Politics and the Interpretation of Meaning: the State in comparative perspective

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N.B. This paper is an attempt concretely to apply our method (as presented in Patrick Chabal’s contribution) on one key theme in comparative politics: that of the State.

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Thanks in part to the insights provided by historical sociology, it is undoubtedly true that in the last few decades our understanding of the genesis of the State has made remarkable progress. We now know more clearly why it is not the ‘natural’ framework of political activity, as a particular philosophical and juridical tradition would have it, but merely one specific mode of political organisation, which emerged in some European countries after the Middle Ages.

Yet, there is still much confusion about the concept. It is frequent for historians or anthropologists to use a broad definition and to apply it to cases where, from the perspective of political science, the notion of the State is not relevant. Furthermore, even within our field, there are wide divergences. Some scholars consider the State purely as the instrument of the dominant classes for accumulation and violence. Others stress the importance of professional bureaucracies that have overcome patrimonial logic and see it as the vehicle for development and modernisation. Yet others view the State as an impediment to the flowering of the creative ‘forces’ of society.

The approach we advocate does not pretend to challenge, but rather to build on, the very considerable achievements of historical sociology as applied to politics. We aim to stress another, complementary, angle of attack, which looks in depth at the meaning(s) of the State in contrasted settings. We discuss first the relationships between culture and States. In the second part, we essay a comparative analysis of three strikingly distinct cases: France, Sweden and Nigeria.

Culture and States

In many (ancient or extra-European) polities, the notion of an impersonal system of government treating every individual as an ‘abstract’ citizen, deserving of equal protection and suffering equal legal obligation regardless of considerations of identity, does not make any sense. In these instances, the political community is defined less by geographical boundaries than in terms of a sense of collective consciousness going back to ancestral filiations, customs, beliefs or practices. Similarly,
the idea of formal equality, transcending all communal or religious identities, is incomprehensible in societies where the political realm is conditioned by primordial factors.

In order to set in context the comparative analysis of the empirical cases that follows, we think it useful to re-examine the processes that contributed to the emergence of the State. We then want to cast afresh the debate about how successfully the Western State adapted to non-European conditions. Finally, we would like to stress the difficulties of political institutionalisation and the importance of the informal – both of which are crucial to our argument.

**Foundations**

As many social scientists have pointed out, the State as it emerged and consolidated in Western Europe over several centuries, was the result of complex processes. Right from the outset it is important to emphasise that it was not the outcome of premeditated political action but the product of intertwined social and political dynamics that local actors did not fully control or even comprehend.\(^1\)

In other words, this particular form of political organisation did not arise from the deliberate application of specific political theories. It would be more accurate to refer here to fortuitous socio-historical developments, even if they did respond to specific local political logics.\(^2\)

What were the main processes that led to the constitution of the State? There was, first, a movement towards **centralisation**. The formation of the State required the end of territorial parcelling and of the juxtaposition of multiple autonomous and competing units. In several European countries, it was the ultimate dominance of one particular House over the others that marked the end of the feudal age. However, even in polities that underwent an absolutist phase, with the complete domination of one particular dynasty, the process of centralisation was laborious and never fully completed.

Second, it entailed a protracted dynamic of resource concentration and then an attempt at **monopolisation**, in the first instance of military means. Indeed, war – at once mission and a means of gaining resources – had been the business of the aristocracy during the Middle Ages. Then, the contending forces were little more than *ad hoc* coalitions, gathered together on the basis of particularistic loyalties rooted in relations of kinship, vassalage or exchange.\(^3\) Over time, military confrontation grew to be more large scale, based on better-organised armies, which had become both the means to achieve, and the symbol of, larger unity. As Weber first noted, the State then succeeded in monopolising legitimate violence both internally and vis-à-vis competing external polities.\(^4\)

The process of monopolisation also (and crucially) concerned taxation. In the case of France, for example, royal levies were long considered exceptional and they were contested. With the Hundred Years War, however, which required huge expense, taxation became institutionalised. Fiscal monopoly strengthened the authority of central power and made it possible to plan large-scale and long-term outlays. More generally, it contributed to the progressive monetisation of the economy.

Thirdly, the twin processes of centralisation and monopolisation led to the establishment of a bureaucracy, which constituted the basis of the administrative State system. This involved a dynamic of State **differentiation** and the emergence of a clear distinction between public and private spheres. As Weber made plain, the rise of the State marked the end of patrimonialism – that is, a break with

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\(^3\) See, for instance, Duby, G. 1973. *Le dimanche de Bouvines*.

\(^4\) By contrast, in some Italian cities, a dominant family controlling a neighbourhood was able both to have a militia and a prison.
the logic of personal allegiance in which ‘patrimonial servants’ owed labour and allegiance to their ‘patrons’. Such a development only became possible when recruitment to the bureaucracy was based on professional merit and competence, rewarded by commensurate salaries and career prospects independent from the vagaries of politics. These were the conditions required to ensure that civil servants remain neutral, discharge their tasks responsibly and rationally within a clear legal framework.5

The last aspect in the development of the State, which we can only discuss briefly here, was institutionalisation. This took the form of the written codification of laws applicable to all citizens and entailed legal responsibilities on the part of those who held political or bureaucratic office. Together with centralisation and differentiation, this resulted in the creation of pyramidal systems of legality (underpinned most frequently by a constitution and a supreme court) and, in parallel, hierarchical structures of bureaucracy and government resting on the juridical order instituted by the State.

For the sake of clarity of exposition, we have limited our remarks to these four fundamental aspects of the emergence of European States. There are, of course, a number of other considerations that are of importance in terms of refining the concept or studying its historical manifestations. Of note would be the relationship between the State, the nation, other territorial entities and different types of political regimes; its role in regulating social forces and in imposing order; its links with the elite; and, finally, its economic function, either as actor or regulator, or, possibly, as manager of the welfare system. We will touch on a number of these issues in our three case studies.

From a comparative perspective, therefore, the analysis of the processes that contributed to the formation of European States has led political scientists to reconsider the forms of political organisations to be found either in earlier periods or beyond that geographical area. For many, the use of the notion in settings where the four processes discussed above have not occurred, or have occurred erratically, is a form of ‘concept stretching’ that is inimical to the proper understanding of the exercise of power6.

Political anthropologists, who deploy a different comparative framework, have sometimes elaborated typologies that distinguished between ‘stateless’ (segmentary or acephalous) societies from those with a so-called ‘primitive’ or ‘traditional’ State.7 Using an exceedingly broad approach, some even define the State as that political system in which rulers are able to exercise coercive power over a specific population within a given area. This may be a necessary criterion but it is far from sufficient. We will not touch here on the discussion of ‘infra-State’ communities8, as defined by

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5 Gerth, H. & Turner, B. (eds.). 1991. *From Max Weber: essays on sociology*, Chapter 8. The theoretical analysis of differentiation was also advanced by functionalist scholars, of which T Parsons was one of the first. The problem is that they set their analysis within a debatable evolutionary theory, which they claim to be the universal key for modernisation. On these issues, see Badie, B. & Birnbaum, P. 1979. *Sociologie de l’Etat*.

6 Of course, we understand that many are unhappy with the implication that the ‘West’ is responsible for the ‘invention’ of the State and its modern administration. Many of those would want to argue that the Western variant of the State is characterised by a high degree of institutionalisation but that other models are possible in non-European settings. This would seem justified in view of the fact that the European States themselves were, by present standards, weak for many centuries. For methodological reasons we find it more useful to offer this approach to the formation of States as an introduction to our comparative case studies.


8 On which there are disagreements between different schools of thought (functionalism, structuralism cultural analysis) and different disciplines.
anthropologists themselves, except to warn of the assumption that posits their necessary evolution into States.9

When it comes to the cases of ‘primitive’ States, it is important to stress that they bear almost no resemblance to those which historical sociology would recognise as such. Not only were they not centralised but also they scarcely had the means of controlling the (often frontier-less) territories over which they claimed political dominance. Given the importance of the transition from segmentary to geographically based polities, this in itself would militate against the idea that such political organisations were akin to ‘incipient’ States.10

Although in a number of African and pre-Colombian South American kingdoms, there was vast accumulation of riches, this did not amount to a monopoly over resources. Leaving aside a number of other relevant considerations in this respect, it is enough to point to the limits of their taxation systems. This took the form of tribute, either informal or linked to clientelistic relations, a system in which the intermediaries retained a substantial amount of what was meant to go to the central authorities or the relevant ‘patron’. Of course, there were huge differences between some of these polities but none of them had evolved bureaucratic forms of fiscal transfers, along the lines of those that characterise contemporary States11.

The question of differentiation is critical here and it makes plain why, from the viewpoint of political analysis, it is problematic to speak of a ‘traditional’ State. The ‘primitive’ communities, which anthropologists have studied, exhibit no specialised political roles. This does not mean that there were no political activities as such but merely that these (group rules, conflict resolution, the discussion of objectives) were intimately linked to other spheres, most notably the religious.12 Frequently, a diffuse notion of the political, the world of the invisible (whatever the local beliefs) and social relations intermingled, as was obvious from sacred rituals, collective decisions, formal customary decisions or festivals. To separate such activities according to political roles or functions is an excessively ethnocentric enterprise. For example, in such societies there were rarely to be found clearly demarcated executive responsibilities: decisions were implemented by means of communitarian pressure – possibly reinforced by the fear of religious sanction – and rarely by a corps of specialised officials.

Where there were ‘governments’, or even a proto-administration, they tended to rely on particularistic (mechanical rather than organic) means of pressure or clientelistic dependence. Such cases can thus be seen to belong to what Weber labelled ‘patrimonial rule’. A number of Africanists are anxious to redeem the pre-colonial period and do not accept this point, arguing instead that there were pre-colonial politics, States and bureaucracies.13 However, as we will explain in greater detail later, these political organisations were not institutionalised and politics in such contexts derived from a straddling of the formal and the informal.

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9 This is a widespread assumption in classical anthropology. See, among others, Lowie. R.H. 1942. Social Organisation.
10 For instance, even in cases of remarkable large-scale territorial expansion following conquest, domination rested primarily on complex and fragile networks of allegiance and not on systematic ‘administration’. The West African kingdoms, sometimes dubbed ‘empires’ are clear illustrations of this state of affairs.
11 We stress, again, that this argument is in no way ethnocentric. We merely point out these differences. See note 6 above.
12 This raises, yet again, the question of the definition of the ‘politic’, which anthropologists often relate to processes of integration, regulation and anti-entropy mechanisms.
Equally, if we take into account the characteristics discussed above, it is not helpful to refer, as historians and archaeologists often do, to the States of the Antiquity. Of course, the legal procedures developed in Mesopotamia and the norms prevailing in Sumer, Babylon or in Assyria – which go back thousands of years – testify to attempts to set up formal codification. However, similarly to the Hebrew laws, such normative regulations remained rooted in the sacred.\textsuperscript{14} We could also point to other characteristics – such as the weak differentiation of the ‘governmental institutions’ or their confused ‘administrative’ responsibilities – which undermine the notion that these ruling organs constituted a State.

Even in the Greek cities of the Antiquity, the political realm was not autonomous either from the religious sphere or from kinship systems. Undoubtedly, it is to those cities that we owe the concepts of democracy and citizenship. Yet, their \textit{demos} only encompassed a minority of the inhabitants. Furthermore, the distribution of authoritative offices (including the top one, that of the \textit{Archon}) by means of a draft/lottery went against the creation of a distinct political sphere. Despite a move towards greater specialisation over the centuries, Ancient Greece never developed institutional structures clearly differentiated from society.

The situation in Rome was not exactly the same. The emergence of a \textit{res publica} evidences a certain distinction between civil society and the political realm. The juridical order rested not just on customary rights but upon more structured dispensations. The concept of citizen extended further than in Greece. Admittedly, there also appeared to be greater institutionalisation. However, a number of characteristics of the Roman political order\textsuperscript{15} make it problematical to characterise such political structures as State. The imperial bureaucrats did hail from diverse social origins, enjoyed a special ‘professional’ status, evolved certain bureaucratic specialisation and began to have access to a real ‘career’. On the other hand, the Emperor, who was also the supreme religious leader, was able to dismiss them at will. Furthermore, Roman magistrates combined judicial, legislative and executive responsibilities. Finally, kinship and family ties remained dominant within a world in which the role of the \textit{pater familias} was pre-eminent. Without a doubt, much of what we consider today to characterise the State issues from the Roman political systems, as they were re-constituted between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries (and especially during the Renaissance). Nevertheless, we must remain mindful of their fundamental cultural differences.\textsuperscript{16}

Late Antiquity, during which Christianity slowly gathered strength, and the early Middle ages, which suffered the invasions of the ‘barbarians’, were not favourable to the creation of a State. This was a convoluted period, during which the cultural influences from southern and northern Europe clashed and mingled. In the age of the Merovingians, the king’s authority hardly extended beyond his entourage. The monarch considered his kingdom as his own personal domain, to be parcelled out among his sons, and readily mixed his own wealth with the realm’s revenues. Even the Carolingian empire failed to move away from a patrimonial notion of power, since control over territory was based on the princes’ loyalty to the suzerain. The period that followed was characterised by extreme political fragmentation, at the polar opposite from a centralised system. The diverse paths that led to

\textsuperscript{14} For example, the most famous of the Mesopotamian codes, that of Hammurapi, is not strictly speaking a religious law since the king is depicted receiving it from the sun God and the God of justice.

\textsuperscript{15} Clearly, what is designated as the political universe of the Roman period is the outcome of several centuries of change, which from a comparative perspective would need to be studied in their full diversity.

\textsuperscript{16} See Grimal, P. 1981. \textit{La civilisation romaine}. For example, the notion of the ‘law’ today differs from the Roman one. Then, it was seen as the will of the people, and it could apply to very specific areas, which would seem more peripheral today, such as the adoption of a particular child. On the other hand, what is today essential, such as financial legislation or the budget, did not come under the legislative purview in Rome.
the emergence of what we today take for granted as States (but which in truth was only one of many possible political outcomes), issue from a later period, at the end of the feudal age.\footnote{In some countries, such as Russia or Japan, the feudal order (itself a debatable notion, which has generated much debate) did not disappear until very late.}

Turning now to the non-European world, we would argue that even the most prestigious ‘civilisations’ (to use a scientifically debatable term\footnote{On this subject, see a special issue of \textit{International Sociology}. 16, 3 (September 2001).}) did not evolve States – at least not according to the criteria discussed above. The Chinese Mandarinate (and the bureaucratic systems it spawned in the region) cannot be equated to Western States. Admittedly, the meritocratic recruitment of the higher civil servants was key. But it rested on the acquisition of general knowledge, which had little relevance to their duties. Although theoretically open to all, recruitment was socially biased, since the required education (including the mastering of Mandarin) could only be afforded by the few. In practice, most candidates were themselves the offspring of those in place. For this reason, and also because of the venal nature of the official positions, the system became quasi-hereditary. As Weber had already noted, it rested on prebendal practices.\footnote{See Gerth, H., & Turner, B. \textit{From Max Weber}, Chapter XVII. For a more recent study, see Van der Sprenkel O. 1958. \textit{The Chinese Civil Service} and Van der Sprenkel, S. 1977. \textit{Legal Institution in Manchu China}.} If social prominence appeared to derive from bureaucratic rank rather than birthright or wealth, in reality the mandarins were able to accumulate riches and to reproduce themselves socially over time.

In Korea, where (differently from other countries in the region) there was great pride in the Confucian mandarin heritage, which enjoyed traditional prestige, there quite clearly prevailed a non-State system.\footnote{See here, among others, Hahm, P.C. 1987. \textit{The Korean Tradition and Law}.} The King (quasi-independent vassal of the Chinese Emperor and absolute ruler within his realm) relied on educated bureaucrats, or \textit{Yangban}, recruited by exam. Yet, candidates could “buy” the examiners who, because of their key role, occupied a critical social position.\footnote{On the mechanics of this system, which evolved over the centuries, see for instance Lee, K. 1984. \textit{A New History of Korea}.} Newly appointed \textit{Yangban}, who usually started their career in the provinces, needed to gather the wherewithal to reimburse what their family had invested to secure exam success. Because, they were usually transferred after two years – precisely to prevent excessive graft – there was little time to obtain such revenues. They relied on the support of local ‘collaborators’ who, though not paid, took their share along the way. The higher-level civil servants, who were rarely posted in their region of origins, were thus compelled to rely on auxiliaries with an intimate knowledge of the area and entered in this way into relations of clientelism.\footnote{According to Hahm, those bureaucrats who refused to ‘play the game’ ran the risk of being accused of corruption since thus ‘collaborators’ often had ready access to the government through (often occult) networks. See Hahm, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 67} In addition, these bureaucrats had to gather the means of ‘buying’ future promotions and of ensuring for their retirement. This system lasted until the end of the nineteenth century, when it entered into crisis in large part due to intolerable prebendal pressure.\footnote{A 1862 report (written by the reforming Gi Jong Jim to the King) states: “your governors treat the provinces they administer as their personal domain; local officials serve themselves as thought they were fishing in their own local pond; the royal emissaries charged with collecting taxes overstep the mark as if they could not resist gulping the local pastries.”}

Generally, then, in such systems as were found in the Far East, the political and administrative spheres had achieved little differentiation. The mandarins effectively acted as a roving aristocracy, relying on patrimonial collaborators. The bureaucracy was thus not neutral, nor did it rest on professional competence. Although these administrative organisations were predicated on a common
cultural structure, which gave it a semblance of unity, it did not constitute a legal order transcending particularistic arrangements.

When comparativists define the State as that administrative and political organisation that emerged in Western Europe from the end of the Middle Ages, it is not necessarily to set it up as a model. Even less to suggest that other modes of political order, either more ancient or found outside that geographical area, are ‘inferior’. It is merely to stress the fundamental differences between these different systems. Since it is clear that the Western State was not the outcome of deliberate political ‘planning’ and since it was only conceptualised as such a posteriori, the argument cannot be normative. In other words, there is no inherent European ‘superiority’ in the fact that the State emerged in that part of the world. Furthermore, it is clear that the evolution of the State has been halting, and easily reversible. In many ways, present States are far removed from certain ideal types currently in vogue, as we will see later.

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that from an analytical perspective, the distinctions made by historical sociology between the different types of ‘States’ extant have been useful to comparative politics. We, for our part, would like to build on such work by proposing a cultural approach, focusing on a discussion of the extent to which the notion of the State makes sense in different settings. Before we present our three case studies, however, we should like to return to the thorny question of the extension of the ‘State’ beyond its Western European heartland.

The transplanted State and the tricks of the mirror

Today the State seems to have become the only legitimate form of government, if only for reasons of credibility at the international level. Nevertheless, analysts need to go beyond the formal appellation. It is understandable why the leaders of the so-called developing world should want to acquire respectability by casting their institutions under this rubric. It is, however, incomprehensible why political scientists should conspire in this, particularly when it is obvious that such political structures are lacking some of the major attributes of the State, which we have discussed above.

The most extreme such approach is that of international law, which confines identification to the formal structure in place regardless of whether the State has control over the territory it claims or whether it is sufficiently institutionalised to discharge its official functions. Among political scientists there is a tendency to speak of State ‘construction’, ‘formation’, or ‘hybridity’ or to deploy such (rather ethnocentric) caveats as ‘soft’, ‘weak’, ‘unfinished’ or ‘neo-patrimonial’. This situation illustrates the confusion engendered by such a mix of scientific, normative or dogmatic discourses.

There have been a number of ideologically or intellectually driven phases in the study of the spread of western style States throughout the world, which have touched on some of the sociological characteristics we discussed briefly above. We will mention here only those approaches that either concur in the view that State development is historically a Western process or believe that it is in that part of the world that it has reached it most evolved complexion.

Developmentalist perspectives hold that there is a universal process of State construction that results in due course in the establishment of institutions along the lines of those to be found today in Western Europe, North America and Australasia. Some of these theories are highly sophisticated but they remain irredeemably ethnocentric and teleological. For those who advocate this position, the assumption is that no political system in the world can remain immune to the political processes that have marked the evolution of the most ‘advanced’ nations. They hold, for instance, that the differentiation of the political sphere from society is a readily exportable method for achieving key structural changes instead of acknowledging that it is merely one of the singular outcomes of the
historical trajectory of a number of European countries. Nations may be more or less politically ‘developed’ but it is postulated that, if they apply the ‘right’ recipes (along with the ‘right’ policies of social modernisation and economic growth), they will eventually come to acquire a State resembling that of the more ‘advanced’ countries.

By the seventies, such theories, which had been evolved in respect of the more recently independent countries, had exposed their limits. Given the lack of progress, particularly in Africa, their exponents were forced to explain what was happening on the basis of developmental ‘delays’ or ‘malfunctions’. Analytically, however, such views rapidly lost credibility, since they were clearly unable convincingly to account for what was taking place politically in those countries. Although they were eventually replaced by other approaches, developmentalist theories continue to exercise strong influence. Those who live from the policy advice proffered to Third World countries have a vested interest in continuing to refer to the likely evolution of the State in the Western direction. Equally, the rulers of the so-called ‘less advanced’ nations have a stake in the argument that their governmental institutions are ‘catching up’ with those of the West.

Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives obviously do not envisage the Western State as the ultimate stage in political development. For them, it is but the embodiment of bourgeois domination and is deemed either to be transcended or to whither. In their own way, however, they mirror the ideological and teleological approaches of development theory. Whether they view the State as a vehicle for accumulation, violence or as the symbol of foreign imperialist domination, their reasoning remains economically deterministic and ignores local historical dynamics and cultural specificities. Dependency theories, though politically hostile to American concepts of development, are in fact the reverse side of a similar approach and like them they were exposed for their heuristic vacuity in the seventies. However, like them too they continue to exercise influence and have re-emerged recently in the guise of anti-globalisation.

Since the eighties, the trend has been towards more subtle interpretations, many of which based on biological metaphors: hybridity, graft, phagocytosis as well as cystic or mimetic growth. Greater empirical sophistication has made it obvious that non-Western societies have adapted these systems to their own environment. The question here becomes how the structures of the (Western) State have adjusted to distinct and unfamiliar environments. Such approaches mark a vast improvement over developmental or dependency frameworks of analysis, which considered the evolution of governmental institutions in non-Western countries either as necessary transplantation or as unwelcome intrusion. However, as we explained in our previous book on Africa, they failed to make clear the lack of balance in such transfers: the receiving organ is far more influential than the transplanted constitution.24 Or, to put it in biological terms, the dominant ‘genes’ issue from the local habitat; the recessive ones from the West.

Some scholars have concluded that the grafting of the State has been rejected and that the successful operation of Western type institutions was only possible in its original environment. Others have developed a sophisticated analysis of the export and import of Western political institutions, giving particular importance to those actors from either side who have been influential in the transfer of such models.25 Comparisons have also been made between those cases where the State has been imposed (through colonial rule or as result of donor conditionalities), those where it has been willingly embraced as a recipe for development or those where it has been mimetically and mechanically constructed. Finally, it is clear that in this respect there is a further distinction between an approach in terms ‘ideal-type’ or in terms of the relative ‘effectiveness’ of the States in question.

Whatever the differences between these schools of thought, most of the work on ‘institutional genetics’ has continued to concentrate attention on the State. It is as though it had become impossible to study contemporary political systems otherwise, limiting analysis to identifying ‘deviations’ or dissecting the ‘unintended consequences’ from the model. This syncretic approach claims to offer a ‘middle way’ between teleological (especially developmental) dogmatism and ‘cultural’ extremism. It rejects equally those who argue that non-Western settings are ‘soft’, thus easily susceptible to foreign models, and those who see them as ‘compact blocs’, immune to outside influence.

Scholars who are empirically minded know that the importation of foreign models is problematic and usually provokes resistance. For our part, we reject the dichotomy thus established between the view that such imports are either salutary or nefarious. At the same time, we do not subscribe to those syncretic approaches, which are perennially confined to debating the extent to which the Western State has been adopted, adapted or rejected. These are critical questions, which echo a number of issues discussed in the first two parts of the book. For us, a cultural approach is far from being deterministic since it pays suitable attention to the dynamics of change, as well as to the circulation of political models.

As we explained, our method is inductive and centres on the interpretation of meaning. For us, all approaches that draw on the Western model, or experience – whether theoretical, ideological or even empirical – are locked into a deductive practice. Admittedly, we all need a frame of reference for comparative analysis but it is possible both to maintain critical distance from the Western perspective and to evolve a scientific analysis of political difference.

To enter into theoretical debates merely on the basis of the political and administrative lexicon of Western theories – also frequently used by non-Western scholars who have been trained in our academies – confers an illusion of analytical familiarity as regards political ‘diagnosis’ or ‘remedies’. Here it is not a matter of technology transfer but of the transfer of the modalities of political order and legitimacy. Even those who claim to be critical of universalist approaches ought to realise that the study of the circulation of such imported models cannot be an end in itself. Comparative analysis needs to dig deeper and seek to uncover the impact of this commerce of (political) meanings at the local level.

**The formal and the informal**

The political analysis of the State needs to be multifaceted. In this section we shall stress the comparative dimension of institutionalisation and of the formalisation of political rules. However, it will be clear that our reflection on these issues links to other aspects of political analysis.

All cultures are part of a given normative order, which is more or less formal, explicit or rigid. In numerous settings, the community’s regulating principles are not to be found in written legal codes. They belong to the world of the implicit or tacit – which naturally does not mean that they command any less respect. Yet, this raises the question of the institutionalisation of regulations – about which one may take a broad or narrow view. For many scholars, among whom anthropologists, it is legitimate to refer to institutionalisation so long as there are stable and effective norms and rules of conduct. Others restrict the use of the concept to cases where laws have been codified, most often in juridical form – where, therefore, normative legitimacy operates within a relatively differentiated, official, coherent and strictly defined legal framework.

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27 Such an approach might be based on an implicit ethnocentric hierarchy, which we for our part seek to avoid.
From this perspective, a comparative examination of the diverse cultures extant throws up interesting cleavages, of which we will mention only a few. Many societies are highly intransigent when it comes to the violation of their (formal or informal) norms. Anthropology is replete with examples of ‘traditional’ communities whose people believe their very existence is at the cost of total obedience to principles and customs that have served them well since the origins of time. The observance of these rules is perceived as the guarantor of collective survival; any deviance is seen as ‘unnatural’ and potentially lethal. On the other hand, other communities value above all flexibility, compromise and *ad hoc* accommodation: here group survival is linked to the ability to adjust.

Moving on to a second comparative dimension, societies are more or less prone to formalisation. In some countries (as in Germany, for instance), there is an apparent predilection for clearly defined norms, preferably in written forms and overseen by official bodies. Such cultures are uncomfortable with fluid, or ambiguous, situations, which tend to engender noticeable social disquiet. In other societies, the opposite is true: any attempt at systematic regulation is depreciated and commonly ignored. Many among those who have studied misunderstandings in international trade have pointed to the fact that Westerners seek rapidly to formalise transactions by means of contracts. In the Far East (China, for example), what matters most is the setting up of regular contact, the progressive establishment of informal relations of trust that are ultimately difficult to break. This attitude, which privileges self-discipline, is in harmony with historical experience and cultural context.

The development of long-distance trade over centuries forced Chinese traders to operate outside the family units, which had always constituted their framework of reference. Given the absence of a formal Western-style juridical order legalising commercial transactions, they transposed the rules of Confucian ethics that regulated family life to their international networks. Business relied on the creation of ties of loyalty and the need to maintain one’s reputation, which was protected from deviance by harsh collective sanctions. We are not here entering into the debate of whether Asian ‘values’ are more or less conducive to economic development. We are only concerned to point to the existence of different types of contractual logics, both of which both have demonstrated their efficacy.

For us, such an analysis of the interpretation of the formal and informal aspects of social behaviour is crucial to the understanding of the State. Whereas in highly formalised societies adherence to written rules is paramount, there is ostensibly far greater room for manoeuvre in informal settings. Let us be clear here: informality does not mean anomy. In informal contexts, the notion of rule is deliberately vague. Acceptable behaviour derives from a number of general principles, or what might be termed ‘an intelligence of circumstances’, rooted in and bounded by orally transmitted traditions. Of course, it is difficult to give an account of such a system, even for those who have been socialised into it, precisely because it is not formalised. It is in this way like the air we breathe.

As we have detailed in *Africa Works*, such informal socio-political and economic relations, which appear disorderly, are readily used instrumentally within what is effectively a patrimonial, or

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28 In this respect, one could define culture as the conversion by *Homo Sapiens* of instinctive survival practices into replicable and transmissible knowledge.

29 See Hall, E. 1966. *The Hidden Dimension* Hall mentions the case of the Poles, where it is socially acceptable to disrupt queuing. Of course, it would here be important to assess the extent to which there was a class element in such behaviour, since the disorganisation of established order could also be a form of resistance.


31 In this respect, one might mention a standard distinction in anthropology between context ‘rich’ or ‘poor’ cultures, in which communication is more or less implicit.
clientelistic, context.\textsuperscript{32} Equally, a study of African ‘bureaucracies’ reveals a system where there are as many unwritten ‘rules’ as there are employees and where personal relations largely determine outcomes. Such particularistic dynamics are difficult to understand for those who hail from societies in which written regulations are effective.

When it comes to countries where formal legal codes are paramount, and this is our third comparative dimension, the question for analysis is the extent to which those rules are followed. In some societies, respect for written norms derives from a strong internalisation of their merit: failure to conform is troubling or even incomprehensible. In other settings, however, it is the reverse: non-compliance is routine, when not highly prized (if not officially, at least in private). Yet again, it is a matter of uncovering the local modalities of power and socio-political relations according to the method suggested before, as we shall aim to do when we discuss the notion of the State in France and Sweden. We leave philosophers and ideologues to debate whether it is more ‘civilised’ or more ‘alienating’ for a society to have a highly formalised mode of social control (within a democratic framework), which commands widespread respect for the law. Our concern here is merely to point to the importance of such considerations for the understanding of distinct political systems.

The above discussion is not meant to suggest that comparative analysts should assume either that there is a sharp dichotomy between the formal and the informal or, even less, that there is a ‘natural’ continuum from the one to the other. It is merely intended to stress the divergences between those environments where States are based on the rule of law and those the very notion of such a State does not make any sense. Of course, it might be argued that all political systems encompass both ‘normative’ and ‘pragmatic’ characteristics and that political success often depends on the ability to take liberty with the former.\textsuperscript{33} We know that in the West (regardless of divergences between juridical traditions) lawyers and attorneys often move in a world both of punctiliously respect for formal procedures and regulations and of recourse to all manners of arrangements that are sometimes of dubious legality. Whatever the case, the point here is that such contrasts in actual behaviour – as opposed to formal legislation – are crucial when it comes to making meaningful political comparisons. The working of a political order is not merely the outcome of ideological domination. If political actors draw on existing cultural repertoires to assert their legitimacy, they have to do so within the common cultural environment of which they too are a part.

In other words, what matters most here is to stress that playing with the rules may itself be part of the rules of the game. To understand how, entails an analysis of actual differences in this respect between various polities. As we shall show in the second, comparative, part of the paper, the behaviour of political actors in the three countries is extremely divergent.

Our research on Africa has revealed that local politicians are exceptionally loath to accept the authority of State institutions over their personal conduct. Within a particularistic political order, accountability rests essentially on the rulers’ ability to meet the demands of the communities and factions that support them. It is thus essential to demonstrate one’s own pre-eminence over the realm of the formal. In this respect, a last minute change in the constitution making possible a third presidential mandate is only truly shocking to those who uphold constitutional primacy – not to the leader’s supporters.

In France, as we shall see, politicians pay homage to the Republican or European institutions but often find ways of ignoring or bypassing them when it is convenient. In Scandinavia, however, the legitimacy of political actors appears to depend on their subservience to State institutions. In the

\textsuperscript{32} Chabal, P. & Daloz, J.-P. 1999. \textit{Africa Works}.

\textsuperscript{33} See Bailey, F.G. 1970. \textit{Stratagems and Spoils: a social anthropology of politics}. 
former Soviet Union, legislation never commanded absolute authority since the Communist Party, underpinned by Marxist-Leninist ideology, remained the ultimate political arbiter.\textsuperscript{34} Laws were in practice mere instruments and this raises the question of political differentiation within totalitarian systems.

Beyond these general considerations, it is useful to consider the cultural factors that may have impinged on the formation of Western States. Here, some analysts have stressed the importance of the separation between the spiritual and temporal realms, which brought about a form of social and political order rooted in this disjunction. They argue that this division between the profane and the religious (and between their respective forms of legitimacy), which became established in some countries, led to the distinction between private and public spheres and thence to the emergence of State institutions differentiated from society. This separation, which is meaningless in many settings (especially in most Islamic countries), has had a deep influence over our conception of power, authority and law.\textsuperscript{35}

Yet, the situation in the West is not so clear-cut. Comparative analysis reveals significant differences in the political relevance of the relationship between religion and politics in countries such as Italy, the United States, Norway or France. We do not intend here to enter into a debate about the prerequisites to secularisation (or about the fundamental split between what belongs to God and what belongs to Caesar) in the emergence of the modern Western State.\textsuperscript{36} Such approaches in terms of dualist or monist cultural codes are probably useful. Yet, it is probably more enlightening to go beyond the analysis of discourse in this respect and focus instead on the realities of life, as they are actually experienced by the peoples concerned.

And it is in this direction that we would want to see the study of States evolve.

**States in mind**

Contrary to the standard deductive approach, we do not seek here to gauge how our case studies fit a given abstract definition of the State. We do not see comparative analysis in terms of the search for common denominators or as the quest for typological classification. Our method rests on empirical research with strong emphasis on the local perspective – that is, an interpretation of what makes sense to the people concerned.\textsuperscript{37} This perspective is indeed one that is liable to recast in a different mould the study of standard methods in social sciences.

Our view of the State differs from both institutionalist theories and from those approaches based on ‘sociogenesis’ or individual ‘psychogenesis’, such as that advocated by Norbert Elias.\textsuperscript{38} Of course, it is quite legitimate to study the links between the evolution of institutions and that of individual citizens, as well as the extent to which ‘civilised’ society requires social control and personal self-control. However, we must eschew the assumption that what has happened in the West is a potentially universal dynamic process. To illustrate our viewpoint, we refer to Elias’ suggestion that

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\textsuperscript{35} See inter alia Badie, B. 1983. *Culture et politique*.

\textsuperscript{36} For Huntington such a distinction is fundamental to the Western path of political development, whereas in the Islamic world ‘God is Caesar’, in the Confucian tradition ‘Caesar is God’ and for orthodox Catholicism ‘God is Caesar’s junior partner’. See Huntington, S. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations: remaking of the world order*, p. 70. In the Scandinavian countries, where the State is paramount, the dominant church has been Lutheran. For a discussion on religion and democracy, see here Stepan, A. 2001. *Arguing Comparative Politics*, Chapter 11.

\textsuperscript{37} See Geertz, C. 1983. “From the Native’s Point of View: on the nature of anthropological understanding”, in Geertz, C. *Local Knowledge*.

there is a ‘world of difference’ between an inherently dark and dangerous medieval path and the well-ordered street of a modern city. This is true as far as it goes, but we would want to point out that there is also a ‘world of difference’ between Sweden, where jay-walking never occurs; France, where pedestrians battle with drivers who seldom give way; and the utter chaos of a Lagos, where pedestrians and car drivers refuse to give way – thus provoking gigantic traffic jams.

Local notions of civic duty, State responsibilities in respect of public services or the expectations people have of its role in terms of social regulation, vary considerably according to environment. We will discuss below the case of a country where the State embodies social harmony and welfare. However, we start with the example of a country where it is ostensibly very strong but where there is pride in breaking its rules – except, that is, when it is beneficial. We conclude with a discussion of a country where the notion of ‘State’ does not make sense and where people turn towards kinship groups or clientelistic networks in order to access officialdom or to seek protection. In such circumstances, is it still legitimate to refer to this political system as a State?

**France or the ambiguous State**

It has been argued that the ideal type of the State was the French model.\(^{39}\) This is because it is the country where the processes of institutionalisation and differentiation have been the most thorough – due in the main to the fact that the penetration by the centre into the periphery was difficult and that resistance from civil society prompted the development of a formidable bureaucracy. Without a doubt, this administrative machinery was strengthened over the centuries, most notably during the absolutist period (when royal officers already enjoyed real professional careers), during the 1789 Revolution (which asserted control over a newly administratively parcelled nation) and during the first Empire (when the prefectural corps was set up). Furthermore, the State reinforced its grip in other ways too: through its obsessive insistence on secularity, the attempt to remove all intermediaries between citizens and State, central monopoly over education, strong interventionism in the economy, the establishment of the famous *Ecole Nationale d’Administration* (or ENA), the ethos of public service, and the exploitation of the ideology of the ‘common interest’. This is indeed a *prima facie* case of extreme State development.

Yet, if one re-examines the question of the autonomy of the State, not from an ideal or theoretical viewpoint but focusing attention on political and administrative actors over the last few centuries, then a different picture emerges. Here, the scholarly work of historians and those political scientists specialising on elite reveals a State that is far from the reified homogenous entity supposedly issued from the Colbertist, Jacobin and Napoleonian traditions. This also makes it easier to move away from intellectualised visions, rooted in the history of political thought, which either seek to praise or condemn the State as it developed in France.

Looking more closely at the absolutist period, usually seen as crucial in the formation of the State, it is not difficult to identify a number of ambiguities or paradoxes. It is true that the royal administration managed to diversify and to gain firmer control over a very divided society. At the same time, a number of factors would suggest that it was at best a proto-State: offices were purchased, hereditary positions were expensively maintained (this was one of the Crown’s main sources of revenues) and personal allegiances to those in power prevailed. There remained a deep and persistent fascination on the part of this *noblesse de robe* for with the old aristocratic model.\(^{40}\) Finally, particularistic and patrimonial relations still flourished. Moreover, insofar as the institutional

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order was embodied in the very person of the King\textsuperscript{41}, there was a contradiction between the requirements of an emerging modern and complex bureaucracy and the ability of the monarch to exercise meaningful administrative supervision.\textsuperscript{42}

Beyond Versailles, the country remained a disunited conglomeration of social, economic and political entities – old provinces, generalities, baillages. Sénéchaussées, military districts, academies and dioceses – which made for an administrative, judicial and fiscal labyrinth that conspired against the establishment of an efficient State system.\textsuperscript{43} Britain, on the other hand, though it is often seen as a far less ‘advanced’ State at that time, already enjoyed a far more ordered juridical order. As de Tocqueville noted, there were strong continuities between the Ancien Régime and the Revolution. The Empire préfets followed in the footsteps of the royal intendants in surrounding themselves with patrimonial collaborators who had deep local roots.\textsuperscript{44} However, territorial unity in France was only achieved, and not without resistance, after the Revolution, underpinned by a strong nationalist ideology, simplified the country’s administrative grid.\textsuperscript{45}

It might indeed be thought that the priority placed on centralisation, further strengthened by the Napoleonian bureaucracy, had finally brought about a strong State. Yet, looking at the civil service in the first half of the nineteenth century, it is clear that only a small elite was actually trained and personal relations continued to predominate. The private and public spheres readily mixed and promotion depended on favour. In addition, the numerous regime changes that took place during that period resulted in regular purges, notably of the préfets, who habitually behaved like local potentates, readily mixing political and administrative responsibilities.\textsuperscript{46} Although the definitive establishment of the Republic did strengthen meritocratic principles, there were still variations in the extent to which a supposedly autonomous bureaucracy was able to maintain its independence in the face of social conflicts and political discord.\textsuperscript{47}

From our perspective, the State only makes sense in its relation with, or rather in the nature of its differentiation \textit{from}, society. In the case of France, even those scholars who have stressed the logic of differentiation have also had to take into account a process of ‘de-differentiation’ – given the importance of corporatism, the bureaucracy’s intimate links with the private sector and the politicisation of the higher echelons of the civil service.\textsuperscript{48} We know that in today’s Fifth Republic, the appointment of top civil servants to key positions requires a double ‘sponsorship’: a political one, bestowed by the President, the Prime Minister or a member of the government and a corporate one by way of the approval of the administrative ‘corps’ to which the individuals belong.\textsuperscript{49} It is also common to reward political loyalty, as Mitterrand was particularly wont to do, with appointment to

\textsuperscript{41} Louis XV reminded parliament that “sovereign power is rooted in my very person”.
\textsuperscript{42} For a discussion of this contradiction, see Fauchois, Y. 1997. “L’absolutisme: un colosse aux pieds d’argile”, in \textit{L’histoire grande ouverte: hommages à Emmanuel Le Roy-Ladurie}.
\textsuperscript{43} See Godechot, J. 1968. \textit{Les institutions de la France sous la Révolution et l’Empire}. Looking at some key indicators – the low percentage of officials in relation to the size of the population, the continuation of private practices of tax collection and military recruitment – one could easily argue that the State was relatively poorly developed.
\textsuperscript{45} See Birnbaum, P. 1990. \textit{L’Etat en France de 1789 à nos jours}.
\textsuperscript{48} Suleiman, E. 1976. \textit{Les hauts fonctionnaires et la République}.
prestigious public office. Examples of similar practices abound: witness here the efforts made by prominent political actors to provide benefits to certain groups within their constituencies.50

From a comparative viewpoint, it is well to see the French case for what it is really. The above remarks were intended to balance the views of those who hold an excessively idealised notion of the French State tradition.51 However, we do not subscribe to the opposite stance, which considers that there is little specific about the case of France. Within Africanist circles, for example, there is sometimes a tendency to argue that in terms of nepotism or corruption there are only differences of degree, and not of kind, between France and sub-Saharan countries. Such sweeping relativism undermines comparative analysis. There is in France an impersonal and independent civil service that is not to be found south of the Mediterranean. As we showed in *Africa Works*, both cultural context and political behaviour are eminently different. This is why it is important to pay proper (scientific rather than normative) attention to the political implications of such differences.52 Otherwise, comparative analysis becomes moot.

Such considerations notwithstanding, the French people harbour a profoundly ambivalent attitude towards these central institutions. The French State is undoubtedly both strong and ubiquitous but a cultural approach reveals clearly that it also elicits keen reservations within society. A closer examination makes plain the myriad ways in which individuals seek to evade its reach. What is significant here is that such practices are not only the preserve of the ‘populace’ but also concern the elite. Many politicians and businessmen take liberties with the official ‘rules of the game’, as though they believed they had impunity.53 More generally, there is in society a general disdain for officialdom and regulations. Drivers readily flash their lights to warn their peers that there is police on the road. Faced with draconian bookkeeping regulations in the public sector, numerous offices resort to the setting up of ‘unofficial’ accounts as the only means of operating with a minimum of financial flexibility.

It is useful here to speak of ‘double language’. Citizens and politicians alike eagerly call on the State when they need it, or when they can see its usefulness. Otherwise, they just as readily denounce its inequities and inefficiencies. The perennial discussion about decentralisation illustrates clearly such ‘schizophrenia’, since it involves at the same time making greater demands on the State and seeking emancipation from it. A cultural perspective on such phenomena, based on ‘thick description’, is particularly useful here as it enables the analyst to refine comparative analysis. There is in France undoubtedly far less respect for the State than in Sweden, though it is a far cry from the Nigerian situation we discuss below. The recent judicial cases involving the creation of fictitious jobs (amounting to illegal financial subsidies to the Gaullist party) within the office of the Paris mayor provide an interesting case study of French ambiguities. So does the long-lasting collusion between political parties and construction businesses. Although the most recent instances have implicated the very top of the French political establishment (including allegations against President Chirac), many dismiss the trials on the grounds that these are well-understood ‘common practices’. Others have denounced the ‘politicisation’ of the magistrates. Whatever the case, the recent events have resulted in the indictment, and the successful prosecution of a number of politicians, including Juppé, a former Prime Minister.

50 A good example is the creation of the so-called ‘fiscal exceptions’. Edgar Faure was thus able to give special help to the pipe makers of Saint-Claude and spectacle makers of Morez, both in his own Department of Jura.
53 See Lascoumes, P. 1997. *Elite irrégulières: essai sur la délinquance d’affaires*. This is a sensitive issue, which may lead to the devaluing of politics and the rise of populist extremist movements.
French ambiguities in respect of the State are particularly obvious when it comes to the implementation of public policies. As Lascoumes writes:

We live by the rule of law but the empirical analysis of numerous local and national activities makes plain the extent to which legality is the object of negotiation. Alongside the abstract, vertical, legality, to which lip service is paid, there is at all levels an horizontal legality, which derives from the actors' negotiated adjustments made in order to reconcile their interests with the rules.54

Let us illustrate this observation with reference to legislation about the environment. The implementation of European Union regulations on ecology is perennially delayed, or derailed, not just because it is against the interests of powerful agricultural lobbies but also because the administration is complicit in failing to take the necessary measures. For instance, farmers were largely able to ignore the 1991 European directive on nitrate levels simply because they exploited the loopholes made possible by the legislation’s local caveats. French farmers have thus become masters at registering their support for anti-pollution regulations while finding ways to evade them at the local level. In this they benefit from the fact that the administration appears to be more concerned with general political and economic issues than with the impact agriculture has on the environment. In the end, therefore, it is the locality that sanctions the law and not European legislation.55

The same goes for hunting, where French ‘traditions’ effectively block European regulations on the protection of certain species and the safeguard of exceptional habitats. Government is torn between the political strength of the Chasse, Pêche, Nature et Traditions party, which is extremely powerful in some regions, and the need to conform to EU legislation. Local authorities are often complicit in the failure to implement the regulations but the State calculates that such laxity is politically beneficial – even if under pressure from environmental groups, it is frequently indicted by the courts for non-compliance with European legislation.56

In general, France’s relations with the EU are fraught with such cultural ambiguities. On the one hand, Paris seeks to use the Union to assert its European importance and project a strong international image – frequently at the cost of appearing arrogant to its partners.57 On the other, French governments give themselves license to implement European legislation according to own narrow political interests – even if they were fully behind the decisions made in Brussels. The point here is not that such tensions do not exist elsewhere in Europe, but simply that in the French case they reveal how deeply ambiguous the relations between State and society are.

**Sweden or the State of consensus**

In Sweden, the opposite is true: however eurosceptic government is and whatever objections it may have to Brussels legislation, it nevertheless is impelled to follow the letter of the law.

Such extreme submission to the legal framework of institutions is balanced in the country by very high levels of expectations regarding social protection and welfare provisions for the whole of the population. The State, therefore, is highly significant both because it is the guarantor of individual equality before the law and because it is seen to embody key (welfare) virtues, which entail onerous


social, economic and political responsibilities. It is ever present in people’s minds. It symbolises collective accountability, from the lowliest citizen to the Prime Minister.

From the viewpoint of a cultural analysis, it is of course important to understand the historical factors that have brought about this somewhat unusual situation. The medieval period (understood here as post-Viking) exhibited very few State characteristics, other than limited attempts at legal codification. The kings were weak, with little executive power, since the bulk of their efforts were devoted to establishing and maintaining political alliances. They were compelled regularly to travel in order to assert their authority over their vassals, over their temporary allies and over those members of their family whose loyalty was feeble. The assemblies (things), which were held with some regularity, were at once political, legal, religious, social and economic.

From the sixteenth century, however, there began a distinct, if halting, dynamic of State construction. Scholars speak here of maktstaten, militärstaten and skattestaten, referring respectively to the State functions linked to political power, army and taxation. The Swedish State brought the whole of its territories under unified and legal control much earlier than the French. This came as a result, not of the imposition of central control over the periphery but of socio-political processes that ensured the participation of representatives from all areas. It entailed not just representation from all the regions but also from the main estates: aristocracy, bourgeoisie, clergy and free peasants. Historical sociologists of this period have stressed the importance of the absence of serfdom and of the remarkable presence of peasant delegates in Parliament, which acquired in this way undisputed representative legitimacy and promoted standardisation. Despite the huge distances involved and the difficulties in communication due to terrain and climate, Stockholm’s relatively central position ensured the fairly rapid distribution of official documents. In this respect, Sweden did not experience the difficulties faced by the Danish-Norwegian State where, given the size of the country, it sometimes took months for official correspondence to reach the northern regions.

The Swedish State only experienced limited absolutist periods: 1680-1718, which followed the ‘long century’ of conquest and regional domination; and 1772-1809, which was however marked by the assassination of Gustav III and the abdication of his son, Gustav IV Adolphe. Thus, attempts to establish an absolute monarchy were swiftly stifled. By and large, Parliament exercised control and constrained royal power, as is best illustrated by the famous ‘Age of Liberty’ that characterised most of the eighteenth century. As a consequence, the State did not seek domination over society but aimed instead at achieving a general consensus, which was guaranteed by its representative sovereignty. Over the centuries, there emerged a privileged relation between the citizens and the central institutions of power, in which all parts of society participated. If the nobility had influence, it was less because it owned the land than because it gave service to the State, whether in the army or administration. The bourgeoisie, who were dominant in cities that had little autonomy, also had a vested interest in the modernisation of the State.

Of course, it is essential not to reify the Swedish State and to scrutinise carefully the interests of political rulers. Those historians who have studied the question of who benefited most from the control of power in Sweden have concluded that no single class or group managed either to capture or instrumentalise the modern State. Often, the King supported the interests of the peasantry against those of the aristocracy, whose indispensable services he still managed to retain by means of other

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59 Including that of distant Finland or those provinces conquered from Denmark.
rewards. Most of the time the monarch was no more than *primus inter pares* within a Council accountable to Parliament and his room for manoeuvre was reduced. For its part, the nobility was often divided and thus sought support from other quarters in order to prevail over rival factions.

From a comparative perspective, the Swedish State was one of the earliest to achieve the establishment of monopoly control. As regards coercion, Sweden pioneered the setting up of a national army within Europe. Even if it had to have recourse to mercenaries, the bulk of its troops were composed of peasant conscripts, who signed up for ‘military service’ in exchange for land allocation. This was crucial for a country long committed to expansion abroad but it was also critical in bringing about the integration of its diverse populations and in fostering a sense of national unity. As concerns taxation, payment was made to State appointed tax collectors and not to the local gentry. This was decisive in terms of the development of non-parochial social relations, since it made possible direct links between the population and State institutions, thus avoiding intermediaries. In exchange, the State was expected to work towards infrastructural and economic development. Because the country was heavily dependent on the export of iron ore, the authorities set up an important communication network right from the eighteenth century.

The transition from a particularistic to a bureaucratic system did not occur without difficulties. On the face of it, the process of administrative rationalisation was clear-cut. Right from the seventeenth century, efforts were made to bring about specialisation and to allocate well-demarcated responsibilities to full-time officials. Procedures were institutionalised: for instance, public accounting was based on clear budgetary rules, required professional bookkeeping and involved auditing. Similarly, the rights and responsibilities of public officials were codified precisely: for example, in order to ensure continuity of service over the given area over which they had responsibility, functionaries required permission if they wanted to take leave.

Nevertheless, when it came to recruitment there continued to prevail a venal system, which was not really compatible with a meritocratic rationale. Hence, members of Swedish high society could acquire official position by means of payment – whereas in the more absolutist Danish-Norwegian system, the emphasis fell more squarely on juridical competence, work effectiveness and career employment. In Sweden, the income generated from the sale of offices was the preserve of the sellers, who could use this as an advance for the purchase of higher office or to subsidise their retirement. Such a system did not neglect competence since in most cases recruitment still necessitated a university degree. Efforts were made to provide appropriate education – for example at the University of Uppsala, where foreign teachers were employed to train the country’s future diplomats. Consequently, the elite were keen to send their children to institutions of higher education – even, if they were often too young to benefit from the teaching. However, exams were a mere formality. In sum, at the central level, and in cities, civil servants were educated but they owed their position to their social and financial standing.

Students of Swedish history now agree that the consolidation of a modern, Weberian-type, bureaucracy did not occur until the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, it is important to stress that the tradition of bureaucratic transparency and of public access to administrative documents goes back to the 1760s. In this respect, Sweden was far ahead of its Scandinavian neighbours, which only adopted such open procedures after the Second World War. The same applies to the well-known *Ombudsman*, whose role it was to protect citizens against administrative abuse. Although this

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61 This tendency has lasted into the contemporary period, which explains why, for instance, the Social-Democrats have been opposed to cooperatives.
position was only formalised constitutionally in 1809, it was already effective from the beginning of the eighteenth century.

In sum, and from the point of view of historical sociology, it is easy to identify the origins of today’s strong, unitary, highly bureaucratised but consensual State in the country’s longue durée – even if the process of differentiation, notably between high public office and the political realm is much more recent.

Our aim, however, is not just to highlight the specific attributes of the Swedish State but to offer a cultural analysis of its place in contemporary society. In this Scandinavian country, the State has virtually acquired a ‘religious’ aura. Every citizen is not just aware of the laws but conforms to them as though they issued from a ‘sacred’ text. Everyone is vigilant. Transgression brings forth vigorous admonition. In this respect, it is important to mention the important role played by Lutheran pastors in the formation of the State, especially at the local level. If the State confiscated the wealth of the old Church and annexed Protestantism, it also absorbed the spirit of the Reformation. Unlike France, there is in Sweden no opposition between State and Church: the former took over the former but it retained its moral fibre. Despite the current decline in active religious activities, it is clear that Lutheran ethical injunctions to obey the law, which is embodied in the secular State, still carry much conviction.

The Swedish State guarantees the respect of the principles of equality, integration and inclusion within the framework of participatory democracy. Depending on one’s viewpoint, its ubiquitous importance in the citizens’ everyday life can be seen as either reassuring or oppressive. Whatever the case, it is without doubt a State that makes perfect sense to the Swedes, who have come to internalise both its reach and its wide-ranging responsibilities.

The picture, however, is more complex, for Sweden also exhibits a very high degree of individualism, which on the face of it seems at odds with the ubiquitous presence of the State. It is indeed difficult for outside observers to reconcile the Swedes’ apparent desire to conform and their highly prized individual autonomy. A cultural approach is useful here, for it makes it possible to understand that the State is the one institution that ensures a balance between the primacy of social cohesion and the respect of individual independence. Relations between State and citizens are direct, unmediated. The State has responsibility for areas, which in other countries would be the preserve of the family, the local community, the Church, charitable organisation or private insurance. In this respect, it is not dissimilar to the French case but there is a fundamental difference: in Sweden the State is not concerned to ‘tame’ society; conversely, civil society is not geared to resisting the reach of an all too invasive State. In the Scandinavian country, it is in fact the State that guarantees the existence, and facilitates the operation, of a strong democratic society.

A number of analysts have looked closely at more recent social (notably, feminist and environmental) movements, arguing that they show the decline of traditional corporatism and mark the rise of a more vigorous civil society – the origins of which would go back to the early nineteenth century. We would not want in any way to minimise the importance of religious lobbying, anti-

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63 The Swedish Lutheran Church was the State religion until recently.
64 See Daun, Å. 1991. “Individualism and Collectivity among Swedes”. Of course, one needs to take into account the actual cultural significance of individualism, which often points to a strong degree of self-consciousness or singularity, but which here refers primarily to the desire for autonomy.
alcohol leagues and numerous other associations, which have contributed greatly to the amelioration of living and working conditions. Yet, such activities were not similar to those that obtained in more liberal and bourgeois countries, where the State had signally failed to address such social issues. These were egalitarian organisations, which readily found a place within the State.

The explanation for this lies in the country’s socio-historical trajectory, which experienced little class conflict. Because the elite were not economically secure, they readily sought employment within public service. Of course, a number of scholars have pointed out that such an edifying vision of Swedish society could itself be an ideological smokescreen, obscuring greater social divisions. They have questioned the myth of the ‘independent peasant’, for instance. Nevertheless, such interpretations are as extreme as the ones they ostensibly aim to debunk. There is indeed no gainsaying that the absence of serfdom, the quite exceptional degree of peasant political representation and the alliance between the Crown and the less privileged social classes had a fundamental impact on the historical evolution of the State and must be a the core of any socio-political analysis.67

From a comparative perspective, this points to the singularity of the Swedish model, which a number of political scientists have argued exposes the limits of some theories of historical sociology.68 The so-called Swedish ‘model’ can be understood, not just as an ideological choice but also in cultural terms. Thus, the Social Democrats, who developed the welfare State to its ultimate logical conclusion, did so within a set of cultural logics that transcended their own ambitions and constrained their choices.69 This is a key conclusion, which lies at the heart of our approach, and which requires an interpretation of ‘culture’ going beyond the view that it is merely used instrumentally as ‘ideology’. Our hypothesis, therefore, is that the elite operated within a cultural framework that set clear limits to their action.

If the Swedes did not invent the welfare State, it is obvious that it was they who developed it furthest. For better of for worse, Sweden is a country that has combined the highest rate of taxation with the most comprehensive social provisions. Specialists constantly debate the issue of which model of the welfare State arose first, which influenced the others most and what differences can be found within Europe or within Scandinavia.70 Such discussion can often become ideological, or normative.71 When asked about this issue, the Social Democratic leaders – particularly those familiar with the so-called Golden Age when they ruled virtually unimpeded –stress the efforts made by the party and its affiliated organisations (trade unions, youth movements) to transform society. Theirs is a highly partisan political vision, which can sometimes amount to proselytism.

68 They argue that the Scandinavian experience is not easily explained by structural analysis such as that proposed by Barrington Moore in his Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: lord and peasant in the making of the modern world since there was neither bourgeois revolution nor disintegration of a small-holding peasantry. See also Østerud, Ø. 1977. Configurations of Scandinavian Absolutism. Similarly, critiques have shown that Stein Rokkan’s macro-interpretative analysis, combining cultural (North/South European cleavages) and economic (East/West distinctions) factors, paid too little attention to the national specificities of Scandinavian countries, particularly Sweden.
71 For a panorama of the country from that angle, see Lewin, L. 1988. Ideology and Strategy: a century of Swedish politics.
Given the somewhat biased, but nevertheless ambivalent, views propagated by the party — highlighting a high degree of egalitarianism and redistribution but within a capitalist economy — the discussion of the Swedish experience has become highly politicised, often superficial and Manichean.72 Piqued by the Social Democrats’ tone of moral superiority, conservatives readily cast the ‘model’ in question as a totalitarian nightmare, a system that extinguished all individual and social initiative. Radical Marxists see it as proof that capitalism could not be reformed.73 Such are still sometimes the views of those who are primarily concerned with normative issues, and in particular how far the Swedish ‘model’ either failed to live to its propaganda or has in fact been changing under the pressures of globalisation, the European Union and the impact of high immigration.

Another interpretation is that the nature of the peculiarly generous Swedish welfare State has its roots in the country’s historical culture. Some historians point to those who studied, and were inspired by, Bismarck’s social legislation in the 1880s. Others refer to more local precedents (the laws protecting the poor, the role of guilds, etc.), going back to the end of the Middle Ages, or at least the early nineteenth century. Similarly, it is argued that there are deeply entrenched cultural reasons for the nature of the highly rationalist corporate system that emerged.74 If the Swedish model was consolidated at the end of the Second World War, many contend that it emanated from the earliest period of capitalist development, when a paternalist bourgeoisie was keen to cooperate with a rather reformist working class in order to maintain social peace. In sum, the Swedish consensus on the need to avoid conflict and to promote general well-being is, in this reading, the outcome of an agreement between ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ to share the benefits of economic growth under the aegis of a strong, benevolent, State guaranteeing equal social and civic rights, ensuring the operation of extensive public services and working to make certain that there did not emerge within society excessive income differentials.

Presented in this way, these two lines of reasoning may well appear extreme and, thus, unsatisfactory. The first is an intellectualist view, which reduces politics to the question of party programmes. The second runs the risk of offering a ‘culturalist’ justification for the system — though of the two the second provides the more convincing historical evidence, as many analysts have shown.75

Our view derives from a more subtle interpretation of what lies between the two, even if it leans somewhat in the direction of the second. We consider the development of the Swedish State within the longue durée and attribute the success of the Social Democrats primarily by reference to the fact that their ideology, their actions and their construction of Swedish identity were in harmony with the country’s cultural milieu. In other words, they did not just evolve policies that were popular but which also managed to embody society’s cultural concerns. The pursuit of social justice conferred on those politicians a high degree of legitimacy and contributed to strengthen further a notion of the welfare State that was in consonance with the population’s expectations. Hence, politicians both used and were dependent upon society’s cultural foundations. If this is the case, then the more general comparative question is whether such a process is universal or whether it is itself dependent on the local world of meanings.

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72 This is the period when the debate centred on whether street sweepers should be paid less than managers and whether five years’ professional experience should be equivalent to a university degree. See here Svensson, L. 1987. Higher Education and the State in Swedish History.
This is central to our argument. We do not subscribe to the view that culture is a totally independent variable, which politics does not affect. Nor, for that matter, do we adhere to the view that political action can transform society wholesale, thus reducing the cultural dimensions to mere alternative ideologies. Building on what we have explained so far about the relationship between culture and politics, we would want to advocate an approach that considers the cultural framework within which politicians operate. As we showed in our last book on Africa, political elite can manipulate cultural symbols but they do so within a cultural environment, which they cannot fully master and which they must respect. We thus reject both the theory that elite merely manipulate cultural factors, behaving as though they were impervious to local codes and the structuralist approach that sees them merely as puppets of infra-structural determinism, whatever that may be.

From the viewpoint of what the citizens expect in respect of their duties and official responsibilities, it is clear that the Swedish State is highly institutionalised. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the Swedes are ambiguous about other models, even one as close as that of Denmark (let alone those further south): they envy their greater laxity but fear possible anarchy. 

**Nigeria or the State that does not make sense**

Nigeria stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from Sweden, since politics in that country is primarily driven by factors of identity and exchange, which have made impossible the institutionalisation of administrative and governmental structures. In a system that is primarily plural and particularistic, the State is not seen as a neutral entity charged with the protection and well being of the population. Without privileged access to individuals who are in a position to help, the ordinary member of the public can expect little from ‘the State’. As a result, the nature and level of trust in respect of federal states and local government are conditioned by the type of links individuals have with office holders. This explains why those who have felt excluded from the political system have sought the creation of their ‘own’ provincial state. The extension of the federal system and the increase in the number of regional states has afforded relative autonomy to a large number of ethnic and local groupings. The quest is endless but there are limits to how many more sub-divisions can be created, since these states are both expensive and divisive.

Clientelism and factionalism, which show no sign of abating, are not congenial to the putative Westernisation of the political system. Most Nigerians today are, as they always were, obsessed with securing protection from a patron – not from the State. Communitarian solidarity and membership of a Big Man’s network are the only effective forms of social ‘security’ in what is otherwise and implacably harsh environment. People seek out the ‘winners’, who are likely to reward the support they receive from their followers. In this respect, the conspicuous display of wealth is a political asset, since it implies that the Big Man is unlikely to fail to reward his constituents. The elite, for their part, exploit such personal and informal relations. Nevertheless, loyalty is evanescent and competition between the politically privileged compels them to deliver resources to their clients in order to sustain their prominence.

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76 There is a strange echo in the perceptions of the Swedes who travelled to Rome in earlier centuries and those who do so today, which combines fascination and unease. The very same words are used: there is attraction for an apparently freer and more bohemian lifestyle but disquiet about looseness, disorganisation, chaos, corruption, etc.

77 As is often the case with reference to Nigeria, or even Africa as a whole, the most enlightening evidence often comes from literature. See here Aluko, T. 1986. *A State of our Own*.

78 We use the term of Big Man because it is the one most commonly employed in Nigeria to refer to the ‘protector boss’. But it is also a reference to Sahlins’ anthropological model, which is applicable to sub-Saharan Africa. See here Médard, J.-F.. 1992. “Le "Big Man" en Afrique - esquisse d'analyse du politicien entrepreneur”.

An analysis based on the interpretation of meaning shows that in such a set up the main considerations turn around trust/distrust and about good/bad leaders. In the absence of an institutional framework that works, or makes sense, political relations are defined by primordial solidarity or clientelistic groupings. The complicated overlap between considerations of formal and informal politics makes any investigation fiendishly complex. But, as we have argued before, it is crucial to go beyond the façade of constitutional politics to uncover the more subterranean logics of the exercise of power in this, the giant of Africa.

Unfortunately, the bulk of academic writing on Nigeria rarely ventures beyond the narrow confines of the formal State. Political scientists, development ‘experts’, as well as local intellectuals, all continue to rely on a deductive approach, often without any historical perspective, which results in an analysis of the State that is framed by use of qualifiers, such as ‘soft’, ‘hybrid’, ‘developing’, ‘neo-patrimonial’, etc. For us, these mixed categories are not helpful since they suffer a double handicap: rooting in universalising models and at the same time suggesting reasons why Africa might be an exception. Such an approach thus manages both to give the illusion that it is merely a question of ‘development’ and to be ethnocentric. More worryingly, it makes it difficult not just to explain African politics but even to describe concretely what is happening on the ground. Thus, academic conformism, political correctness and conceptual stretching conspire to prevent understanding or insight.

Let us be frank here: the use of inappropriate comparative tools, simply because they apply in other settings, is not conducive to making sense of what is taking place in Nigeria. At best, such approaches conclude that the African country is ‘behind’, that its development is hindered by a number of external factors linked with the impact of colonial rule, the constraints of the world market or globalisation. Concretely, this means that the political analysis of the State is most often confined to the study of domination, violence or accumulation. There is too little attention paid to local political dynamics.

Our starting point is different. We seek to understand politics in Nigeria from a long historical perspective and by means of an inductive, interpretative, framework – and not in terms of how it may differ from that of the so-called developed world. Here, as anywhere else in the world, what matters is the analysis of the political realm in its relation to the other spheres of society. Seen from this angle, there are significant continuities, going back earlier than the colonial period – the impact of which appears in this respect to have been rather more limited than is commonly assumed. The postcolonial era is thus better understood as one during which ‘modern’ politics re-appropriated its local, African, heritage on the basis of long-established social and cultural codes, rather than as a phase of the continued Westernisation of colonial institutions. This does not in any way mean that there has been no political evolution since independence but merely that this evolution has been largely determined by the adaptation of what we might call a local political ‘matrix’ to the modern world.

There is no space here to develop a political and cultural comparison between the present day country of Nigeria and the pre-colonial territory it now occupies. A careful study of the historical and anthropological literature and several years of field research confirm a strong impression of heterogeneity. This is clear in relation to the question of social stratification: the argument that the
precolonial period evidenced a ‘common Nigerian heritage’ is not convincing.\(^{80}\) This type of approach usually goes hand in hand with the claim that ethnic groups were ‘created’ by the colonial rulers – an outcome that was made easier by the work of European anthropologists, who had classified Africans in this way.\(^{81}\) This is a very debatable interpretation, based as it is on the assumption that the precolonial area that is today Nigeria was harmoniously homogenous, and that it was the British who exploited and fostered whatever divisions may have existed between the groups who chanced to live there.\(^{82}\) Those who have studied the history and the evolution of such groups, and in particular their cultural specificities, know that there were significant cultural differences between them and that these differences have regularly become politically salient since precolonial time, even if tactical alliances have prevailed during some periods.

Nevertheless, there are a number of similarities in the political systems of Nigeria’s different ethnic or regional groups. For instance, whether we consider the Borno model, Hausaland before and after the *Jihad*, “classical” or military-type Yoruba organisations, the more egalitarian Ibo communities or many other cases, there emerge numerous common elements, which are crucial to our interpretation. Above all there was little of the kind of political differentiation, the type of institutionalisation, and the bureaucratisation that may have developed elsewhere in the world. Of course, there were in Nigeria strong centres of power, which controlled relatively large territories. Yet, such political systems never remotely evolved in the direction of a State differentiated from society, such as we have outlined in the case of France or Sweden. We are aware that many African and Africanist scholars reject this view on the grounds that precolonial ‘States’ in Africa were powerful and well organised. However, as we explained in the first part of the paper, such systems turned on a notion of legitimacy, which was primarily underpinned by exchanges of personal loyalty,ascriptive solidarity and particularistic reciprocity between patrons and clients. Nor did the distinction between the public and private spheres make any sense.

Colonial rule had only limited success in changing those political and administrative mechanisms and in establishing a Western political order. True, the British did divide the territory by means of arbitrary cleavages, which upset previous arrangements. Yet, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that colonial rule brought about systematic and radical political change in this respect, and this for two reasons. Either the colonial government relied on a system of indirect rule that depended on existing political dispensations, which such dependence contributed to legitimise. Or the imposition of new (Western) forms of political government was undermined by the ways in which they were appropriated and ‘Africanised’ by those who were put in charge. The British were less concerned to bring about the ‘modernisation’ of politics than in the more pragmatic need to ‘exploit’ the colony at the lowest possible cost. In the end, therefore, both budgetary constraints and the necessity to maintain legitimacy led the colonial government to rule in a fairly ‘informal’ manner.

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\(^{82}\) It can in fact be argued that it is postcolonial politicians who exacerbated ethnic divisions, torn as they were between their desire to transcend such splits and their inability to mobilise support other than by such means.
In point of fact, only the first two generations of Africans educated in mission schools were exposed to the European social and political ‘ideals’ that lay at the heart of the modern State. This small minority soon found itself torn between its commitment to the European ‘model’ and its allegiance to the rest of the population, who resisted their influence. The British relied heavily on these Nigerians, who worked in the colonial administration under the stewardship of a handful of white civil servants. However, a turning point occurred in 1890 when it was decided to colonise the interior. Europeans now replaced the local black elite. Frustrated by their sudden downfall and unhappy at a new form of racial discrimination, these educated Africans protested in vain. Barred from the civil service, they now turned towards the professions. This newly sharpened divide between white and black elite led them and (in greater numbers) their descendents towards a nationalist position. Indeed, it is they who created and led the movement for independence.

A careful study of the political evolution that took place in the decade preceding and following independence shows that the formal transformation of the political system had limited impact on the ways in which power was exercised. From the administrative point of view, the agents working for the traditional authorities (maintaining order, collecting tax, or enforcing the law) remained at the mercy of their employers, who could sack them at will. There was no code regulating the employment of these civil ‘servants’, or granting them professional independence. Similarly, Native Authorities had complete license when it came to the remuneration of their auxiliaries. Those who had the right contacts were well paid. Others, who might have worked much more, were left to find revenues where they could – not infrequently abusing the local population they were meant to serve. The attempts made to modernise the administration, increase specialisation and promote meritocracy, were at best feeble. In the North, for instance, the authorities were mainly concerned to replace southern bureaucrats with northern ones, since it was understood that the whites would leave at independence. This politics of Northernisation was successful in that it drove the southerners away but this was at the expense of professional competence, since the latter were usually better qualified. Those who replaced them came from the main aristocratic families (including their palace servants of slave origin), regardless of their qualifications. It was the Emirs who appointed all, even the heads of technical departments, on the basis of political loyalty and not competence or motivation.

The same continues to apply today: the loyalty of administrative staff is not to the institution they serve. There is in this respect no lasting internalisation of ‘impersonal’ norms. In this area, as in most others, relations remain particularistic and negotiable. Civil servants do not see themselves as professional officials within an administrative machine and do not consider those they are meant to ‘serve’ as an undifferentiated ensemble of people. From this viewpoint, therefore, the State is merely a façade, the formal regulations of which are used when necessary and discarded when expedient. Only those Nigerians who have lived abroad, for instance in the UK, object to these practices and bemoan the lack of reaction on the part of those fellow Nigerians who have known nothing else.

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83 See, for example, Ayandele, E 1966. The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: a political and social analysis.
86 See Whitaker, C. The Politics of Tradition: continuity and change in modern Nigeria, p. 181. In the southeast and southwest of the country, it was the elected officials, rather than the traditional authorities, who controlled the appointment of civil servants; the result, however, was the same.
Clientelistic networks or systems of ‘co-ethnic friendship’ prevent the advent of any functioning formal bureaucratic organisation. The more resources bureaucrats control, the more they operate as though they were in charge of a ‘business’. All civil servants, even the lowliest, find ways of negotiating the powers bestowed upon them by their office. It is often the touts, loitering around official buildings, who act as intermediaries to the office-holder, explaining that access to the service in question will have to be negotiated, in the first instance with them.87 Most Nigerians, who know full well that there is no other way, are forced to play this game – which serves both the intermediary and the bureaucrat.88

There thus prevails an attitude of fatalism and an inability to conceive that the situation could be any other than it is. The common response is not to criticise such practices but to find (and to pay for) the contact within that will deliver the service. The perceptions of the bureaucrats themselves transit along particularistic or extra-professional lines rather than the more impersonal ones that ought ideally to characterise a bureaucracy. Like everyone else, they give preference to their ethnic group. In a country where particularistic clientelism prevails and where survival strategies require the acceptance of unequal reciprocity, such an administrative ‘system’ is reproduced through the generations. Whatever the reason, the logic of a bureaucracy operating according to ‘impersonal’ norms, regulations and procedures has failed to take root. The State ideals that the colonial rulers sought (very late in the day and with little vigour) to impart to their successors did not survive long after independence. If this heterodox analysis is correct, then it becomes possible to make sense of a number of aspects of prevailing logics of representation and behaviour.

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Our approach, therefore, aims to account for what happens, concretely, on the ground, above and beyond theoretical or ideological debates about the State, which often lack historical depth. For analytical reasons we have developed an argument that sought to explain how Nigerian practices differed substantively from those of the other two cases. We tried in this way to show why it is problematic to refer to the Nigerian ‘State’. However necessary this was for the purpose of explaining what we mean by such a stark formulation, we would argue that the method we employed was still too deductive.89 Ideally, we would like to do away entirely with the need to explain why the modern concept of the State fails to apply to this country and devote our full attention to the empirical analysis, the ‘thick description’, of the nature and workings of social and political relations at the local level.

For us, then, a ‘scientific’ approach would ultimately demand that we keep our distances from a ‘general’ concept of the State, which in any event some argue only makes sense in the West.90 We would hold that it is not necessary to place it at the heart of research on politics. When it seems to make sense in a particular environment, it should be analysed in terms of its local relevance and historical trajectory.

87 As can be testified by anyone who has lived in Nigeria.
88 The intermediary explains the situation thus: “since you do not know anyone inside, and since I do, I offer my services to you, knowing that you will show appreciation”.
89 In Africa Works also we were compelled to develop an analysis centred around standard political concepts (State, civil society, identity, dependence, development), which led to relatively iconoclastic conclusions in terms of the ‘meaninglessness’, ‘non-emancipation’, ‘illusion’, ‘insignificance’ of what are considered to be ‘standard’ political questions.