

Chapter 1

Historical Regimes of Responsibility in ‘the Politics of the Belly’

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The idea of responsibility is inseparable from notions of a sense of social or cultural belonging and material interests. Senses of belonging, and interests, come by definition in many forms. Responsibility, on the other hand, is tied into categories of space and time: the space in which it is exercised, and the time to which it is indebted, whether it be the time of human beings or of God. In other words, responsibility carries conflict within itself.

To understand this, we need simply take up one relatively brief historical sequence, that of structural adjustment programmes from the 1980s to the 2000s. Their protagonists saw themselves as caught up in various registers of responsibility. African donors and political and economic leaders sometimes shared a common vision of macroeconomics and the need for Africa to make an ‘adjustment’ to the constraints and opportunities of the global market, but this did not mean that they felt responsible to the same authorities. Some were accountable to multilateral institutions, but these did not necessarily have the same agenda and each of them fostered different or divergent interests, if only because they were the echo chambers of their national shareholders. Others were the representatives of their nations, but also of narrower circles of belonging constitutive of these nations, starting with what is called ethnicity; this comes endowed with a specific ‘moral economy’, as John Lonsdale (1992) has demonstrated in the case of the Kikuyu in Kenya. In these circumstances, the ‘Washington Consensus’ was a useful (or useless) fiction, a ‘working misunderstanding’ (Sahlins 1993), which mainly provided the framework for hard-headed negotiations between donors and recipients of multilateral and bilateral credits – for example, negotiations on the setting of economic indicators such as the rate

of inflation, or the terms of taxation. The overlapping of these regimes of responsibility generated a considerable degree of irresponsibility, judging by the deleterious consequences of this period for civil peace, for the health and education of the populations involved and for their standards of living. But structural adjustment programmes concerned other actors than individual states and the institutions of the Bretton Woods or UN systems – in particular they concerned companies torn between the expectations of their shareholders, employees and customers, and more or less preoccupied by their social responsibility (CSR, or corporate social responsibility), and they also affected the forces of civil society, which embodied other repertoires to do with citizenship, religion, environment, health, public education and so on.

From this brief overview, it can be concluded that, during the short sequence of structural adjustment, responsibility was the subject of a complex process of utterance on the part of a multitude of actors, and that its development took the form of a ‘constellation’ (*Konstellation*).¹ It is this very same complexity that we must understand and problematize in terms of the historicity of African societies – for these societies, like all others, but perhaps more obviously than others (because of their history and their cultural practices), are made up of a plurality of space/times (Bayart 1979). The representations of responsibility that prevail within them stem from this heterogeneity, and the more or less contradictory rationalities that it fosters.

The Interweaving of Historical Durations

The African political classes chose, in the aftermath of independence, to reproduce the territorial framework inherited from colonization and endorsed the principle of the nation-state. As a result, they stayed within a framework going back two centuries, combining the expansion of the capitalist mode of production with the universalization of the nation-state as a mode of political organization on the level of the international system (Bayart 2007). This sequence was paradoxically accompanied by the crystallization and intensification of particularist forms of social identification, of which ethnicity and religious denomination are the two main examples evident across the African continent. Each of these three dimensions tends to have its own regime(s) of responsibility.

Such transformations have profoundly affected West African and Saharan societies since the nineteenth century. On the one hand, they have come into conflict with these societies' main political, economic and cultural mechanisms, especially their relation to territory, sovereignty, wealth and poverty, spatial mobility, freedom and dignity, and therefore responsibility. On the other hand, they have been the subject of often large-scale, and always creative, appropriation on the part of all of their actors. This twofold reality casts doubt on most of the interpretations which emphasize the supposedly insurmountable contradictions between a state inherited from colonization and traditional local societies, in the form of a zero-sum game. Things are actually much more complicated, as the regimes of legitimacy, security, social responsibility, wealth enhancement and the cultural and political representation of 'good government' simultaneously play a part in these historical dimensions, in different spaces and disparate durations that fit into each other rather than succeeding one another. Analyses distinguishing between pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods, and contrasting Africa with European or other entities that have made a dramatic entrance into African history, are totally inadequate when it comes to understanding the political problems that African states encounter, and the crises and conflicts which affect them.

The very notion of periodization, which in any case is criticized by a growing number of historians, is misleading and does not help to understand the historicity of African societies in their complexity and multidimensionality. Like all societies, but in a more obvious way when analysed in detail, and when we get away from the mythology of dependency that sees the colonial period (or the Atlantic slave trade) as the be-all and end-all of their historicity, African political societies are based on the interweaving of heterogeneous, 'long', 'medium' or 'short' durations (*durées*), in Fernand Braudel's sense (1949).

But, as well as drawing on the analytical convenience of Braudel's distinction, we need to understand, as Henri Bergson (1889) would put it, the 'compenetration' of these durations, both from the point of view of the objective structuring of societies – their political organization, their mode of production and their social relations, for example – and in their cultural and political consciousness. This 'compenetration' of durations gives rise to traumatic memory effects, which can be described, as Bergson does (here drawing on the psychiatrist Pierre Janet), as 'false recognitions' or

‘memories of the present’. This same compenetration also leads to hybridizations between heterogeneous political forms or repertoires, of various origins, and to many different (and even competing) senses of identification and belonging.

These effects of memory and hybridization, this logic of the overlapping and concatenation of different durations, and these respective elements of ‘undivided continuity and [of] creation’ (Bergson 1911) are constitutive factors in the reproduction of the nation-state south of Sahara and most of the political crises it undergoes. They are all the more complex because in reality the three orders of duration (short, medium and long) also come in several guises. Even if we leave aside the transformations that shaped the medieval age and the early modern age of the subcontinent over several centuries, neither the colonial moment nor the post-colonial moment have been immune from changes that give them their true historicity, notwithstanding their polemical essentialization in terms of ‘colonialism’ or ‘neocolonialism’ or *postcoloniality*.

The state in Africa may suffer less from its congenital maladaptation to local societies than from the way it was grafted onto them, and from its powerlessness (or its deliberate political reluctance) to meet the expectations it raises among its citizens, including in situations of political bankruptcy and civil war (cf. Lombard 2016). The state is a rhizome: it has a real historical base, interacts with local authorities, and has seen its bureaucratic principle largely adopted even in the lower strata of society (Bayart 1989 and 2013).

The coherence of the whole of the Saharan and West African region seems to stem from a historical sequence which has been its matrix and which continues to configure social, economic and political transformations within it: namely the shift from a world of empires to a regional system of nation-states, in the context of the global expansion of capitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As in the Eastern Mediterranean, the nation-state, in West African and Saharan countries, is the result of imperial combinations, rather than of any unitary imperial matrix, since colonial empires in the second half of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century were grafted onto earlier imperial forms, or onto memories of them, and even sometimes formed a real synthesis with them which has lasted until today, as in the emblematic case of Morocco (Hibou and Tozy 2015). Shaped by the colonizer, the contemporary nation-state

thus interacts both with imperial logics which are themselves heterogeneous and with logics of lineage that are not antagonistic to the former (*pace* the postulates of historicist evolutionism) but in fact fuel them. Historians and anthropologists have demonstrated that the old states of Africa were structured by the intermediation of lineages.² The memory of dead empires is perpetuated today through these lineages, reproduced by family stories and genealogies – the ‘histories’ (*tawarikh*) that are the ‘most popular genre of historical writing’ in the Sahara and the Sahel (Scheele 2012: 162) – and more broadly by the oral tradition, in a more or less conflictual and polemical way. The contemporary nation-state, far from having reduced the significance of lineages, has embraced them and continues to rely on them.³ Nation-state, empire, lineage: each has its memories, each has its regimes of responsibility, which interact with the global categorical imperatives both of monotheisms and markets.

As a commercial space integrated into the *longue durée*, the Saharan and Western African region has generated, from one trading zone to another, and within different societies, ‘marginal gains’ which have been the main driver of accumulation in a context of monetary pluralism and financial informality.⁴ The Sahara, the Sahel and the Forest were thus highly lucrative crossover areas, depending on several factors that included supply and price differentials between the British and French empires during the Second World War, the exit of Mali from the franc zone in 1962 and the nationalization of its foreign trade, the vagaries of the subsidy policy for staples enforced by the Algerian state, the return of Mali to the franc zone in 1984, and the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 – to cite just one example, namely the political economy of the border between Mali and Algeria. As a counterpart to its contemporary territorial division, the Saharan and West Africa region includes a trans-societal architecture of vehicular trade networks that tend to be identified in ethnic terms, at the risk of simplifying things and erasing the internal divisions of these transitive peoples.

In the words of Jane Guyer, the Saharan and West Africa region has been ‘marketable, but not bankable’ (Guyer 2004: 16). Given the failure of free trade to penetrate the continent economically, the European powers tried to remedy the situation in the second half of the nineteenth century by moving from an ‘imperialism of intent’ to an ‘imperialism of result’, which implied its effective military occupation (Hopkins 1995: 248). They did not succeed

in the colonial framework, any more than they did later on through official development assistance or structural adjustment. Even today, ‘everything seems changeable, negotiable, redefinable all the time’ (Guyer 2004: 18). The resulting multidimensionality of African societies makes the creation of scales of equivalence and (in)commensurability crucial, both within these societies and at their interface with their surroundings.

This multidimensionality involves the formation of values, but also of space–times, regimes of truth and repertoires of identification. Far beyond the sphere of market exchange, Western and Saharan Africa is historically characterized by its mobility and by a fungibility that leads another anthropologist, Sarah Berry (1993), to say that, in its space, ‘no condition is permanent’. Indeed, the phrase ‘the African Frontier’ has been used to conceptualize the driving force behind the political formations of older times (Kopytoff 1987). This characterization remains relevant today, even in the literal sense of the term: frontier towns which arose simply by fostering the ‘marginal gains’ of smuggling – towns such as al-Khalil on the Algeria–Mali border, Fotokol and Amchide on the Nigeria–Cameroon border, and Mbaimboum on the Cameroon–Chad–Central Africa border have become crucial places of transit and trade on both sides of the relevant monetary and commercial zones by institutionalizing new forms of homelessness, belonging, and local cosmopolitanism, and by sharpening the greed of armed forces from the Tuareg, Aqmi and Boko Haram rebellions and of gangs of *coupeurs de route* (highway bandits who set up road-blocks).

African societies have become twofold, with a diurnal dimension and a nocturnal dimension of the invisible; this is another manifestation of the characteristic mutability of social affiliations and itineraries, often picaresque and found in various guises, for example therapeutic, religious or professional.⁵ ‘He who can do more can do less’, as the saying goes: in societies where some men can turn into panthers or other wild animals, it is easy to change economic activity or political camp by being a *sobel*, a soldier by day and a rebel by night, as in Sierra Leone in the 1990s, or by practising parliamentary ‘transhumance’, as in Benin in the same period. Identity-swapping and its ‘marginal gains’ are not limited to the monetary or commercial orders alone. They are consubstantial with the social life and history of Western and Saharan Africa and assume a cultural shape there (so long as we do not take a culturalist view of the latter). Jane Guyer, with her

experience as an anthropologist and historian of economics and currency, has written about the ‘tradition of invention’ in Africa, an ironic reference to the process of ‘the invention of tradition’ that Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger highlighted: this enables her to reject the idea that a tradition can ever be anything but ‘invented’: ‘Social and cultural life in Africa during the centuries preceding colonization was much more inventive in everyday life than we can imagine today’, she argues – and asserts that ‘Africa has never been traditional’ (Guyer 2000 and 2007; see also Vansina 1990: ch. 9; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Adventurism, cunning, betrayals or political reversals, and fraud are only epiphenomena of this cultural and historical tendency, the recurrence of which gives rise to moral judgments that may be understandable but are analytically irrelevant since what is at stake is actually a form of ‘moral economy’. The dance mask was its primary artistic expression and is still commonly used in cultural and ritual associations (cf. Argenti 2007; Beuvier 2014). The merchant, the hawker, the transporter, the migrant, the itinerant fighter, the smuggler, the ‘digger’ and the preacher are paradigmatic contemporary social figures of this mask.

In addition to its connection with the imperial and lineage logics of the past, a second feature of the West African and Saharan region that we are considering is its multi-century commercial integration into both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic worlds, in a logic of ‘marginal gains’: ‘non-equivalent exchange, through the use of quantifiable currencies, was a familiar institution in West and Equatorial Africa, to which the spread of currencies may well have profoundly contributed. People gained familiarity with negotiating intervals, performing precedence and exchanging goods and services that were explicitly not the match of each other while still measuring value on a monetary scale’ (Guyer 2004: 47). This market economy is not driven by the rational–legal calculation inherent in the spirit of capitalism, as problematized by Max Weber, but by the unpredictable ‘performances’ of its actors, according to varied cultural repertoires whose dramaturgy is all the more evident when it unfolds in a context of crisis, for example a shortage of supplies (ibid.: 97 and seq.).⁶ Its register is one of uncertainty, echoed perhaps by a more general political ‘indocility’ (Mbembe 1988).

The third trait that characterizes the Saharan and West African region is its centuries-old experience of slavery, or more exactly the legacy of three

different experiences of slavery intertwined with each other: the trans-Saharan slave trade, the Atlantic slave trade, and the slavery internal to the societies of this area – three historical incarnations of servitude to which we must undoubtedly add the forced labour of colonization, particularly in French West Africa, so closely associated, in the consciousness of the ‘natives’, with a resurgence of slavery. The notion of slavery is generic and questionable in that it brings together profoundly heterogeneous forms of the coercive or statutory exploitation of the labour force. It does not refer to a ‘permanent’ condition, in a continent where permanent conditions are lacking, since the descendants of a captive, in ancient African societies, gradually became part of the family of his masters, which did not, however, erase the indignity of their origins. But one of the singularities of the area we are considering is precisely this complexity in the legacy of slavery, its traumatic memory, and its varying political treatment, ranging from the ideological repression of internal slavery in the guise of nationalist unanimism and the exacerbation of the ‘false recognition’ of the Atlantic slave trade to the diplomatically correct euphemization of the trans-Saharan slave trade in the Western Sahel and the predatory empire of Rabeh in the Lake Chad basin. For different reasons, colonization, decolonization, the priority given to the needs of development and structural adjustment, have successively favoured the repression of the issue of slavery in public debate, with some exceptions such as Mauritania, and Mali and Guinea, whose first nationalist governments violently attacked the ‘feudalism’ of their traditional leaders. But it remains a ‘public secret’, as the anthropologist Michael Taussig’s (1999) oxymoron has it, an open secret that is the subtext of most civil wars, insurrections, coups d’état, religious mobilizations and even repression, at least in sub-Saharan West Africa. Everyone there knows who is who, based on surnames or signs of behavioural distinction, for example, and marriage alliances must take this into account. Representations of witchcraft also frequently refer to the heritage of the slave trade (Argenti 2007). And, in Bergsonian terms, the ‘memory’ (*souvenir*) of it now absorbs the ‘present’ of the issue of migration, against the backdrop of the civil war in Libya, blurring the mirror effects of historical responsibilities.

The forging of connections between empires (and their lineages) and the nation-state, between the ethics of performance and the spirit of capitalism, and between slavery and capitalism: these are three common denominators

constituting a historical space congruent with and integrated into the *longue durée*, covering the countries of the Maghreb, the western half of the Sahara, and what is commonly called West Africa.

To grasp the entanglement of the durations comprising the historicity of these societies, it is quite legitimate to resort to the nation-state as a yardstick, as it still remains right at the centre of their organization, their political economy, their *imaginaire* and their reproduction, notwithstanding the usual received ideas about the failed state. Nevertheless, its social foundations vary from one region or province to another.⁷ Above all, it is at the local level of its *historical terroirs* that the interweaving of the durations that produce it can be deciphered in most detail – an interweaving which underlies the major questions that the ‘governance’ of the nation-state faces, such as the agrarian problem or the legacy of slavery. It is also at this level, quite often, that the major crises and conflicts that hit the international headlines can be at least partly explained.

The historicity of a *terroir* cannot be abstracted from either the national dimension or the international environment. The prominent role of ‘outside elites’, whether they are urban residents or expatriates, quick to exert their influence or hold onto their place within traditional institutions or through ‘development committees’ and NGOs, is well documented by anthropologists. In addition, the medium scale is often essential for understanding the facts under analysis, especially when a regional area of trade or investment opens up, particularly in the real estate sector, or a ‘system of conflicts’ is formed (cf. Marchal 2006), of which the Libya–Niger–Mali Triangle, the Lake Chad Basin and the Mano River Basin, and the southern part of Senegambia from the Gambia to Guinea-Bissau, provide (or have done so over recent decades) an illustration. The concept of historical *terroir* should not be associated with the idea of gregariousness. It is a node of circulations, often part of the *longue durée* – Mbororo transhumance, the Hajj, and Dioula commercial networks, for example – but also part of our own contemporary world.

The question of responsibility can only be understood in the light of this interweaving and overlapping of historical durations, seen on their different levels.

The Moment of the Colonial State

Colonization itself was a tremendously complex historical moment that we have tended to essentialize, even speaking of ‘coloniality’, like some adherents of postcolonial studies, without much regard for the diversity of concrete ‘colonial situations’. But colonization and the subsequent colonial administrations always remained dependent on the historicity of the *terroirs* with which imperial negotiations and transactions were involved, despite the brutality of the occupation. So, we need from the start to get away from interpreting it in terms of dependency, or in neo-Foucauldian terms, as an unambiguous disciplinary enterprise: such discourses set themselves up as exclusive regimes of responsibility. Of course, both ‘dependency’ and ‘discipline’ were important issues: but dependency is a form of action, and sometimes a strategy, on the part of the actors who are (willingly or not) subject to it. When seen in its *longue durée*, the history of Africa has been a ‘history of extraversion’ during which its societies have constructed their dependency on Europe, both ‘from above’ and ‘from below’, in a trajectory that we can simultaneously analyse in terms of the rational (or irrational, or ‘unintentional’) policies of their ruling groups, the more or less confused social mobilizations of subordinate groups, or the cultural *imaginaire*, depending on the phenomena we observe and the methodological point of view we adopt (Bayart 2000 and 2009). This, of course, does not exclude constraints or contradictions at the heart of these policies or practices of extraversion (Nubukpo 2011). And if we are to cite Michel Foucault, we may as well do so intelligently and recall that he saw power as an action *on actions*, on the actions of the dominated and the actions of subordinate groups – in this case the natives.

It is true that the colonial state introduced a radical distortion in relation to the historicity of African societies, and aroused ‘neither astonishment nor wonder, but only the stupor caused by total defeat’ (Eboussi-Boulaga 1977: 15–16). However, this founding distortion was neither homogeneous nor coherent nor unambiguous. Fundamentally, if we want to understand the ‘governance’ of the contemporary nation-state, this governance has been produced as much by Europeans as by Africans, who have continued to co-write the painful story of their continent under foreign occupation. In addition, the various components of governance have not always been produced by the state or the colonial project. Just as European historians now admit that the state has not had an excessive role in, and even less a monopoly over, the enactment of the law and the norms that are attributed

to it for the sole purpose of increasing the centralization and strength of the state (as presented by the teleological vision that has long prevailed), African studies must take into account the active participation of the 'natives' in the transformations of the continent that have led to its dependency, embodied today in the way that norms are set down for it – from top to bottom of the societies concerned:⁸ as Béatrice Hibou and Boris Samuel conclude 'because it results from practices, the imposition of norms [by numbers] should rather be understood as an interactive process' (2011: 26), just as the imposition of norms of identity according to the categories of ethnicity was 'invented' or 'created', in the words of anthropologists and historians, by the actors of colonization, both European *and* 'native'.

In a way, colonization represented a real revolution, which does not exclude the possibility that certain dominant groups have been able to retain control of it and benefit from it by deploying a conservative modernization strategy, like the Fulani-Hausa aristocracy of the caliphate of Sokoto, in northern Nigeria, under the leadership of a statesman, Sardauna Ahmadu Bello, who in many ways could be compared to Cavour or Bismarck. It was an epistemic revolution, which introduced into society the rationality, the knowledge, the statistics and the techniques of the West. It was a political and administrative revolution, because of the establishment of the state in societies that, historically, had learned the 'civilized art of living fairly peaceably together not in states', in John Lonsdale's words (1981: 139); this was illustrated, in an extreme way, by the huge Saharan commercial and cultural space regulated by Islamic law, apart from any proper political sovereignty (see also Lydon 2009; Scheele 2012). It was a local revolution, replacing the complexity of historical *terroirs* with the administrative unit of the village or often, more precisely, by the more or less coercive gathering of villages (cf. Mann 2015: 73 and seq.). It was a revolution in the education and socialization of children, through school, youth movements and sport; a gender revolution, thanks to the disruption of relations between men and women; a revolution in status, thanks to the redistribution of roles between seniors and youngsters; and a religious revolution, promoting or making possible the expansion of Christianity, but also of Islam. It was a moral revolution, forcing Africans to reinvent their conception of honour (Iliffe 2005); a revolution in identity, developing new forms of social consciousness such as monotheistic faith, ethnic consciousness, national consciousness, class consciousness, and liberal, socialist, Christian and

Islamist political consciousnesses. It was a cultural revolution, with the massive diffusion of new practices affecting clothing, food and the body; and finally, it was an economic revolution, thanks to the implantation of the capitalist mode of production, its productive forces, its social relations of production, and its rational–legal institutional and cultural expressions – an economic revolution that changed the very nature of wealth and poverty by making them depend on the control of money, finance and, perhaps most importantly, land (Iliffe 1987: 105 and seq.). Contemporary ideas of responsibility draw from each of these revolutions.

It is the economic revolution of money, finance and property that we must emphasize if we are to unravel the web of contemporary governance, based as it is on three major transformations that mostly occurred at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth. Under colonial rule, Africa became territorialized through exclusive borders, the regrouping and fixing of its populations, and the securitization of its lands. It adopted bureaucratic political and social institutions, at the same time as it was all being put into writing. Finally, it was put into numbers through statistics, censuses and macroeconomic policies, ‘the thought of the state’ placed in the service of a developmentalist voluntarism of which the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the planning of ‘emergence’ have so far comprised the latest stages (cf. Hibou and Samuel 2011; Egil 2005 and 2015). Two observations need to be made here. On the one hand, the state has taken over these modes of government, not without extending them in the context of neoliberal globalization. On the other hand, these new modes of government are at odds with some of the *longue durée* historical processes that we have identified, in particular the relativism of identity peculiar to empires and to polytheism, the principle of mobility that generates ‘marginalized gains’, the art of performance, the non-alienation of land tenure, and ‘wealth in people’ rather than in money and land, even when this comes at the cost of slavery and clientelism (in the almost Roman sense of the term).

We need to say it again: this is only an ideal-type, a paradigm, partially contradicted or qualified by each of the concrete historical cases we are considering. Nevertheless, such exceptions do not invalidate the ideal type of the Great Distortion brought about by colonization. If we keep Bergson’s vocabulary, and provided we do not adopt a culturalist view of this shift, it

can be seen that Africa has indeed, within a century, with the aid of colonial forceps, moved from ‘duration’ [*durée*] to ‘time’ [*temps*], the latter being inseparable from space, in Bergson’s view. In other words, the Great Colonial Distortion amounted to a spatialization of Africa, or perhaps rather to its ‘territorialization’, this time in the sense of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1983). This abstract formulation can draw on some very specific facts relevant to the issue of responsibility. For example, in West Nigeria, in Yoruba country, in the 1960s, Jane Guyer noted ‘the existence of mutual monetary obligations that smoothed out seasonal variations’ (Guyer, Salami and Akinlade 2011: 50–51). Purchase and sale by deferred payment (*àwin*) differed from debt (*gbèsè*): ‘As long as the time limit for the postponement of the deferred payment has not been reached, the monetary obligation remains an *àwin*, and it incurs no additional payment such as “interest”. The obligation does not fall into the category of *gbèsè* until the deadline has passed’ (ibid.). Micro-credit institutions for ordinary people, including tontines, mutual credit groups, guilds, and social and religious clubs, acted as mediators to smooth out seasonal variations in income and a faster circulation in the overall money supply, to the detriment of savings, but more or less avoiding the phenomena of ‘there’s no money in town’ that hit the local economy hard from the 1980s onwards. Now,

unlike our current financialized economy, the “finite” aspect – the date of the final settlement when the deadline arrives – has always been a *real, factual* element, and not just an element in a legal technology subject to permanent redeployment. The date of the settlement may not be defined according to the Western calendar, but it has long been accurately calibrated in accordance with the number of market cycles, the seasons, or other repetitive elements of the calendar. (Ibid.)

From one historical *terroir* to another, the Great Distortion has tended to bureaucratize and put into numbers these performances and negotiations between actors situated in temporalities other than those of the state and the international system of which it was part.

We must not underestimate the trauma caused by the colonial revolution, which intimately affected souls and bodies. There followed a feeling of cultural, moral, spiritual and even demographic insecurity that is one of the sources of contemporary violence (cf. Last 2008; Ceriana Mayneri 2014).⁹ But colonization also opened up new opportunities that aroused the enthusiasm and support of many Africans, making it an ‘ambiguous’ moment, as the sociologist Georges Balandier (1957) and the novelist

Cheikh Hamidou Kane (1961) put it. From this ambiguity Africa has not emerged, and its contemporary governance is consubstantially tainted. Any attempt at clarification could only be a form of ‘invention of tradition’ of an inevitably totalitarian kind, in terms of Louis Dumont’s definition (1977), striving to rebuild a holistic society on the foundations of a concretely individualistic society (whatever one may think of it). West Africa has already paid a heavy price for such conceptions with the SékouTouré, Tombalbaye and Eyadema regimes, which attempted, through coercion, to impose some fantasy of ‘authenticity’ on their respective countries. In reality, the historical truth of Africa has consisted in a large-scale appropriation of the foreign contribution, following the logic of extraversion which has dominated its trajectory over the *longue durée*.

The Moral Ambiguity of the Post-colonial State

In the contrasting contexts of contemporary Africa, between violence and civic participation, between local, national and global scales, between political and social struggle, and between democracy and the penumbra of the ‘inter-wars’ periods (Debos 2016), governance is negotiated in accordance with specific moral economies which must not be reified into timeless cultures, but which denote particular stories. Vincent Bonnecase (2013) provides us with one example in his analysis of the ‘granary-state’ in Niger. Often referred to, not very precisely, as ‘hunger riots’ (given the soaring international cereal prices in the mid-2000s), protests against the high cost of living mainly reflected very outdated ideas about the Songhay *princes nourriciers*, memories of the colonial administrative regulation, nostalgia for Seyni Kountché’s *dirigiste* regime and the period prior to structural adjustment, in short ‘specific political *imaginaires* anchored in strictly local histories’, and also a ‘desire for the state’, however authoritarian, insofar as the degradation of living conditions was concomitant with democratization (Bonnecase 2013).

In the same vein, Jane Guyer showed how the Yoruba relationship to the Nigerian state was mediated by historically situated cultural representations – shaped in particular by the economic experiences of recent decades, such as the oil bonanza and its disappointing consequences, which resulted in a depreciation of the naira and the drying up of the circulation of money – and also by an idiosyncratic conception of development independent of the

Western understanding of the notion (Guyer 2004; Peel 1978). The very ideas of modernity, development, and ‘Enlightenment’ (*qlaju*) are endogenous in Yoruba country, while being associated with openness to the rest of the world. Cultural extraversion, in fact, has been the driving force behind Yoruba nationalism, in which Afro-Brazilians and the Saro – slaves returning from Sierra Leone – have had a major influence (Peel 2000). In this historical context, the Yoruba – like many other Nigerians, incidentally – perceive macroeconomics through the prism of two priorities: the fuel supply at the petrol pump, always erratic due to recurrent shortages, and the money supply necessary for their artisanal economic activities, which ‘is part of an unwritten clause, but one that is deeply inscribed in the political contract concluded between the state and its populations’ (Guyer, Salami and Akinlade 2011: 44), which gives rise to a veritable popular theory of money on the basis of which the government’s action will be evaluated.

Even the violence of the *coupeurs de route* can be a way of renegotiating citizenship, as Janet Roitman (2004) and Saïbou Issa (2010) have shown for northern Cameroon. Contemporary brigandage is seen as part of the traditional moral and political economy of the *rezzou* in the ancient empires of Sokoto, Bornou, Baguirmi, Wandala and Ouaddaï. It was perpetuated during the colonial period, benefiting from the *omertà* of the villages and sometimes enjoying the complicity of the tribal chiefs, organizing itself in prisons from which it was just as easy to escape as it was to enter them (Issa 2004: 92). It was also carried out against the backdrop of the persistent dissent of the *kirdi* (non-Muslim) societies, whose frequent ‘incidents’ were constantly bemoaned by French *commandants de cercle*/colonial authorities. Today, rural banditry has undoubtedly become more violent, less chivalrous than in the good old times of which the griots sing, rightly or wrongly, but it responds to an ethic, or at least to certain norms – those of the so-called ‘bush soldiers’, mirrored by the ethics of the victims. An ambush thus becomes a place of negotiation in and through coercion, which some gangs literally stage by imposing a whole burlesque drama on the unfortunate travellers (*ibid.*: 96 and seq.). Moreover, the state is by no means absent from this moral economy of predation, either by participating via some of its agents or auxiliaries, such as the village militias for self-defence against Boko Haram, or by helping to radicalize it through the ferocity of its repression since the 1980s. These days, jihadists are carrying out a non-territorial mode of domination, of which legitimate predation, on

the boundaries between the *Daral-Harb* and the *Dar al-Islam*, is the moral economy, however shocking this may appear, especially when it takes the form of a massacre or the capture and enslavement of young women.¹⁰

The effective government of the nation-state is to a large extent played out in the heterogeneity and complexity of the historical *terroirs* in which the autonomy of society is rooted in spite of the authoritarian and totalitarian character of the government. The limited means of the latter guarantee the *Eigensinn* (wilful agency or self-affirmation, see Lüdtké 1995 and 2000) of the social actors, though we must not underestimate the ability of the rhizome state to penetrate the mysteries of the 'real country'. There is a no-man's-land here that remains poorly understood in the social sciences of the political realm or the economics of development, even if the centrality of intermediation practices has been analysed in detail (Bierschenk, Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan 2000). Another major problem of contemporary 'governance', and one that is much debated, is that of 'corruption', and it deserves to be formulated in these terms. The heuristic cynicism of historical sociology decrees that corruption should be conceptualized as a process of primitive accumulation of capital, of which it is easy to find equivalents in the history of all the societies in the industrial world. But neither donors nor citizens interpret it that way. They express it in a normative vocabulary, whether moral or religious, or else in the vocabulary of efficiency, so as to denounce the way the state and its servants are guilty of mismanagement. Nevertheless, things are more complicated than the activists of the *Balai Citoyen* (Clean Sweep) movement in Burkina Faso, and the *Y en a marre* (We've Had Enough) movement in Senegal, as well as senior officials in official development aid, would have us believe. Because 'for there to be corrupt people, there must be people to corrupt them', as African presidents and anti-globalists, in sudden strange agreement, regularly note as they point an accusing finger at Western politicians and multinationals. For it is also true that corruption is a functional cog in the redistribution of wealth that little people, and even the better-off too, expect from the powerful and the rich.

Africa is not just 'ambiguous', as many writers have so eloquently put it. It is *ambivalent* especially because of the diversity of the historical regimes of responsibility that coexist there. This ambivalence is found at the heart of post-colonial governmentality, at the intersection of the techniques of domination and techniques of the self, and thus at the heart of

subjectivation, the constitution of the moral subject and its regimes of truth. It is a lack of understanding that leads people to imprison African societies in evolutionist and culturalist clichés, with a certain condescension as to the alleged irresponsibility and greed of its leaders. The continent suffers from too much responsibility, rather than from a lack of it.

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Notes

1. Constellation is a metaphor ‘regularly used by Weber to refer to the conjunction between, and overlapping of, causal factors in social processes’ (Grossein 2016: p. 334).
2. ‘The clan is not an element preserved in some still primitive form of state, but an institution that is rigorously synchronic with royalty’ as Alfred Adler puts it in *La Mort est le masque du roi. La royauté sacrée des Moundang du Tchad* (1982). Claude Tardits (1980) had reached a similar conclusion. The same applied to the state in early modern Europe (see Adams 2005).
3. On lineage societies, see Perrot (2000). The case of present-day Republic of Mali is paradigmatic in this respect. The Kounta, descendants of a lineage branch of the Qadiriyya, in the seventeenth century, who controlled trade with the oasis of Touat; the Arma, descendants of Moroccan troops who conquered Timbuktu in the sixteenth century; the Keita, descendants of the ruling family of the Malian empire; the Camara and Koroma, heirs of warrior clans; the Cisse and Toure, heirs of Islamized clans; the Kouyaté, griots, and the Kanté-Soumaoro, blacksmiths, remain relevant categories in contemporary political life. The Islamic brotherhoods are themselves based on lineages and dynasties, like the Mouridiyya, dominated by the oligarchy of the Mbacké-Mbacké, in Senegal, or the Qadiriyya movement under the Kounta obedience, in a large part of West Africa and the Sahara. One of Salafism’s forces of attraction, especially in northern Nigeria, in the eyes of subalterns or outsiders to the Hausa-Fulani establishment, is precisely its capacity to subvert this genealogical transmission of religious authority, in this case within the Qadiriyya and Tidjaniyya. Nevertheless, the Algerian jihadists of AQIM (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) in Mali, though they embrace reformed Islam, took over the lineage logic by establishing themselves in the Azawad through matrimonial alliances with the local populations, according to the custom of the desert and the practical necessities of its ecosystem.
4. See Jane I. Guyer (2004: 25–26) on the definition of the term ‘marginal’.

5. For the religious field, see Chanson, Droz, Gez and Soares (2014).
6. See in particular Guyer's dazzling analysis of a service station in Nigeria at a time of fuel shortage, in 1997.
7. See Bayart (2009: ch. 5 and 6) on the regional scenarios of state formation, and Bayart (2009: conclusion) on the concept of the historical *terroir*.
8. On the imposition of norms 'from below' in African societies, see the important work edited by Béatrice Hibou and Boris Samuel (2011).
9. The case of demographic insecurity is particularly interesting and poorly understood. Where the West accepts the image – recently used by the French President – of the Sahel as a zone of great fertility, some of the countries that comprise this area actually foster a sense of under-fertility, which comes with a high degree of social suffering among women who feel they have been affected by infertility. See the very illuminating article by Barbara M. Cooper (2013).
10. On this non-territorial mode of domination and its political and moral economy, see Roitman (2004: 114 et seq.), and Dewièrè (2017) on the 'mobile state' (even if limited by boundary markers, in this case).

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