. Personalized powers, lack of democratic accountability and respect for human rights, pervasive clientelism and corruption, and the external impact of globalisation are some of the factors that produced weak States. But, what role these States can play in the transitions to democracy? Martin Doornbos explores the legitimacy or illegitimacy that the Somalian and Ugandan States have in this challenging task.

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