

Book Review

Clapham, Christopher. *Africa and the International System: the Politics of States Survival* (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), xii, 340pp.

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The discipline of International Relations has always tended to examine international relations from the perspective of the most powerful states. This was particularly the case during and after the Cold War (1945-89). This book suggests examining international relations from bottom up in order to properly understand the workings of the international system. In addition, this book offers a great understanding of why and how the African states managed to survive after their independence from the colonial powers. It asks questions such as whose survival – the state or the rulers? And how did they survive?

In the first part of the book, Clapham copes with the question of the “state” itself. The author makes the argument that the state is an important player within the international system and its role should not be diminished. The author re-conceptualizes the concept of “statehood”, because it is the starting point for the understanding of the study of International Relations. The author claims that the state could have three different attributes: first, equating the state with governance; second, state as legitimacy and third, state as a territorial association (p. 8, 9, 11). Nevertheless, the triumph of practice over theory is an important figure in the discussion, because it is substantiated in the African states in which the rulers are the ultimate power within the state. Therefore, re-conceptualizing the concept of statehood has not that much effect on comprehending the study of international relations; rather, the ideology that empowers rulers provide the basis for state behavior both domestically and in the international arena. If the rulers adopt a socialist ideology they would act almost against the capitalist agenda and vice versa. In addition, many of the African states were/are under personal rulers, for example, Malawi under Banda where foreign policy agenda and allegiance to states could be changed overnight.

However, the author rebuts Robert Jackson's conception of “quasi-statehood”. Quasi-statehood “are states which recognized by others states within the international system, but which cannot meet the demands of an empirical statehood, which requires the capacity to exercise effective power within their own territories, and be able to defend themselves against external attack” (p. 15). This is applied on the African states, but Clapham correctly points this out by arguing that the idea of statehood should be shared and implemented by both the state and its citizens. He uses West and East Germany as an example, where the two factions unified because of idea of a shared vision of a unified

state. Indeed, the idea of the state is very important criterion for the survival of the state, but this was not the case in Africa. According to Clapham the maintenance of social order on lineage and clan structure is designated to limit conflicts between them. In the context of Africa, this was due to colonization by eight different colonial powers. Thus the legacy of the colonialists played an ambiguous role in shaping the colonized states even after independence. The legacies were, linguistic, cultural, structural, geographic, economic and political; also the nationalist leaders were strongly defending these legacies (p. 33, 35). These legacies were created by centuries of colonial rule, and this is impossible to fade away overnight. For instance, the nationalist leaders defended the artificial boundaries, because they had no other options. If they change the boundaries that the colonizers demarcated, there will be no international recognition and support which they needed after independence.

After independence, the author argues, African states did not detach or de-link themselves from the need of the superpowers and, of course, their ex-colonisers. Nevertheless, Africans looked to their former colonial rulers for external support and international legitimacy. The author argues that the survival of African states was best assured by allegiance to a superpower or protector. Therefore “the weaker the internal legitimacy of the state, the greater was its external dependence, and the greater likewise was the price that the domestic regime had to pay for its external support” (p. 21). Thus, the postcolonial states are beholden to former colonizers. Also, because the African states had fragile economic structures, they needed “to maintain the state structures... which they had inherited from colonialism” (p. 45).

The author further notes that colonial experience had deep impact on the cultural, linguistic, and trading networks of African states. For instance, English language has become the formal language of many African and Asian states such as Nigeria; Ghana, Kenya, Uganda and Botswana. The entrenchment of foreign *Lingua Franca* had become a bane of the post-colonial state system in Africa.

The book further explores how African states depended on the support of ex-colonial powers, especially for managing their bureaucracy and maintaining security. In terms of bureaucracy, African states sent their people to be educated and trained in the Metropolis. For instance, “many of the leading members of the state bureaucracy had been trained in colonizer’s states - including, most sensitively, the senior indigenous officers in the armed forces” (p. 78). In terms of security, the author notes that African rulers needed security from the colonial powers in at least three ways: first, “territorial security” that is, preserving the state’s integrity against secessionists; second, “state security”, the concern for maintaining an effective central government; and third, “regime security” that is, protecting the regime or the *status quo* (p. 80-82). Thus, the relationship between the ex-colonial powers and their foster-states seemed to be inviolable to the extent that African states find it impossible to de-link themselves from their former colonial powers, as their survivals depended on this imperialistic arrangement.

The rest of the second section of the book deals with intra-African relations which, Clapham argues, is contingent on ex-colonial power intervention and influence. The author classifies African international relations into four categories: (a) inter-African relationship (b) the politics of regionalism (c) Afro-Arab relations and (d) Afro-Soviet relations.

Inter-African relations was characterized by two significant source of common interest: first, the shared identities between the African states which Ali Mazrui (as cited in the book) summed up as “the concept of we all Africans” and second, the African rulers’ shared idea of the state which removed many potential source of conflict between them (p. 107). Later the author argues that inter-African relationship did not play significant roles in shaping of policies of the continent through the OAU (Organization of African Unity) which has now transformed into Africa Union (AU).

On the politics of regionalism, the author argues that this was mainly conducted within groups of neighboring states which had some affinity with one another. For instance, the Arabic-speaking states of North Africa had such strong links with those of the Middle East that they could, for most purposes, be separated from Sub-Saharan Africa. This relationship was shaped by ethnic, cultural, religious and security interests of both the state and its rulers could be fostered and protected through regional co-operation.

On Afro-Arab relations, the author observes that this was characterized by two different features: first, “common subjection to the domination of Europe and common demands of development and liberation”, and second “Arab states were placed in a stronger position than the Africans” (pp. 126, 127). These difficulties and others, Clapham argues, failed the relationship between the two.

On Afro-Soviet relations, the author notes that African leaders needed an alternative ally and protector that could replace the western powers in four ways. First, Soviet Union attracted African leaders by its military advances. Second, Soviet Union could serve as a partner with African against the West. Third, Soviet Union was a global standard bearer of an ideology (communism) which attracted the Africans leaders. Finally, Soviet Union could supply the African states with military and security services (pp. 143,144,145). But the Afro-Soviet relationship failed, as Clapham argues, due to the interference by the USSR in the domestic affairs of African state, and the Soviet Union was incapable of providing products as good as of those that the West was providing it in terms of quality.

In the final part of the book, the author deals with many important issues, including the decline of African economies, the politics of aid dependence, the decline of sovereignty, African response to these dilemmas and insurgencies, and African international order. However, Clapham presents an argument that African international relations has been privatized or de-stated. Clapham argues that “privatization or de-stating of African international relations...which was to correct a view of international relations which has placed excessive or even exclusive emphasis on the role of states, and assumed that the actions of states should be explained in terms of the interests of the state itself, rather than those of the individuals who controlled it” (p. 265). The author is under no illusion that the state is becoming obsolete; instead he emphasizes that scholars of international relations should place more emphasis on the rulers of African states. The author borrows the term “shadow states” to describe the African states, in which the state is under one man rule and everything within the state is to promote and serve the interest of its leaders and elites. Whether their interest requires the governmental institutions to be undermined or not, it does not matter. If the markets declines, the ruler can use his power of foreign exchange and, of course, these goals needs the army to be privatized as well (pp. 249-256). Thus, every thing is privatized in the “shadow state” under the control of its leader. But we should not be swayed by privatization: the African state continues to perpetuate itself and survive under difficult circumstances, because the

military structure is too powerful and can preserve the state against secessionist and insurgent movements and also the societies does not collapsed yet.

In conclusion, this book provides answers to two major questions: first, how did African states managed to survive after their independence? Secondly, why is it useful to look at the international relations from bottom up? The answer to the first question is that African states survived through international aid, financially and militarily to manage their state affairs. The answer to the second question is that it is useful to look at the international relations from bottom up, because, until recently, African states were/are under one man rule or military rule and thus the state represented the interest of its rulers. The author was successful in answering these questions as set out in the introduction of the book. In addition, the author demonstrates a very good understanding of issues related to the history of Africa and that is why he presents a well-crafted analysis of the African continent policies. In spite of these, some of Clapham's arguments are overtaken by events of the 1990s and 2000s or post-soviet realities. African states are no longer able to seek protection from non-Western, non-Capitalist powers. They are now beholden to Western powers who dictate to their political and economic destiny.