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"Shouldn't You Be Teaching Me?" State Mimicry in the Congo

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Drawing from alternative views on (African) statehood via the notion of "mimicry" in [post]colonial settings, this article investigates the transformational dynamics of routinized micro-interactions between street-level bureaucrats and ordinary citizens in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, and Goma. It is argued that while conventional analyses of "state weakness" may construe the Congolese state as needing better imitation of the western registers of modernity, ethnographic and historical explorations of state-society interactions in the Congo reveal a different story. In particular, it will be shown that the various forms of "state-mimicry" at work in the Congo result in fact—via the "state effect"—in a local "hyperreality" of the Congolese state in which "copy" and "model" entertain an ambivalent but constitutive relationship.

> Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order . . .
>
> —Jean Baudrillard, Simulation and Simulacra

Once described as "a paradigmatic case of state failure" (Reno 2006), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) inherited at independence the key colonial attributes of the "modern state" and enjoyed automatic international recognition. However, following recurring political crises, abysmal levels of poverty, and decades of conflict (Young 1978; Prunier 2008; Autesserre 2010), there is little doubt that the DRC's territorial integrity and formal institutional authority has since eroded. Fraught with predatory practices, corruption, and clientelism, state leadership, functions, institutions, and bureaucracy have experienced a systematic failure to deliver public services or redistributive policies, in the process undermining state authority and legitimacy. With similar degradation unfolding in other African states, from the early 1980s on (Jackson and Rosberg 1982), the concept of state failure gained international currency within international relations (IR), both as discipline and policy. By and large, state failure is defined as a situation in which the (postcolonial African) state no longer performs or, indeed, exists within the form of a Weberian legal-rational bureaucratic apparatus. In the mid-2000s, the state failure discourse shifted terms toward the notion of "fragility," where "the main problem is not the competition between different sources of legitimacy, but that the different forms of legitimacy claimed by state and society are not mutually reinforcing" (Andersen 2012, 206). In order to reinstate state capacity, it was proposed to implement (externally driven) peacebuilding and state-building interventions (Moss, Pettersson, de Walle, 2006) that sought to replicate the key tenets of "good governance" defined along Western

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ideals of government, including issues of legitimacy, accountability, and transparency (Paris and Sisk 2009; Andersen 2012).

Based on the assumption that "non-Western" societies are being Westernized or remain essentially different from Western history, worldviews, and governance practices, these narratives often fail to scrutinize "the effects of the historical relationship between the 'West' and the 'non-West' in the emergence of ways of thinking and doing that are 'almost the same but not quite,' to use Bhabha's turn of phrase" (Bilgin 2008, 6). Criticism has thus surfaced vis-à-vis conceptualizations of state-society relations that do not investigate the consitutive links between state and society, formal and informal, or private and public (construed in dichotomous ways). Central to these critiques is the fact that mainstream IR still promotes an ethnocentric, universalizing worldview of the state that fails to address its deeply imperialist political roots and to interrogate the issue of "difference" in "non-Western" societies (Jones 2006; Bilgin 2008).

In particular, fixed conceptions of the territorial state silence the voices of historically vulnerable societies and confine (global) modes of governance and social relations in reifying analytical binaries that do not mirror the real-life experiences of state-society relations. Worse, international discourses and intervention have reinvigorated the "civilizing mission" in contemporary "North-South" relations (Paris 2002; Wilde 2010; Neocleous 2011). In line with this critical literature, I offer to take this conversation further. In so doing, I use mimesis and mimicry as a rich, transdisciplinary analytical tool to see "ways of 'doing' world politics in a seemingly 'similar' yet unexpectedly 'different' way" (Pilgin 2008, 6). While mimesis engages in open-ended attempts to represent the "real," mimicry entails the action of resistance and camouflage toward reaching subversive copying. Both, however, are preoccupied with appropriation and representation and entertain, therefore, a mutually constitutive relationship (Roque 2015). Because this article seeks to emphasize the ambivalence of imitation—both as subversive and subjugating—I refer to state mimicry.

Originally debated in ancient philosophy,[1] biology, sociology, and, most significantly, postcolonial studies, mimicry is a complex aesthetic, psychological, relational, and political notion. Rarely explicitly employed in the study of presumably failed states, mimicry thus emerges as a nuanced social practice that runs beyond the images of functional, policy, or institutional mimetism (Massey 2009; Dri 2010; Pourtier 2010; Pritchett, Woolcock, and Andrews 2013) in studying global politics.[2] Pointing at its complexity and ambiguities, Bhabha noted that "mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge," the "partiality" of which makes it "at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha 1984, 126).[3] Contemporary concerted policy efforts to replicate—or mimic the universal attributes of—the Western state in fragile environments has led many to fear that it *is precisely lack of resemblance that now has come to produce menace* to our "way of life" (Abrahamsen 2005, 60).

Against this background, and based on extensive fieldwork conducted in the DRC, this article first argues that the state in the Congo *continues to work far beyond* the limits of reductive and reified images of state mimicry as either copy or model. Indeed, the image and practices of the state extend further mere logics of survival, via the nurturing of a nurturing an intricate network of practices and representations that contribute to generating the idea of statehood and public authority (Lund 2016). A nuanced and deconstructed perspective on *how* statehood is effectively performed by street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980; Zacka 2017) and ordinary citizens in urban

[1] In Ancient Greek philosophy, particularly in Plato and Aristotle's works.

[2] For a thorough critique of mimesis in international political theory, read Bleiker, 2001.

[3] See also Naipaul 1967.

DRC, show highly sophisticated governing techniques that are continuously generative of formal "statehood," despite colonially inflected Western state attributes and "state failure" imaginary. Second, construed as a dynamic sociomaterial process of reappropriation and representation of statehood, state mimicry in the Congo results in a broader *hyperreal order* (Baudrillard 1981), where practices and ideational constructs where practices and ideational constructs of the state are no longer either model (the West) or copy (postcolonial states), real (functioning) or illusory (dysfunctional). Instead, it reveals the synchronic and replicated usages of bureaucratic and formalized approaches to governance, even in situations of institutional weakness, which relegitimize the state as an essential provider of public services and social control.

Hyperreality here comes to complement arguments that posit that weak states continue to exist primarily through elite predatory systems and external factors such as international law and sovereignty rules but unravels the idea that state practices in the DRC produce a mere masquerade of the state (Trefon 2011). In what follows I first survey the academic literature dealing with state weakness in the Congo and Sub-Saharan Africa more generally, before turning to earlier and emerging works in anthropology, postcolonial studies, and international studies that have developed critical and far less normative perspectives on state-society relations in postcolonial contexts. Secondly, building on this literature I develop the theoretical background—DRC's hyperreality—underlying my identification of what I term *ideal-type* and *practical mimicry* within daily state-society interactions in the Congo. Both types of mimicry emulate and replicate the formal attributes of the state regardless of the illicit, irregular, or informal nature of the activities street-level bureaucrats engage in. But, while the former explicitly reiterates the formal bureaucratic routines of an ideal-typical modern state the latter works as "improvised" formality, often deployed in a political project to oppose other competing societal forces and to respond to systemic logistical, financial, and material deficiencies. Third, providing some historical context, I briefly depict how the politics of mimicry, encapsulated in the creation of a social class termed *évolués*,[4] effectively pervaded colonial administrative styles and generated long-lasting and ambivalent effects on contemporary state-society relations. Finally, this article provides a fine-grained analysis of two key political terrains within which state agents, using both ideal-type and practical mimicry, can be seen "in action": state security and mediation. Interestingly, while state security is produced more systematically and institutionally, mediation can be seen as a far more informal endeavor where activities unfold randomly, on a case-by-case basis. Tending to mimicry as a practice of formal state attributes shows how these two areas of activity are mutually reinforcing as low-level state agents—and through them, the state—continue to exert social control.

The Congo, the State, and Mimetism

In 2015, while doing fieldwork, I met with Theodore, a neighborhood chief [5] in Kinshasa. He was a short and corpulent man in his sixties and wore a beige suit. His bare and dilapidated office resembled the many others I had visited in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, and Goma. In Theodore's office, I proceeded to explain my presence in the DRC: "*I am here to learn from you: how you do your job on a daily basis*," I said. He immediately responded, with a large grin on his face: "*But . . . shouldn't you be teaching me*?" Albeit apparently insignificant, Theodore's answer is crucial. First, be-

[4] Original colonial terminology depicts a class of "evolved" Congolese individuals emulating European lifestyles.

[5] *Chef de Quartier* in French. Formally, Congolese cities are divided into administrative units. At the higher levels of urban governance stands the Mayor's Office, which oversees the *Maisons Communales*, or Communal Offices. The Communal Office is headed by the Burgomaster, who oversees the local chiefs from the *Cadre de Base*. The latter is organized along a pyramidal administrative model and is headed by neighborhood chiefs. Neighborhood chiefs are official entities recognized by law, but their own subordinates are not granted the official status of civil servant.

cause our encounter represented the stereotypical research scheme in which a privileged European scholar comes to study a formerly colonized environment. Second, because it illustrates the omnipresence of mimetism emerging both within everyday interpersonal intercations and as a performative act of broader global politics. With a touch of sarcasm, Theodore enunciated his own role as a subordinate actor in postcolonial conditions of state fragility and international intervention.

In brief, failed states are construed as safe havens for nonstate criminal networks and the scene of refugee flows and armed conflicts, thus jeopardizing state sovereignty. Loss of territorial control therefore became a prominent debate in both academic and policy circles. State weakness was categorized along a broad analytical spectrum that comprised concepts of state failure, state collapse (Milliken and Krause 2002), and, more recently, fragility (Olowu and Chanie 2016). Stranded in a "territorial trap" (Shah 2012) however, IR has long promoted an a priori fixated, institutional, and territorial conceptualization of "the state" in an otherwise anarchic world order. In this view, it is argued, bankrupt and corrupt states without territorial integrity cannot uphold claims to sovereignty rights nor implement desirable (neo)liberal policies such as fast marketization and democratization (Paris and Sisk 2009). In particular, their administration is posited to be highly defective and unaccountable. Self-serving civil servants are depicted as a homogeneous group whose disorderly conduct and patronage politics leads to a Hobbesian dystopia. Legal texts and the formal codification of governance have thus been emptied of their regulatory substance. This broken system is traditionally defined as (neo)patrimonialism (Médard 1991) and considered a common characteristic of the African (failed) state: informal—and privatized—relations are construed as having replaced formal governing activities.

What does Theodore's story have to do with all this? As part of a bureaucracy that "has long ago lost its sense of professional responsibility and exists solely to carry out the orders of the executive and, in petty ways, to oppress citizens" (Rotberg 2003, 7), Theodore and his peers are seen as both the cause and symptom of state weakness. Ultimately, then, expert accounts help craft international policies aimed at correcting Theodore's *flawed imitation* of "good and inclusive governance,"[6] primarily modeled on Western liberal democracies. By contrast, it is believed only state-society relations mediated by formal, technocratic routines can guarantee that the state treats all citizens equally and thus remains the primary, and benevolent, provider of collective goods. The Congolese organic approaches to governance indeed routinely involve a vast networked domain of governance emerging at the expense of a now illusionary legal-rational organization of power (Trefon 2009). Mimetic bureaucratic routines in Africa are seen here in a reductive light: international political theory tends to portray mimesis as a *masquarade* of the state whose continued existence resides mainly in the distribution of external assistance (Trefon 2011), elite political instrumentalization (Englebert and Tull 2008), and "negative sovereignty" (Jackson 1993).

Criticism against this story has mounted, particularly with regard to the use of "hegemonic concepts" that decide how "state capacities [should] better regulate the economy and society" (Nay 2014, 219). Moreover, state failure—once depicted as a "failed paradigm" (Hameiri 2007)—is thus historically rooted in the intellectual abstraction that the planet is divided into two types of states: the original *model*-state ideal, typically characterized by Weberian legal-rationality found in the Occident, and its *copied*-states, which differ significantly. Of course, this model/copy dichotomy often implicitly undergirds current analyses of the "Global South" and the designs of large-scale peacebuilding and development packages.[7] In short, the modernizing (Devisch 1998; Mitchell 2000; Van de Walle 2016) and civilizing con-

[6] See OECD. 2015. *States of Fragility*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

[7] See also Barnett and Zürcher 2009, Newman, Paris and Richmond 2009; Collinson, Elhawary, and Muggah 2010.

notations of colonial governance have been extended globally to present-day international affairs, in different guises. These narratives of prescription and extreme differentiation ignore the "extraordinarily complex unity of our globalized world" and further obscure "the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together in far more interesting ways" (Said 2003, xxi–xxii).

As a presumably autonomous actor (Mann 1984; Evans 1995), the state is thus traditionally construed as standing above society, operating as the "public" sector in contradistinction to other "private" actors, including citizens and businesses. But, many argue, such distinctions are rarely clear-cut in reality. In *Faces of the State*, Navarro-Yashin (2002, 2) describes a scene in which private actors—individual citizens—such as this "young man from 'the public,' emerging to attack" demonstrators on Taksim Square, "assume a representation of the state through [their] action and persona." Such occurrences happen anytime, anywhere. In the Congo, moto-taxi drivers entertain a complex relationship with state authorities. The latter have long fought the legitimacy of their business, and low-level state agents, from the Municipal Transportation services or Traffic Police, relentlessly arrest and fine them. But the same public servants have also implemented new official measures to enhance transport safety and security: moto-taxi drivers were handed helmets, issued exploitation and driving licenses, and attributed individual plate numbers. On several occasions, it was also reported that moto-taxis would report crimes and help find suspects in collaboration with police officers and neighborhood chiefs. In so doing, they connect to the state's official public authority both as private citizens and business operators and as state mediators, or "auxiliaries." Here, the complex question becomes, then: "who, what and where" is the state? (Navarro-Yashin 2002, 1)

In response, scholars across disciplines proposed to see both images and (everyday) practices of the state (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Schlichte 2005; Titeca and De Herdt 2011) as being upheld and enacted through the mundane perceptions, representations, and habits of ordinary individuals (Dumm 1999; Robinson 2006; Enloe 2011). Beginning with the works of classical state theoreticians who have grappled with the "difficulty of studying the state" (Abrams [1977] 1988), this article's conceptual perspective on the formation of statehood is rooted in a relational sociology (Emirbayer 1997; Andersen 2012; Frödin 2012) that questions the perceived natural existence of the state. In this vein, and against essentialized accounts of the state, scholarly works have devised heuristic and theoretical tools that seek to grasp the state in action. Grappling with issues of "negotiating statehood" (Hagmann and Péclard 2010), "governance without government" and the "mediated state" (Menkhaus 2007, 2008), the research aims to study the coexistence of multiple actors laying claim to political order, social control, and statehood more generally. The notion of "hybrid political orders" in violent settings (Boege, Brown, and Clements 2009; Renders and Terlinden 2010), for instance, and the role of practical norms in shaping the notion of "real governance" (De Herdt and Olivier de Sardan 2015) have achieved important methodological and theoretical contributions. In analogous terms, Murray Li—drawing on the works of Foucault, Scott, and Rose—sees governmental intervention as assemblages, and Cleaver (2015) suggests studying the notion of institutional bricolage. Those views construe statehood as an *effect* (Mitchell 1991) emerging from the countless *micropractices* and *social interactions* enacted between a large variety of state actors, auxiliaries (Blundo 2006; Blundo and Le Meur 2009), and citizens, whose status, activities, and representations do not necessarily fit conventional (academic) analytical categories.

This is an intricate problem, which mimicry—as a dynamic and nonlinear process of representation and reappropriation—can help illuminate. By assuming "developing" countries should engage in adequate mimesis of their Western counterparts, I suggest that state theory in IR remains blind to the *countless* sites and practices

that generate statehood *even in crisis* (Hoehne 2009). If we understand mimicry as both individually and collectively performed instances of historical, cross-cultural identification involving processes of imitation, reappropriation, and resistance, it offers an alternative analytical avenue for engaging with "the state." Mimicry is both real and elusive yet is a fundamental driver of human behavior. Used as a critical theoretical tool in postcolonial studies, anthropology, and sociology, these works oppose a simplified account of mimesis as mere "copy" but develop instead careful considerations of its ambivalent and sophisticated usages in both subjugative and disruptive terms.

Congo's *Hyperreality*: Ideal-Type and Practical Mimicry

This text begins with the proposition that statehood is a work in progress, assembled and generated—as an effect—through the routinized, mundane practices that embed "the state" into society (Migdal 2001). With a multiplicity of actors challenging or laying claims to state power, the Congo's broader hyperreal order is composed and recomposed via the quotidian lifeworlds of mimicry. In analogous terms, Mitchell proposed statehood should not be construed by "trying to separate the material forms of the state from the ideological, or *the real from the illusory*" but through an understanding that "the phenomenon we name 'the state' arises from techniques that *enable mundane material practices to take on the appearance of an abstract*, nonmaterial form" (Mitchell 1991, 170). Grasping the ambiguity of statehood—as a political space that expands beyond the presumed boundaries between what is "real" (supposedly, the model) and "illusory" (the copy) and between what is practice and what is ideology—not only helps to study multiple everyday actions beyond the strictly private and public spheres but also shows how these translate into a broader and, indeed, unitary image of the state.

Importantly, despite their seemingly improvised characteristics, the interpersonal relations that undergird the production of public services and social order are nonetheless routinized and patterned on highly codified arrangements, mimicking bureaucratic routines. Echoing the feminist notion that the "personal is political," (Enloe 2011) private and public spheres intertwine in ways that do not undermine the state's public mandate, but can potentially (re)legitimate its authority. As part of a broader "social whole" (Albert and Buzan 2013), the "modern state" remains only one, albeit crucial, referential system. This suggests that postcolonial state mimicry, far from reproducing grotesque façades of states, embodies Girard's (2001, 18) idea that "Imitation is human intelligence in its most *dynamic* guise."[8] Linking micropractices to the broader idea and experience of statehood, mimicry further connects to Jean Baudrillard's concept of *hyperreality* (1981), which can be said to consist in a "reality effect" (Debrix 2009, 58).

Hyperreality depicts a situation where "it is no longer a question . . . of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real" (Potolsky 2006, 154). Overall, our conceptual approach—state mimicry and hyperreality—mobilizes the "plastic significance" (Roque 2015) and interpretative power of mimesis in analyzing [post]colonial state-society encounters in the Congo. The lifeworld of state mimicry, I suggest, uncovers a hyperreal order in which difference and imitation become coproductive of the idea and institutionalization of the state. Baudrillard's concept here serves as an intellectual conduit to grasp the complexity of the (everyday) "state," and highlights the ambiguous yet fundamentally coproductive relationship between the illusionary and the real, between unity and multiplicity. In contrast to fears that "the different forms of legitimacy claimed by state and society are not mutually reinforcing," as quoted above, Congolese individuals construct a complex web of microgovernance

[8] Translation is mine.

mechanisms that emulate, appropriate, and represent the formal contours, symbols, and bureaucratic procedures of the state. The assemblages, negotiations, and *bricolages* characterizing the modes of governance in the Congo are institutionalized, galvanized, and funneled through systematic imitation and replication of governmental "formalités," a type of (re)bureaucratization of social interactions (Hibou 2013). More generally, the emergence of a hyperreality in the Congo that blends difference and resemblance, also bears testimony to current calls to abandon the "binary distinction between 'West' and 'non-West,' which blinds us to the co-constitution of West and East, and North and South, in the emergence of the global" (Owen, Heathershaw, and Savin 2018).

Evidencing these claims required using an eclectic set of methods, including participant observation and ethnographic interviews (Spradley 1979). I additionally collected a wealth of official documentation and photographed civil servants posing in their offices in a bid to capture the images of spaces, faces, and objects that sustain state-society relations. This material helped to "repopulate international politics with human life and recreate the dramatic milieu of everyday experience" (Vrasti 2013, 62). The data thus collected suggest two interrelated types of state mimicry—ideal-type and practical—are at work. In analytical terms, this was done through "localizing" *ideal-type* and *practical* mimetic conducts in both their verbal and nonverbal dimensions (Lempert 2014). *Ideal-type* mimicry encapsulates the notion that in their everyday lives, citizens and state agents enter dynamic interactions that *come to view* via the compounded usages of legalistic language; the quotidianized, official rhythms of office hours; and telephone rings, as well as official objects and bureaucratic ceremonials. Here, street-level bureaucrats and their clients create sounds, language, rhythms, and symbols modeled on "Weberian" legal-rational domination.

Take public offices in Kinshasa. They display information on their walls: "Bureau du Chef de Quartier" and "Commissariat de Police"—underneath are listed phone numbers and sometimes office hours. Even though they rarely show up at their desk on time, civil servants routinely remind interlocutors of their working hours as well as the importance of making appointments. Otherwise, they say, how would they "properly greet their visitors and tend to their requests?" particularly since "in Europe, it seems [people] must make an appointment when [they] come ask for a service."[9] *Ideal-type* mimicry is exemplified in how state agents, interacting with their peers and clients, systematically reappropriate the formal/rational technocratic attributes and ceremonials of the modern state: labeling offices, claiming a workspace, sitting behind a desk, requiring appointments during office hours, the writing of phone numbers on the walls, waiting rooms, stamping, reporting, and compiling folders.[10]

When an opportunity or challenge arises, especially in institutional contexts where financial and logistical resources are scarce, people turn to *practical* mimicry. Although it could be understood within the conventional tenets of informality, practical mimicry is better described as an open process entailing both negatively perceived actions, such as corruption and clientelism, and consensual synergies including cooperative action, spontaneous reward, negotiations, amicable mediation, facilitation, or conflict prevention. This type of mimicry grants space for difference and ambiguity thereby de-essentializing the state, and denotes both the ambiguities of state mimicry as imitation and partiality and the complementarity of formal and organic approaches to governance. This avoids enhancing flawed assumptions about the necessarily disruptive nature of informal rules, norms, and practices (De Herdt and Olivier de Sardan 2015), as often predicated in international discourses of state governance. Now return to the example discussed above. Office labels are

[9] Interview with *Maison Communale* personnel, Kinshasa, October 22, 2015.

[10] Cf. Auyero (2012).

hand-painted on walls because there is not enough funding to do otherwise; the listed phone numbers are *personal* mainly because the landline system has long been dismantled. Civil servants request appointments be made yet know they will not show up unless you call ahead of time; they embody state authority but negotiate the terms of public service delivery, and when desks and offices break down, they pile up paper, pens, stamps, and official documents into tiny briefcases they call, not without humor, their "portable desk." Practical mimicry—echoing James Scott's *metis* (1998)—imitates and appropriates local registers of pragmatic knowledge but *still* employs the language and signs of state formality in dealing with hardship. Practical mimicry thus translates into individual and sometimes spontaneous, but formalizing, decision-making that both precludes and supports the better imitation of the legal-rational Weberian state apparatus.

Before turning fully to contemporary instances of mimetic conduct in the DRC, however, we must reflect on its colonial manifestations. This is particularly important in countries like the Congo, where administrative and social practices are still partially reenacted along past colonial imaginaries. As such, I suggest that the hyperreal domain of the state is mediated and constructed by a complex mixture of ideal-typical and practical mimicry, whose underlying processes are always inscribed in subtle—but real—colonial durabilities (Legg 2017).

Colonial Mimesis

The ambivalent effects of mimesis and mimicry were particularly salient under colonial rule, when "colonial subjects" utilized mimicry to alternately mock, appropriate, resist, or claim (political) power and agency. The Congo as it stands today indeed emerged from violent colonial governance aimed at modeling, and thus "civilizing," barbaric "natives." European domination over "indigenous" lives was to be retained via various manipulations of identification processes, representations, and political organizations of the Congolese, whose "social and material conditions had to be redressed."[11] Imbued with racial anxieties and imperialist aims, the Belgian Congo's administrators transformed ordinary Congolese people into colonial subjects mimetically "molded" for the needs of industrialization and for political aims in a bid to divide, subjugate, and manipulate.

Meet the Congolese family pictured below. Its members lived in Kinshasa, named Leopoldville under Belgian rule (Figure 1). Take a close look. This is staged. It is a striking illustration of Fanon (2008 [1967]) and Bhabha's (1984) influential thought on colonial mimicry. This family represents what was an institutionalized social class of *évolués*, the product of the colonial politics of identification and differentiation—a legalized process of "othering" (Taussig 1993)—that distinguishes the "modern" man from the mass of uncivilized savages. While Figure 1 thus features the various achievements of the *model colony* (Lauro 2011), it also conceals the colonial administration's long lasting anxieties toward the colonial subjects, numerically dominant and a threat to Europe's civilized way of life (Lauro 2009). The authorities were to break dissent at its root by fragmenting Congolese loyalties either toward a privileged, "civilized" few or a "barbaric," uneducated class of factory workers and peasants.

Returning to Figure 1, imagine the sounds, the smells, the atmosphere, the conversations unfolding in this colonial snapshot of feigned intimacy. Reading the state-controlled periodical for *évolués*, *La Voix du Congolais*, listening to the radio in their orderly living room, an entire (Catholic) family composed of a monogamous couple and young children go and young children seemingly go about their daily life. They, specifically, mirror the "patriarchal image of the family and of the (European, post-war) subordination of woman to man and child to adult" (Devisch 1998, 229).

[11] This is the vocabulary generally used within the African Archives.

Figure 1. A family of *évolués* at home, Léopoldville (Kinshasa), Belgian Congo. Probably 1950s. Source: African Archives, N°32–62/21.

Exemplifying Aimé Césaire's (1972, 6) claim that "colonization = 'thingification,'" Figure 1 thus shows the sanitized décor of a "native" family who had successfully mimicked their "masters'" representations of modernity. This image however, purposely silences the darker processes of a controlled narrative over the Congolese identification with the Self toward the (white, dominant) Other. Having "repudiated their 'tribal' customs to *emulate* the European lifestyle with respect to social mores (they were not to be polygamist), education and training, professional qualification, and good citizenship" (Gondola 2016, 44), the *évolués* evidence the central role of mimesis in normalizing the search for "mutual recognition" on the part of the "colonized subject" (Fanon (2008 [1967])), thereby sustaining state power in the Belgian Congo. This mirrors long-standing discussions in postcolonial studies reporting mimesis' ambivalent aims to "subject the colonial other to a double command. Be like me, don't be like me; be mimetically identical, be completely other. *The colonial other is situated somewhere between difference and similitude, at the vanishing point of subjectivity*" (Fuss 1994, 23).

As expected by the Belgian administration, the processes of mimicry imposed upon the *évolués* led Congolese people to integrate Western racist ideologies into their own political thinking. For instance, by the late 1950s, small groups of Catholic *évolués* opposed Congolese claims for immediate independence. They advocated to remain under Belgian rule for another few decades in order to give the Congolese people more time to reach the intellectual level of their European "model." Portraying the uneducated and unhealthy "*indigènes*" as threats to overall socioeconomic progress, *évolués* took pride in their status of "nearly modern, nearly civilized, nearly western. Many reportedly displayed disdain toward their 'primitive' counterparts while referring to themselves as the 'Congolese who can think'" (Nzundu 2013, 181). An old Jesuit priest I met in Kinshasa recalled:

> It was badly seen for them [the *évolués*] to live in their home community, their extended family. They became like schizophrenics. Whenever they could, they returned to their villages to visit their family and give them presents but they had to do it discreetly. There were internal divides even among Black people.[12]

Regarding colonial governance, "[The *évolués*'] ceremonial display of seniority and of rhetorical skills at meetings in their private homes and bars . . . with a great deal of pomp, offered *replicas* to the public celebrations and many inaugurations that the colonists had invented in the administrative centres, as well as to the latters' *omniscient and omnipresent administration*" (Devisch 1998, 231). In this view, state authority in the Congo was built on idealized representations of Western modernities based on the rationalization of personal and professional relations and the use of technocratic and administrative capacity to control and order the territorial state's population. Entrenched in a long history of colonial political mimesis, North-South international relations are arguably still punctuated with "imperial debris," "the fragile and durable substances and signs, the visible and visceral senses in which the effects of empire are reactivated," through "their reappropriations and strategic and active positioning within the politics of the present" (Stoler 2008, 195–96). This is crucial in explaining how historical mimesis came to substantiate Congo's contemporary hyperreality, by clouding what is from "then" and what is distinctly "now." Following the historical illustrations dissected here, the sections below—discipline and mediation—hope to exemplify some concrete aspects of state mimicry in bureaucratizing and institutionalizing formal and informal practices and relationships as various local political actors compete over different political projects (Bierschenck and Olivier de Sardan 1998).

Social Control

Figure 2 below features Solange, a neighborhood chief in Kinshasa. As with most of my informants, I followed her at her office, in its busy courtyard, and through the streets she often patrolled. That day, she had asked me to photograph her and chose to pose at her desk, as she does when she receives clients. If contextualized, this photograph conveys a multilayered story. The decaying state of her immediate surroundings—the built environment of her office—exposes quite strikingly the generally poor working conditions a large majority of civil servants must deal with on a daily basis. These are just one of the visible symptoms of ill-designed international state-building intervention, widespread corruption, and institutional corrosion. Broken ceilings, cracked walls and limited access to adequate furnishing, stationery, and technology support a narrative of absences so often reiterated in the study of "good governance." In place of modern phones, computers, printers, and dossiers, Solange displayed fragments of her personal life, including an ironing board, the keys of the bus she rents as part of the public transportation system, and family pictures. But an attentive gaze reveals more. The subtle presence of symbols, signs, and objects of statehood and public authority have imbued her office space. From the president's portrait to an old dusty printer to the assemblage of old chairs, desk, stationery, folders, pens, stamps, a large storage cupboard, a Congolese flag, UN and EU programmatic posters, and piles of red tape, she works to locate her persona at the center of public authority. In so doing, she produces services, draws maps and compiles reports, receives clients, solves issues, asks for money as she sees fit, and stores archival documents she says she had "organized chronologically all the way back from the 1940s," back when "civil servants still enjoyed authority and dignity." Beyond the well-documented decrepitude of the public service, this photograph captures the real-life intersections between the private, the personal, and

[12] Interview with a Jesuit priest, Kinshasa, September 9, 2015.

Figure 2. A neighborhood chief at her desk in Kinshasa. (the author herself)

the formal and provides good introductory material to discussing how these various dimensions come to recreate the state as one of the main providers of social control.

State Security

First, street-level bureaucrats provide what could be loosely labeled as state security. Neighborhood chiefs, for instance, as the official heads of the *Cadre de Base*,[13] work closest to the population with which they interact on a daily basis. This is mostly due to the fact that they usually live in the neighborhoods they administer and know their residents personally. People, often visit them to address a range of personal and administrative issues. While disputes, family feuds, criminal activities, and intercommunity tensions are brought to the chiefs' attention for appeasement and problem-solving purposes (see next section), there are also many opportunities for the chief to document, record, and report on local grievances to higher government authorities. Albeit initially in an informal guise, this becomes an invaluable database for state authorities at large—including the police, the intelligence services, and sometimes ministries—to monitor and surveil the many potential points of friction by administrative units. A large number of my informants in all three cities, from police officers and intelligence personnel, to neighborhood chiefs and urban planning technicians, said they worked to "securitize" the population and their property. For instance, Urban Planning Services began demolition campaigns that bulldozed thousands of houses and shops located on swamps, the airport, and public roads. Police officers teamed up with moto-taxi drivers, chiefs, local informants, and intelligence services to monitor various unruly fomenters of dissent and to dislodge itinerant sellers and homeless families, quite classically, out of "public

[13] See footnote 3.

health" concerns. Neighborhood chiefs document grievances, unrest, private feuds, and crime within their offices' vicinities, which they later report to their hierarchies.

A chief in Lubumbashi declared that her formal functions were to collect

> as much information as we can and pass them over to our hierarchy, [that is] the Burgomaster, the Police and Intelligence personnel. Once we've collected all this, we write up daily, weekly, monthly and annual reports we deliver to the burgomaster's office who sends it to the Mayor's office. There, they condense all this information into one larger annual report.[14]

The significant share of work dedicated to *gathering data* on local residents and regular reporting to the state's administrative hierarchy were recurrent *standardized practices* that emulate and appropriate the language, symbols, and props of traditional state institutions and protocol. Although the DRC lacks the technological equipment (computerized databases, CCTV cameras) other states typically use as part of their surveillance apparatus, the country has trained and deployed thousands of "eyes and ears" (the police, the *Cadre de Base* chiefs, census takers, public transportation staff, to name a few) through apparently ungoverned urban areas. Employing practical mimicry, personal stories and problems are informally brought about, sometimes solved, and formally recorded, documented, and reported upon. Although the Congolese state notoriously resorts to physical violence (torture, live ammunition, arbitrary arrests, etc.), social control is additionally induced daily *via* the careful maintenance of a complex, embedded network of state and nonstate agents that assume these surveillance microstrategies.

Stéphane, a neighborhood chief in Lubumbashi, confirmed that daily tasks included elements of surveillance so as to maintain state authority in the hands of its agents. Despite the chronic absence of appropriate office stationery, reports that detail the lives, problems, and deviant behavior of the Congolese citizens are compiled, stamped, signed, and delivered to the administrative hierarchy, all the way up to the provincial and national ministries. While Stéphane's office shows similar signs of decay to Solange's, like her, he stores, organizes, and pushes paperwork up the state's hierarchical ladder. "We use our cell phones to stay in permanent contact with the police, the population and the Communal Office. . . . The report has four or five categories, like *Administration*, *State of Mind*, *Politics*, *Security*, *Economy*, *Finance* and *Socio-Cultural*," Stéphane explained. Using ideal-type mimicry, these reports all look the same, are similarly filled out, sent to the hierarchy, and systematically compiled into annual reports. He further added:

> [Data collection] is systematic. Not with technical devices or with lots of personnel, but through our everyday tasks. Our people in the neighborhood, they have my personal phone number, the Police works here with me, we solve crime together, we collaborate constantly . . . People come to me; they call me, or my assistant, whenever something bad happens. . . . That's how we get information. People call us, they come here . . . and we also use the Cell and Block chiefs who know everyone and all their problems at their own level. We can share this with the intelligence services, the police, the mayor this allows the authorities to know whether or not the population is calm and where there is insecurity.[15]

Through concerns for state security and the use of surveillance techniques, street-level bureaucrats undertake an active role in performing social control. Of course, many Congolese residents express defiance toward these activities because collected data do not translate into attempts at rehabilitating vital public services such as education and health care. Congolese citizens know they are being watched and counted, for the purpose of monitoring the next sites of popular dissent. On many occasions, however, state agents and local residents alike recognized the need for

[14] Interview with cell chief, November 12, 2014.

[15] Interview with Neighborhood Chief Lubumbashi, same day.

strong state authority over political order and security matters. An Urban Planning Services employee in Lubumbashi once justified his department's demolition campaigns by screaming, "the Congolese people are anarchists!"[16] Meanwhile many citizens lamented their own disorderly conduct and the need to rehabilitate state capacity to surveil, punish, record, and track incivility. A woman living in Kinshasa once admitted that the police, although "they have the authority to punish," did not exert enough "control" over Congolese citizens, who "are, it is true, far too undisciplined."[17]

Reflecting on similar issues, some recounted the supposedly better days of colonial paternalism. Although she was born after independence, Solange said, "civil servants used to be literate intellectuals, *évolués* . . . We no longer experience nice living standards and proper morality like we did back then."[18] A few, during open discussions and interviews, would laughingly suggest the Belgian *chicotte*[19] should be reintroduced to tame unruly citizens, while others simultaneously recalled the raw humiliation and differentiated treatment reserved to the *évolués*:

> The "chicotte" was really frequently used against all of us, niggers. It was quite humiliating, with all these public insults . . . We were told: "you are just monkeys" . . . Except to those we called the *évolués*, they received greater respect than us because they were taught how to behave like white people.[20]

Two old *Lushois*[21] explained, "everything was very organized with the Belgians. . . . The Belgian system was different from today's. In each neighborhood, there were lots of offices with white civil servants followed by black police officers. The chief was white and he patrolled his neighborhood."[22] The Jesuit priest quoted above admitted that state agents still "have not escaped this colonized state of mind" where, it is believed, everything ran smoothly, everyone could read and write, and everyone was safe and disciplined.[23] Yearning for order imposed by a strong—if abusive—state was noticeable throughout my many encounters. This is not particularly surprising in a context of increased poverty, protracted conflict, and fear. By internalizing the idea that coercion and security should be one of the state's regalian prerogatives, Congolese bureaucrats and citizens alike have long self-disciplined by turning to the *idea* of the "organized" Western (and formerly colonial) state in the face of its chronic inadequacies. Interestingly then, many of the political grievances regarding security—from criminal activities and sanitary hazards to road safety and armed violence—are directed toward the state, not against it (Lund 2006).

Here, practical mimicry punctuates the more informal dimensions of state-society relations. Despite the intimate aspect of operating surveillance and data gathering, state agents mimetically deploy ingenuity in using each other's contacts, practical know-how, and daily tasks to formally document and pass along all information deemed useful to maintain state security and, thus, self-preservation. In addition, as the gatekeepers of the state, frontline civil servants (Koh 2001) and law-enforcement agents, in spite of their notoriously organic approaches to completing their work, follow the same procedures and the same set of codified rules. Ideal-type mimicry resides in mental compliance to the idea that state agents must observe, regulate, document, and report. They do so, we have seen, by meticulously organizing data in

[16] Interview with Urban Planning Services personnel, November 3, 2015.
[17] Interview with Congolese resident, October 22, 2015.
[18] Interview with neighborhood chief on March 26, 2016.
[19] Leather whip.
[20] Interview with Urban Planning Services personnel, Lubumbashi, November 10, 2015.
[21] Lubumbashi residents.
[22] Interview conducted, November 18, 2015.
[23] Interview with Jesuit priest, Kinshasa, October 9, 2015.

formalized categories, replicated from one document to another and from one city to the next. While practical mimicry generates official surveillance data via ideal-type mimicry, it generally relies on close and private relationships between various actors of civil society and frontline bureaucrats. Importantly, unlike Foucault's "society of discipline" in which surveillance remains localized in specific sites—the school, the prison, the mental institutions—information flows are not only produced through the works of intelligence personnel, courts, or statistics but also via social media, convivial chats, semiformal neighborhood patrolling and problem-solving practices (see next section below), and finally, via "the state" as it is embodied in the physical presence of local chiefs, urban service technicians, or police officers. This, interestingly, joins the ongoing scholarly debate over today's "Deleuzian society of control" that construes "security arrangements as comprehensive and fluid ensemble of diverse modern instruments" (Hagmann 2017, 418–19). General concerns for state security—operated through surveillance and knowledge-producing tasks—are here no different from those discussed in so-called developed and democratic nations.

Mediation

This section presents another set of governing techniques unfolding within a far less official domain of state-society relations: "mediation" practices. These, however informal, work hand in hand with the state security activities described above and contribute therefore to consolidating social control. Generally, chiefs from the *Cadre de Base* describe their official, ideal-typical responsibilities as such:

> We supervise the population; we ensure peaceful community relations and we guarantee the security of our people and their property. We also help [our superiors] to conduct the annual census because they rarely have enough census takers. We have to avoid disorders and tensions among neighbors and to do this, we give them counseling and advice when they come to us.[24]

These prerogatives are inscribed in Congolese law, and neighborhood chiefs have taken on the habit of reprinting them and handing them over to other chiefs at the cell, block, or street level. Similar to the activities described above, this is done in a bid to recreate procedural approaches to governance by replicating the "politics of writing" (Gupta 2012), which shape, partly, the sociomaterial interactions unfolding among civil servants in a top-down manner and in their treatment of service users. While chiefs engage in formal and codified networks of dealing with paperwork, documentation, and security issues for instance, they also tend to the personal and private ailments of their residents with a view to finding amicable agreements. Their typical workday thus involves a complex mixture of ideal-typical and practical mimicry. The latter often involves devising creative problem-solving mechanisms while neighbors or family members enter a feud over inheritance rights, fighting children, witchcraft, or property rights. Typically, troubled individuals first bring their issues to the neighborhood chiefs to settle their disputes. After all parties have been brought to their office and discussed matters at length, with emotions running high, they abide by the chief's decision. Stéphane explained such mediation activities as follows:

> [People] bring their land disputes to me, their property issues. In this case, we send out an invitation to all family members, and all the parties to the dispute. I ask that they bring all the documents they possess and I will search my own archives see if I have old property titles that might clarify the situation. If we manage to solve the issue here, it is good, if not, I send them to court.[25]

[24] Interview with Cell Chief Lubumbashi, November 12, 2014.

[25] Interview conducted on November 20, 2015.

Should such endeavors fail, the chiefs then adopt ideal-typical mimicry and formally refer the parties to the police or the local court after providing them with legal advice on court proceedings.

Additionally, these stories regularly irrupt in the official meetings that chiefs and police officers convene weekly. Although much discussion revolves around land disputes, other personal concerns punctuate civil servants' daily tasks. One man in Goma complained to the chief about his neighbor letting his goats graze on his field; another in Lubumbashi brought funeral-related matters to the office; and, still in Lubumbashi, an old lady sought counsel from her chief regarding her cheating husband. Although each problem has its own set of individual specificities, the processes of mediation are similar: negotiation, appeasement, and discussion among all parties are the norm, therefore fulfilling the expectations of community members regarding the role of state agents. In greater formal terms, the chiefs generally convoke their residents either in person, or via the use of their personal cell phones and small "invitation" booklets that contain detachable "*Convocations de Service*," which feature the name of the country, province, city, state symbols, official signature, stamp, place, and date. Although they look official, these booklets are not government issued but are produced instead by the chiefs themselves, suggesting the proliferation of state-like material objects and symbols.

Unsurprisingly, then, despite widespread recognition of the state's decaying capacity, local residents have generally maintained an acute sense of local state authorities as essential mediating figures of social organization within the urban fabric. Two young Congolese men living within the limits of Solange's jurisdiction, quite typically confessed:

> "[The Chiefs] are *very important*. They're like the *fathers in the family* . . . The chief's role is very important . . . he's *our number one guide*. You bring your problems to them: 'Mama Solange! We have a problem with a funeral, with documents, with inheritance . . .' She will help us. She will counsel us . . . If the mama can't do it, she'll bring it to the burgomaster on our behalf."
>
> "*She's our mama* . . . If we have any problem we go see her. We have no trouble with her, *she helps us*."[26]

These practices translate processes of state embeddedness into society and, importantly, highlight the (ambivalent) significance of those networked interstitial spaces that associate both private and public spheres.

In addition, low-level civil servants also mediate interactions among their peers. While the neighborhood chief is recognized by law, the cell, block, and street chiefs working under their supervision do not exist in any jurisdictional apparatus. Surprisingly, this does not seem to matter "on the ground" because they are perceived and identified as state representatives both within the administrative hierarchy and by the people they govern. In Goma, another neighborhood chief explained that—apart from solving disputes and disciplining residents—she had to negotiate access to civil service status for the other chiefs operating under her leadership.

> The *Cadre de Base* chiefs . . . work for free: for us, for the community, for the state . . . it's not fair, they need to live too. So sometimes to help them out, we go to the Burgomaster's office, and we ask if it's ok for us to make service cards for the cell chiefs, etc. We use a computer; create them, print them out, laminate them, and I sign them. Everyone contributes financially, just a little something . . . This way they can prove they are state agents to their residents and then be able to exert authority. . . . It's not much, but it looks official, it's the most important.[27]

[26] Interview with a street chief and two local residents in Kinshasa, March 30, 2016.

[27] Interview conducted on November 26, 2015.

This arguably claims a double objective. On the one hand, it aims to reassure those street-level civil servants who have been left out of the state apparatus' legal framework but whose work still serves as a fundamental pillar of state power. On the other hand, issuing service cards produces collective recognition of their vested authority as a state institution and induces residents' obedience at large. These micropractices participate in the state "invading"—at least as an idea—the personal and private spheres of everyday life, while "the exercise of power and authority by these local institutions [is] bolstered by references, implicit and explicit, to the state" (Lund 2006, 687). Through the widespread enactment of such mediating activities, organic approaches to governance are supported by recurring instances of ideal-type mimicry (the formal referral to higher authorities, compliance with legal responsibilities) and practical mimicry (creating "real-fake" service cards, printing invitation booklets, convening meetings in public offices). To be sure, a large number of daily activities are performed pending the negotiation of a fair "price." Whether in the form of material goods, relational favors, or monetary exchanges, petty corruption and bargaining are a central piece of state-citizen relations. But, by using creative solutions to financial and logistical shortcomings, thousands of municipal civil servants revive "the state" as a critical actor of public life and social control.

Conclusions: Mimicry and Membership

Field data provide some invaluable insights into the microfunctioning of urban governance in some of the most notorious instances of uncontrolled urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa. Of course, "the state" in the DRC and elsewhere does not solely derive and take form from the disciplinary, collaborative arrangements or formal surveillance schemes recounted here. But because it is historically entrenched and gives space for tending to tension and ambivalence in everyday practices, human relations, and ideologies, mimicry serves as a particularly useful tool to interpret field data and to reflect on the contributions of sociological and anthropological approaches to state theory. Talking of the hyperreality of a place, space, and people through intimate glimpses provides analytical avenues for the study of the reconfiguration of power across a large variety of governmentality tactics that "petty sovereigns" (Butler 2014) take on daily that translate into a large ideational and performative state apparatus (Althusser 1976).

Seeing the intricate flows through which ordinary individuals and public figures continue to construct and construe the state as an ideological and sensory experience shows "locally" crafted mechanisms blend with internationally promoted ideas of good governance and bureaucratic procedures, so much so that the distinction between the two becomes impossibly blurred. Ideal type and practical mimicry as embedded in social practices and relations have indeed "substituted signs of the real for the real" (see Poltoski above) in ways that discourses of "state failure," "good governance," and "fragility" have often worked to obscure. In this view, it is often presumed that the hundreds of thousands of street-level bureaucrats, police officers, urban planners, and *Cadre de Base* chiefs are necessarily detrimental to properly mimicking the attributes of the "modern state." This is misleading mainly because although vested interests indeed drive many of the decision-making processes in the Congo, it is unclear both how this is always specific to African politics and how it necessarily precludes state-society relations from being continuously reinstitutionalized. Indeed, ideal-type mimicry occupies as much of a pivotal role as practical mimicry in recreating technocratic and bureaucratic distance between "the state" and society.

Highlighting patterns of mimicry within state-society relations resonates with efforts to question "difference" and "absences" (Sidaway 2003) of norms, rules, and infrastructure in Africa and emphasizes instead the existing mechanisms through

which public figures like Theodore, Stéphane, and Solange do not mimic the images of blatant inadequacy but those of ambivalence and complexity. They are the absent faces and silenced voices of all the *possibilities* contained within the sophisticated processes of governance at work in the Congo and in a potentially large number of other environments. In broader terms, it is thus hoped that introducing the notions of mimicry and hyperreality encourages students of IR, researchers, and policymakers to interrogate further the homogenization of the Global South—and Africa in particular—and its supposedly inherent differences from "the West," most frequently portrayed as deviance or, as Thakur put it, "malign influences on international politics" (2015). Mimetic conduct as historically enacted everywhere is not only a challenge to "the colonial power base of the hegemon or coloniser by appropriating and subverting its discourses or behavior" (Owen, Heathershaw, and Savin 2018, 286), it also opens up avenues for meaningful dialogue between binary views that claim societies are either Western or non-Western.

The Congolese state has become a "copy that is not a copy" in its own right (Taussig 1993, 52) by forming and creating its "true real" (ibid., xvii). The state—albeit in nonlinear guises—not only exists in its mundane, performative dimension but also stands as a powerful societal force and referential system. When citizens in the Congo and elsewhere courageously resist authoritarian regimes and police brutality, they both speak to the subversive images of failing and fragile states and reaffirm the state's very existence by demanding their right to representation, redistribution, and dignity be guaranteed by state institutions on the same terms as other citizens living in democratic regimes. Reifying mimetic conduct and ideas as mere imitation of a supposedly better model tends to delegitimize what might in fact be "a haunting claim for equal rights of membership in a spectacularly unequal global society" (Ferguson 2002, 565).

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