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African compliance with state fragility to gain agency in the international system: A case study of Uganda

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Most states in Africa, due to their unique history of state formation, do not satisfy the established (western-centric) pre-requisites of statehood. This incongruity results in Africa being framed as a place of fragile states with African agency discounted in the process. The discourse on state fragility is instrumental in insidiously granting legitimacy for western governmental interventions in Africa. Meanwhile, the resulting reception of international aid and security assistance by African governments has produced an increasingly popular claim: African states have lost the autonomy to determine their affairs. An important aim of this paper is to challenge this assumption and re-insert African agency into the discussion by revealing how African state-elites have made strategic appeals to notions of African weakness and state fragility to convince donors to finance their governments and assist in the elimination of rivals for continuing their (sometimes) illiberal rule. Subsequently, speeches, interviews, newspaper articles and donor reports from Uganda will be subject to critical discourse analysis (CDA) to demonstrate this point. On a theoretical plane, studying how African actors' interactions with discursive structures have granted them room for agency, a dialectical position is taken in understanding the structure-agency debate.

Key words: Africa, agency, fragile states, discourses, Uganda.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In much of international politics, the primary unit of analysis is taken to be states and agency of a state is often assumed to correspond to its capacity for sustaining proper bureaucratic and coercive structures. In Africa, however, most states do not meet these pre-conditions

for state capacity, resulting in the categorisation of African states as fragile states with African agency disregarded in the process (Williams, 2013: 130-142). This framing of African states as fragile is understood to be vital for western actors in legitimising their increasingly interventionist position in African countries. The ensuing receipt of aid and military assistance by African states

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from western donors has, in the meantime, produced a popular argument: African-foreign relation is driven by western interests with African governments losing self-sufficiency in determining their affairs (Woods, 2005: 392-402; Duffield, 2001: 120-140). A crucial purpose of this paper is to dispute this claim and re-introduce African agency into the conversation by illustrating how African states have gained from their classification as fragile states and have even actively stabilised their perception as weak states for regime maintenance reasons.

One might question this all-embracing usage of 'Africa' in the singular. Following Harrison (2010: 15), however, there are some circumstances that permit describing 'Africa' as a whole as states with a shared history, as a collective international force or as a discursive entity. Today, African states are nowhere near a united presence in international politics and although they share a colonial history (and therefore similar development of states), due to the varying experiences and impacts in this period, even such a union cannot be strongly justified. Hence, the most powerful union African states hold is discursive. Africa has been established as a category and referred to as such on countless occasions by both foreign and African political and intellectual actors (Harrison, 2010: 16-17; Brown, 2011: 2-3). This is especially true in the field of international politics and development policies where common solutions and problems are constantly assigned to 'Africa' as a whole (Zondi, 2011: 5-17). In other words, I justify speaking of Africa in the singular based on the fact that it has already been extensively employed before. Similarly, any discussion of the 'western/donor community' as a whole would normally result in sweeping generalisations about various actors and organisations that differ along national and institutional lines. However, in the case of Africa, these actors subscribe to similar (interventionist) attitudes and actions in combating the continent's fragility, making it reasonable to talk about them collectively (Harrison, 2012).

Structure and theoretical framework

The paper will begin by tracing the rise of the fragile state agenda and confirm that African states are labelled as such on the grounds that they lack the accepted pre-requisites for state-capacity. Next, by demonstrating the historical variations in state formation between Africa and Europe (which reveals the non-universality of existing theories on statehood), a flexible re-conceptualisation of African agency that overlooks such requirements will be justified. Considering the diversity of actors in Africa, talking unproblematically of 'African agency' as a collective force is hazardous. So, it is essential to clarify that the only African agency that I intend to consider here is that exerted by the ruling class, particularly government leaders and their representatives. Therefore, a take on agency that is divorced from state capacity and employed

by state elites will be utilised to analyse the complex existence of African agency. In Wight's (2009: 187-188) neat phrase 'it is not the state which acts: it is always specific sets of politicians and state officials' who introduce meaning and intention into actions.

By looking at agency this paper also addresses the longstanding structure-agency debate, which may be perceived as the contest between social constraints and personal freedom in influencing events (Sibeon, 1999: 139). Against this backdrop, a dialectical position that aspires to engage with the temporally embedded nature of the structure-agency relationship in Africa will be taken. Eventually, a case study of Museveni's (president of Uganda since 1986) regime will be carried out to demonstrate how the Ugandan elites have embraced the fragile states discourse for securing greater agency in the international realm. The evidence about Uganda gathered from political speeches, interviews, newspaper articles and donor reports will be subject to critical discourse analysis (CDA) to demonstrate this point.

Discourses, in its most basic sense, can be regarded as a 'particular way of talking about and understanding the world' (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 1). Most discursive methodologies, including CDA, share a social constructivist epistemology- the notion that discourses are crucial in the construction of ideas and social processes. In other words, the social world is not 'given', but rather the common sense(s) and structures of knowledge in this world are constructed and normalised through repeated discursive activities (Milliken, 1999: 273). Proceeding with this understanding, in discussions regarding the 'securitisation' of Africa, this paper subscribes to the Copenhagen school theorists' argument that the framing of a security threat (here, the African continent due to its accommodation of failed states) is facilitated through certain discursive practices that stabilise this notion as an autonomous reality (Buzan et al., 1998: 21-23). Finally, the concluding part of this paper is dedicated to discussing findings from the case study and addressing the possible limitations of my work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Jackson and Rosberg's (1982a: 1-24) work *Why Africa's Weak States Persist* touched off discussions on the inferior capacities of African states. Over time, numerous analyses of weak states emerged and phrases like 'failed state', 'lame Leviathan', 'collapsed state' and other variations became prevalent in academic works.¹ Many of these expressions ultimately boil down to the inadequate and insufficient state capacity in delivering core services to the citizenry (Helman and Ratner, 1993: 1-19). Most scholars in the academic can be separated into 'problem solvers' and 'critical scholars.' Problem solvers are

¹ See Mazrui (1995, pp.28-9), Callaghy (1987, pp.87-90) and Zartman (1997, pp.19-37) respectively.

inclined to give attention to development and performance concerns of fragile states and produce recommendations for governments and international agencies in dealing with such states. This strand of work, however, provides little conceptual or theoretical reflection (Lemay-Hébert, 2013: 243).

Meanwhile, literature from critical scholars tends to challenge the analytical soundness of the fragile state label. They have examined the manipulation of this narrative by western agents for justifying their intervention into spaces classified as 'fragile'. They also highlight the misrepresentation of African reality and the imposition of neo-colonial theoretical hegemony through the use of this label. This is my starting point. Building on such works,² attempt will be made to expose the label's weak conceptual underpinning. However, many of these critical scholars dedicate little attention to the agency of failed states and prematurely conclude that they are passive victims of western discursive control. This approach is worrying as it presumes that fragile states are incapable of responding to the situation, thus further perpetuating their perception as weak states. Therefore, the contribution of my work lies in attempting to bridge this gap by asking how and in what ways have the apparently fragile African states managed to gain agency in the international system. This is not a completely new line of research, but neither is it a well-trodden ground. For instance, some studies have located African agency arising from resisting and publicly opposing foreign arrangements through the bolstering of pan-Africanist and nationalist rhetoric.³ In these works, agency emerges from acts of resistance. However, this view of agency seems less adequate to the task of analysing the *utilisation* of 'fragile state' label. Since this study was intended to study how elites exist within the system to extract benefits, my work will explore instances where agency emerged through acts of *compliance* with (rather than dismissal of) discourses that portray African states as fragile and lacking in agency.

There exists a small and somewhat under-appreciated strand of literature that examines the use of discourses (mostly on democracy and good governance) by African actors for manipulating western donors. For instance, Whitfield and Fraser (2010: 341-366) convincingly argued that Rwanda and Ethiopia managed to play the part of 'the good reformer' or 'donor darling' for gaining space for manoeuvre in their engagements with western patrons. Similarly, Bayart and Ellis (2000: 219-227) looked at how a range of African regimes have utilised 'the discourse of democracy' to manipulate the donor community into providing resources. Even so, there is limited exploration in such works of the relationship between utilisation of

discourses and African agency. Therefore, I will draw on these works for guidance in conducting my own investigation on the utilisation of 'fragile state' discourse while also relating it to African agency. Before doing so, however, it is first essential to explore the reasons and circumstances that contributed to African states' classification as fragile states.

Why the African states fail?

Max Weber's (1964: 156) interpretation, employed by many political scientists today, established the pre-conditions for statehood by defining it as 'a corporate group that has compulsory jurisdiction, exercises continuous organization, and claims a monopoly of force over a territory and its population'. Meanwhile, in much of the literature, agency is regarded as 'the faculty of acting or exerting power' independently upon situations (Buzan et al., 1993: 103). In the case of states, their capacity to act is said to correspond to their capacity for maintaining these pre-conditions: effective collective action, collective identity and compulsory jurisdiction (Williams, 2011: 8-9).

A state produces efficient collective action through its bureaucratic and coercive apparatuses. However, in the African context, most states do not always have a legitimate monopoly on violence to tame the society. Instead, coercive instruments are wielded by various regional and military groups that are available for hire to both governments and corporations (Dunn, 2001: 51-55). Without exclusive control over violence, internal conflicts become prevalent and state capacity becomes further compromised. Meanwhile, the fundamental bureaucratic arrangement in Africa is neo-patrimonial in nature. That is, top leaders swap valued goods (such as access to resources or a position in the bureaucracy) in return for political loyalty and support from subordinates (Callaghy, 1987: 93-95). This system of repeated reciprocity, a *quid pro quo* network, indicates that states acquire their legitimacy, not from the implementation of law and order, but rather from pleasing individuals in the patronage pyramid. When this is not achieved, the clientelist networks break down and military coups occur, resulting in a reshuffle of the state's personalised structures (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982b: 38-44).

With ethnic boundaries cutting across political ones, the pre-eminence of several local (tribal/ethnic/religious) identities render national identities in Africa fragmented (Widner, 1995: 114). Also, ever since it was determined by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) that governments would be recognised as sovereign as long as they commanded the capital city, the control of the outermost regions have remained variable (Herbst, 2000: 110). Even though this rule now remains revoked, due to low population densities in hinterlands, African governments continue to make compromises in their area of jurisdiction, thus encouraging illegal activities and contributing to the African instability (Herbst, 2000: 109-

² See Call (2008, pp.1496-8), Nuruzzaman (2011, pp. 288-9) and Dunn (2001, pp. 46-63).

³ See Lee's (2012, pp.93-7) work on the African 'won't do' stance in trade relations with WTO or Murithi's (2012, pp.662-669) paper on AU's collective rejection of NATO's involvement with Libya in 2010.

112). With the state regarded as incompetent in maintaining supreme authority over its entire territory and population, the account of a *Leviathan* (the most classic western understanding on statecraft) that can protect citizens from 'war of all against all' (Hobbes, 1651, chapter XIV p.72), fails in Africa. This has prompted scholars to like Clapham (1998a: 269) to go as far as to say that '...anything readily identifiable as a state is hard to discern' in Africa.

A little bit of history

These supposedly universal pre-conditions, that remain a litmus test for state's capacity for action everywhere, relate directly to the *European* process of state formation. It is not surprising then that African states, which have their own history of state formation, do not fit the definitions of sovereignty and statehood developed for understanding and analysing European nations. However, once specific constructs (about statehood) become fixed in place, the constructivist logic could seem almost as deterministic. So, the only means to reveal the constitutive capacity of concepts is by exposing the actions through which they became created. Taking a brief look at the varying history of state emergences in Africa and Europe will illuminate this point.

The most famed words about state formation came from Tilly (1975: 42): 'War made the state, and the state made war'. Indeed, the territorial borders of European states were established while defeating external and internal competitors. Meanwhile, the collection of resources for waging wars helped generate efficient bureaucratic and coercive structures state representatives to execute taxation, policies to regulate the extraction and the police to ensure compliance with legislation. Along with improved capacity for states to penetrate the society and monitor the population, facing 'external' enemies also consolidated national identities (Bean, 1973: 220-223).

In the newly independent African states, however, the story was quite different. The borders were never contested since the states were bequeathed with their artificial boundaries from the colonial past. In the words of Delavignette (1950: 276), 'the machinery had changed hands, but not the parts.' Also, due to lack of wars, there was never any need for the collection of resources or conscription to fend off aggressors. This meant that powerful institutions required for regulating and monitoring the citizens took time to appear in Africa (Herbst, 1990: 128-131). Meanwhile, due to the precedence of ethno-regional identities, the governments continue to remain concerned about loyalty and support, causing patron-client networks to emerge as the primary state-society linkage in Africa. This is especially true in the case of Uganda where previous coups and regime reversals can be seen as the manifestation of political

struggle between the different regional groups (Green, 2017: 11-14). As a result, the regime structure and political authority in Uganda, and everywhere else in Africa, is more personal rather than institutional (Clapham, 1998b: 143-144; Grovogui, 2006: 25-63).

However, the persistence of western theories that define a proper state through the evaluation of its institutional arrangements continues to deny the reality of African state formation and has profoundly impacted how the world perceives the continent. Relying on western concepts of statehood, many works have reached the conclusion that African states are fragile or failed. A failed state is understood to be a state that is unable to deliver crucial political goods such as territorial control, security and legal order, leaving citizens vulnerable to a range of shocks (Zartman, 1997: 20; Jackson, 1987: 527). Using this as their starting point of analysis, in its recent publication, Fragile States Index (2020) also identified seven of the world's top ten fragile states to be from Africa. When African states 'fail', they are not only perceived as weak players in the international arena, but they also become open to intrusions from foreign agents. The following will delve into the consequences of such intrusions.

The consequence of failure: Aid deployment and securitization of Africa

The overlap between scholarly literature and policy developments should not be overlooked. Knowledge generated in the academia is constantly utilised by policymakers in creating the 'dominant intellectual/policy perspective' (George, 1994: 34). Indeed, international policy initiatives since the 1990s mirror the change of attention in scholarly papers towards the 'fragile state' agenda. Since configurations of state capabilities remain fundamental in the present-day perception of state agency, the apparent lack of this in Africa has resulted in many works actively advocating the requirement for western humanitarian and security interventions in the continent. For instance, take the following excerpt from Rice and Patrick (2008:4): 'Africa is the region with the world's highest concentration of weak and failed states and requires increased US attention [...] to address performance gaps and improve security'. Academic works such as this (which falls into the 'problem solvers' category) provide western interventionist initiatives with a justification for moving into African spaces.

Intervention, particularly through aid deployment, is almost always appreciated as a morally sound and altruistic act. Indeed, the Commission for Africa under Blair declared that 'the developed world has a *moral duty* to assist Africa, which remains a *scar* on the conscience of the world' (The Guardian, 2001). Such statements, however, not only reiterate Africa's assumed vulnerability but also keep alive justifications mirroring the colonial

times, once again opening African spaces to the interventions or rather civilization missions from outside. Moreover, with foreign agencies stepping in for the supposedly 'missing' state, even something as basic as the capacity to act becomes an extension of forces external to the state, thus creating a *dependent state* (Bräutigam and Knack, 2004: 257-259).

In the years following the events of 9/11, however, a tendency has surfaced among donors to minimise development aid while continuing to expand military assistance. As Duffield (2001: 121) put it, development has now repackaged itself as a 'conflict prevention' mechanism, resulting in the continued militarisation of donor-Africa relationship. Beyond understanding this shift as a mere policy development, security initiatives could also be regarded as a social and intersubjective construct. According to Copenhagen School scholars, a matter becomes a security issue not because it poses an objective threat, but because it is represented as constituting a threat (Buzan et al., 1998: 21-23). This is made possible through 'speech acts.' Speech acts are not direct accounts of a presently prevailing autonomous situation or reality. Instead, they bring forth an issue (as a security threat) by successfully presenting it as such. Therefore, speech acts/discursive practices can be regarded as holding a performative function: they stabilise certain realities and thus facilitate certain practices (Searle, 1965: 221-29; Austin, 1962: 4-7).

In other words, 'securitization' of something requires the employment of speech acts that work to elevate it as a security threat requiring countermeasures that exceed the norms of everyday politics (Buzan et al., 1998: 24). In the case of Africa, due to its fragile states, the continent is presented as a security threat to western states and populations, thereby legitimising foreign intervention into African states. In a world that is becoming increasingly smaller and interconnected, it is argued that the conflicts in failed African state can easily spill over and 'threaten security at home' (Abrahamsen, 2013: 135). After all, the 9/11 incident proved beyond dispute that instability and disorder in one corner of the globe can traverse national boundaries and threaten the stability of the international community. Indeed, soon after 9/11, British Foreign Minister Straw claimed that 'unspeakable acts of evil are committed against us, coordinated from failed states in distant parts of the world' (quoted in Abrahamsen, 2005: 66).

The logic here is that if a certain form of the state is understood to be universal and perfectly exportable, the only thing stopping the development of the 'right' sort of state is the 'wrong' kind of people. Failed states, therefore, are no longer dysfunctional states affecting only local citizens. Instead, they are now 'free trade zone for the underworld' that needs to be effectively regulated (Abrahamsen, 2013: 136). Hence, securitization works on a preventive doctrine- it focuses on preventing potential attacks rather than fixing the problem after it has already

occurred. Indeed, the USAID website (last revised 2017) state that their 'work in preventing conflict and violent extremism reduces political instability that can threaten U.S national security'. Meanwhile, the UN (2017) also concurs that intervention in Africa is necessary for sending a 'united message to rebuke terrorist attacks' that would otherwise breed in weak African states. This pre-emptive approach permits western powers to become involved in African affairs even when there is no indication of a threat. Over time, therefore, western governments have heavily invested in regional peacekeeping missions in Africa, with the Horn of Africa now an important military hub for Task Force 150 that is collectively managed by Britain, United States, Spain, France and Germany (Fisher and Anderson, 2015: 135-136).

Duffield (2001: 139) argues that such security initiatives are imposed on African states as part of the wider western objective to establish itself 'as an intimate and regular presence' in the continent for regulating the lives of passive and vulnerable people. In a similar vein, Woods (2005: 393-403) also confirms that securitisation becomes a vehicle for western military expansion and corporate interests. With rising uncertainties in the Middle East, some scholars have also argued that the securitization of Africa is more precisely the securitization of Africa's energy resources, especially crude oil (Andreasson, 2015: 20-42). Some others have insisted that the 2011 Libyan intervention proves that post 9/11 western activities in the continent is 'selective' and motivated by geo-strategic concerns (Fermor, 2012: 323-361).

These works demonstrate that the 'failed state' label is often inconsistently utilised and politically non-neutral. The recognition of having failed is certainly more a matter of the certain actors' concerns and convenience than an 'objective' evaluation of the state's performance. However, the fixation of these works with western capacity for discourse manoeuvre leaves Africa with victimhood status. The assumption that African states are submissive objects of western discursive domination bears connotations of weakness. Therefore, works informed by this reasoning continue to preserve the 'state failure' narrative. Breaking away from this pattern, the subsequent chapters will reformulate African agency and observe it in action by analysing African actors' responses to the fragile state discourse.

Reconceptualising African agency

As the part on the history of state formation indicated, many states in Africa do not function in the defined ways when it comes to the delivery of core political services like security, rule of law, territorial control, etc. Indeed, their population has almost never obtained services from states, but instead through alternative forms of

governance established at levels other than the state-including via sub-state actors (tribes and local strongmen) and international institutions (Boege et al., 2009: 8). However, it is not always the case that stateless areas become hotbeds for criminal networks and terrorism. Often, local authorities, who might be more responsive than state and more credible in the eyes of the local population, emerge in such zones (Boege et al., 2009: 6-10; Niang, 2018). Even so, since the state is widely regarded as the *only* acceptable form of political organisation, when the state is unable to achieve supreme authority, it is automatically assumed that all control is lost.

Due to our preoccupation with fixed pre-conditions for state capacity, we are unable to accept hybrid institutions or political orders within (incomplete) state structure, resulting in the contextually insensitive assessment that African states have failed. Borrowing the words of Dunn (2001:50), 'the African state is not failing as much as is our understanding of the state'. Existing definitions concerning state, therefore, needs to be reconceptualised. However, it is not my intention here to theorise new definitions of statehood that can accommodate African realities. Instead, my objective is simply to destabilise the myths about a 'proper state' in order to justify my take on agency that is divorced from this Westphalian straitjacket. Indeed, we can no longer use institutional capacity of the state as an indicator for agency when existing understandings about state continue to miss significant elements of African politics. Therefore, my (interim) conclusion is that more theoretical consideration is required for understanding African agency.

Agency of state-based actors

Some scholars (Krasner, 1978; de Mesquita and Lalman, 1992; Wight, 2009) have maintained that state and its agency can be interpreted as actions and interactions undertaken by state-leaders and elites on behalf of the state. In other words, only structurally positioned governmental actors can 'bring into play specific powers and state capacities that are inscribed in particular state institutions' (Wight, 2009: 187). This is a useful starting point. Especially so in the case of Africa where state elites establish 'personal rule' and define the external representation of the state (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982b: 42-43). More recently, Ronald and Knowledge (2018) have also made the argument that African agency is multi-actor in nature and exerted by state elites in their interactions with external agents.

Proceeding with this understanding, a range of works have looked at how African agency is exerted by state leaders through outright resistance and opposition of foreign arrangements. Indeed, some states in Africa now trainings⁴ and condemn western policies by waving the

'African solutions for African problems' banner (Lee, 2012: 93). However, since agency arising from restricting external demands has already been explored at length elsewhere, this paper will attempt to study how aligning with donor activities can also become a channel for amassing agency. That is, the emergence of African elite agency is observed through acts of compliance with prevailing commentary on fragile states.

Agency from compliance: The role of structures

Unlike the voluntaristic celebration of agency that denies any role to structures, my account portrays agency as embedded within wider structural contexts. Here the term 'structure' alludes to the conditions within which agents function (Sibeon, 1999: 141)- encompassing the discourses that categorise African states as failed states. Indeed, discourses can be regarded as a type of structure that is 'actualised in their regular use by people' (Shapiro, 1989: 11) and it works to operationalise a particular 'regime of truth' (Milliken, 1999: 273). That is, while discourses stabilise and enable some representations of the world through the articulation of certain knowledges, they also silence and disable other forms of meanings and practices (Weldes, 1999: 154-155). In other words, they facilitate some actions while constraining others. This reasoning is true in the case of fragile state discourses since it privileges western notions of statehood while delegitimising others, thereby having an impact on the actions undertaken by African state-based actors.

My argument here is that African (elite) agency is produced by strategically complying with and utilising the structures produced by 'fragile state' discourses. An obvious criticism, however, in viewing discourses as 'a structure of meaning-in-use' (Weldes and Saco, 1996: 373) is the possible disregard for *material* structures. After all, when Africa is so hemmed in by concrete structures of poverty, underdevelopment, institutional fragility and military incapacity, it is only logical to believe that material conditions would affect (and even limit) African state leaders' capacity for action. Indeed, following this logic, one could even argue that African elites are not so much utilising discourses on fragility as they are abstaining from disputing an objective reality-Africa's lack of state capacity and material inferiority. I welcome this interpretation wholeheartedly. In fact, the rationale behind choosing Uganda, a country lacking 'hard power', as the case study for this paper is precisely to include the possibility for testing such an argument.

Presently, the Ugandan state headed by President Yoweri Museveni is financially dependent on over forty development partners, making it one of the world's top aid recipients (Branch, 2011: 84-86). Additionally, following the events of 9/11, considerable military assistance has also been granted to Uganda to strengthen the 'incompetent' and 'poorly trained' Ugandan

⁴Morocco with the US in 2011 (Morocco World News, 2013).

People's Defence Forces (hereafter UPDF) (Feldman, 2008: 46). Those providing foreign assistance continue to argue that Uganda 'has performed poorly in promoting the pre-eminence of state institutions' (Putzel and Di John, 2012: 16). Indeed, Uganda also regularly appears on the lists of fragile states and was ranked 24th the previous year (Fragile States Index, 2020). All these factors indicate that this country has arguably been in a condition of structural weakness, leaving it, in reality, with limited avenues for securing agency in the international realm. Hence, this could very well be a case study that admits the triumph of material conditions over discursive ones in influencing actions.

METHODOLOGY

The case study of Museveni's regime in Uganda

CDA is any analysis of discourses that takes a politically motivated perspective in identifying the utilisation of discourse in maintaining ideologies and structuring meaning (Fairclough, 1995: 32). By examining the power relations and social situations that language contributes to and reproduces, this approach works to uncover the 'order of things' as the 'order of discourse' (Foucault, 1972: xi). CDA will be utilised in the case study of Uganda to systematically uncover how the 'failed state' discourse provides an opening for Ugandan elites to express socio-political reality in accordance with their agendas and ambitions of regime maintenance.

The most popular criticism levelled against CDA is that the approach easily allows for researchers to 'cherry-pick' fragments of texts/speeches that confirm their preconceived conclusions (Stubbs, 1997: 7), making it possible for them to read 'meaning *into*, rather than *out of* texts' (Widdowson, 1995: 164). This paper admits that the quantity of discourse material out there is sometimes too vast to precisely identify manipulations and make definite claims. Therefore, the purpose of the ensuing discursive analysis is not to examine the 'real' causal relations or to produce the 'right' story. Rather, my intention is to look at Uganda-foreign relations (in the field of aid deployment and military assistance) and bring forth discursive evidence that will render ambiguous the prevailing view that discounts African agency. After all, 'critical' in CDA implies exploring 'connections and causes that are *hidden*' (Fairclough, 1992: 9) in order to demonstrate that our reality could, in principle, be perceived differently.

Aid for the weak Uganda

African leaders often require sufficient resources to feed their patron-client networks. In this circumstance, the ideal solution is extraversion. Bayart and Ellis (2000, p.21) describe extraversion as the process whereby state-elites access 'resources from their relationship with the external environment'. For African states, this extraction of resources from the international community is made easy through the utilisation of prevailing discourses that render African states as weak. For instance, Museveni (2016) report on *the bottlenecks facing Africa's development* was utilised by the AU (hereafter African Union) to navigate their highly mediated international conference on the continent's problems (Daily Monitor, 2016). The leading bottleneck mentioned by Museveni (2016: 3-4), and concurred by other leaders, was the existence of a 'weak state exemplified in a weak army'.

More recently, in January 2018, Museveni conceded to Trump's (alleged) description of African states as 'shithole countries' by

tweeting that '[Trump] talks to Africans frankly. It is the Africans' fault that they are weak...we are 12 times the size of India, but why are we not strong?' (The Washington Post, 2018). These remarks illustrate Museveni regime's active participation in re-enforcing the image of African states as weak. A direct consequence of such discursive activity is the invitation of aid. Indeed, resources can be more easily extracted from external sources when states reproduce and reinforce their status as fragile states (Fisher and Anderson, 2015: 143).

Aid packages obtained in this fashion have been vital in buying political support for sustaining the neo-patrimonial networks required for avoiding regime breakdown in Uganda. Political elites (top civil servants and army officers) are given the autonomy to utilise these resources for their own personal interest in return for loyalty to the regime (Tangri and Mwenda, 2008: 182). As Barkan et al. (2005: 14) put it, since the 1990s, Museveni started to 'look increasingly like a neo-patrimonial ruler [...] at the helm of a clientelist state,' making Uganda one of the world's top aid recipients (OECD, 2019). Moreover, to guarantee that aid keeps coming, a considerable portion of the state's function becomes directed towards outside. With donor-friendly programs in place, Ugandan state now has limited reasons for finding a more consistent source of income- through taxation or domestic production (Mwenda, 2006: 5). As a result, not only is the government incapable of increasing its own fiscal base, but it also fails to install a 'tradition of providing goods and services in exchange for taxes and fees' (Goldsmith, 2001: 127), thereby hindering the growth of the bureaucratic structures required for suitably extracting reserves from the populace. This situation, therefore, ironically furthers Uganda from the ideal form of state that deployment of aid is supposed to nurture, while also strengthening the regime's ability to further capitalise on Uganda's fragility to invite these aid flows.

While it would certainly be interesting to observe in depth the utilisation of fragile state discourses by Ugandan officials for acquiring aid, at present, I've been unable to locate sufficient discursive evidence for this. There is, however, still scope for further exploration in this line of research since the very act of accepting aid from donors logically requires the Ugandan government to participate in the processes (including discursive) that affirms Ugandan state's dependent and weak position in the world. More importantly, since resources previously allotted for development aid are now primarily re-directed to securitisation efforts (Duffield, 2001: 120-122), the Ugandan government's attempts to attain agency through the means of fragile-state discourses manifests most clearly in their dialogues with donors over matters of counter-terrorism. Therefore, the subsequent section will explore Uganda's efforts to reinforce concerns about 'war on terror' maintained by western actors, especially following the events of 9/11, in order to secure military support for regime maintenance.

The self-securitisation of Uganda

Uganda's peripheral zones have, to varying levels, endured continuing instability at the hands of many rebel organisations. Since the 2000s, western Uganda is held by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an anti-Museveni Islamist movement that has mercilessly terrorised the region (Prunier, 2004: 373-374). Meanwhile, Northern Uganda has become a base for the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a Christian coalition that has carried out numerous bombings in Kampala (the Capital of Uganda) (Tripp, 2010: 169-171). Additionally, al-Shabaab, an offshoot of the Somali terrorist group called the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), has also conducted suicide attacks in Uganda to demonstrate their objection at the Ugandan involvement in the AU peacekeeping mission (AMISOM) that intends to neutralise ICU (Tripp, 2010: 172). Over time, Museveni's government has made great use of this ongoing

insecurity to push a narrative of Ugandan fragility.

For instance, during negotiations with western partners, Museveni continues to justify his government's soaring military expenses by citing the ongoing fragility in the peripheries. It was claimed that Uganda could turn out like 'Somalia [post-1991] or Cambodia [after Khmer Rouge rule]' if military assistance was reduced (Quoted in Tripp 2010, p.141). By drawing parallels to conditions in other failed states, the Ugandan regime succeeded in making patrons drop any efforts to introduce a cap on the military budget (Fisher 2013: 16-17). That is, conscious compliance with traditional knowledge on 'fragile' states became a rhetorical tool employed to wear down sponsors into ultimately satisfying the regime's demands. This also indicates that securitization is not a thing that western actors did to Africa, but it is instead a position that African states like Uganda readily welcomed.

Indeed, in public addresses, Museveni and senior army spokespersons have repeatedly described peripheral areas, especially in the North, as territories of 'lawlessness' and 'insecurity' that are constantly threatened by rebel groups (Daily Monitor, 2009; New Vision, 2010). In other words, by characterising certain zones of Uganda as dangerous and ungoverned spaces, Museveni is able to emphasize that the state is incapable of securing dominance over its entire territory, thus 'securitising' Uganda himself. Moreover, the Ugandan government organised many state-managed crisis briefing trips to fly-in donor officials and western state leaders into provinces attacked by rebels in order to systematically reinforce narratives of Ugandan instability and chaos (New Vision, 2001a; Rosenblum, 2002: 195).

In private bilateral meetings and public speeches for foreign donors, Museveni consistently represented the peripheral area as a place tormented by 'bandits', 'criminals' and 'lawbreakers' (Tripp, 2010: 171). Following 9/11, however, the language employed to describe these insurgents shifted. They were no longer bandits or (as Museveni described LRA prior to 9/11) 'ordinary lawbreakers' (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999: 20) but instead *terrorists*. In his interviews and public addresses post 9/11 (Canada TV, 2002; Integrated Regional News Agency, 2005; Daily Monitor, 2007), Museveni portrayed the victims of LRA attacks as 'victims of terrorism' and described both ADF and LRA insurgent groups as terrorists. The regime has also been keen to stress the connection between these organisations and the al-Qaeda. For instance, in the weeks following 9/11, Museveni declared to reporters that '[Osama] bin Laden took [LRA and ADF] for terrorism training in Pakistan and Afghanistan' (New Vision, 2001b) and that the Al-Qaeda, through the ADF, had planned his assassination in 1999 (Marchesin, 2003: 4).

By directly combining Ugandan regime's enemies (LRA and ADF) to that confronted by the West (al-Qaeda) and by demonstrating the state's commitment to the Global War on Terror, Uganda has been able to elicit more military assistance. For instance, Ms Whitaker, the CEO of the US lobbying agency employed by the Ugandan state, managed to extract millions of dollars-worth military equipment for Uganda by expressing to the US secretary of state for African affairs that the country is supporting the US 'by fighting a war against terrorism' (Whitaker Group, 2003: 17). In reality, however, the extent to which LRA and ADF are 'directly linked to world terrorism' (as argued by Museveni during his interview for Canada TV, 2002) remains uncertain. While there is certainly some proof that ADF was trained by Al-Qaeda's networks (Prunier, 2004: 375), LRA is a group that arose primarily due to local grievances with at-best tenuous associations to Islamist fundamentalism (Fisher, 2013: 17-18). Yet, in 2001, Museveni's regime successfully managed the inclusion of both groups in the American 'Terrorist Exclusion List' (Integrated Regional News Agency, 2001). This development indicates how African elites are able to penetrate and manage internal state affairs of western countries in a fashion comparable to the ongoing foreign involvements in African political affairs.

Over time, Barack Obama, former US president, declared that eliminating the LRA was in America's direct 'national security interests' (White House, 2011). Washington has since actively backed Uganda, with the Obama's administration providing intelligence support and nearly one hundred military specialists to assist the Ugandan soldiers in their fight against the LRA (CNN, 2011; The Guardian, 2011). The Ugandan government is able to portray their local rivals as terrorist threats to the US and the rest of the world precisely because this same logic was previously (and continues to be) employed by many western governments in justifying their interventions into Africa.

Indeed, Ugandan regime officials have frequently emphasised that these rebel groups continue to threaten Ugandan and by extension international stability. For instance, in 2005, when the ADF was removed from the Terrorist List (due to its inactivity for nearly a decade), Ugandan officials insisted that ADF 'was never annihilated and ... [was] now regrouping' (Tripp, 2010: 156-157). Later, in 2008, Uganda's ministry of internal affairs declared, without any real proof, that they had 'neutralised' a supposed ADF attack that was planned to happen in Kampala during the Commonwealth Heads of Government summit in which the Queen was in attendance (The Daily Telegraph, 2008).

Later, when ADF moved their operations to Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2010, the preventive doctrine, previously professed by western donors, was cited by the Ugandan officials as a justification for invading into DRC to continue chasing this organisation. Over the years, DRC has played host to many insurgent groups against Museveni's rule, including the LRA and ADF. In reality, therefore, DRC itself was a threat that Uganda wanted to address for reasons of regime maintenance. Scholars have also argued that the Ugandan invasion of the Eastern DRC was at least partly fuelled by economic motives. Indeed, this mediation has provided the Ugandan government with the ideal situation to profit from Congo's enormous mineral wealth (Reno, 2000: 6-7). This was a long-term regional goal that was formed outside of Uganda's relationship with donors. The intervention itself, however, was justified by linking ADF rivals with global terrorism and by employing the same preventive strategy utilised by western securitisation missions. In his speech, for instance, Museveni declared that the intervention was necessary 'in order to secure Uganda's security interests' (The Observer, 2014). More recently, the Ugandan military spokesperson Brig Richard Karemire claimed that '...in a *pre-emptive move*, UPDF conducted attacks on [ADF] camps in Eastern DRC' (Daily Monitor, 2017) indicating that military operations carried out by Uganda in DRC are preventive in nature.

Unsurprisingly, the regime's justification for continuing AMISOM operations in Somalia remain that it is necessary for preventing the global terrorist threat posed by al-Shabaab. In February 2007, for example, the Ugandan defence minister Crispus Kiyonga stated that Ugandan soldiers had a '*moral obligation* to undertake [Somalian intervention] for the good of the region' (Parliament of Uganda Proceedings, 2007). Similarly, Museveni also wrote in Foreign Policy (August 2010) that '...the support of the international community remains critical ... in this *common* endeavour'. Ugandan regime's efforts to portray itself as an ally in the global war on terror have enabled it to extract external funding and logistical assistance and thereby subsidise larger militaries in the AMISOM intervention (Eriksson, 2013: 36; New Vision, 2009).

Once something (here Africa) becomes securitized, it becomes difficult (even for the ones who established it) to roll back on the securitisation process (Buzan et al., 1998: 24). Borrowing the title of Appadurai's (1986) book, discourses have a 'social life', making it possible for African elites to appropriate and reproduce them as they please for meeting their own goals. Moreover, it becomes increasingly challenging for sponsors to oppose or even withdraw support for such interventions when the Ugandan administration tactfully align their goals with the western objectives and make strategic appeals to the norms and discourses initially advocated by

the West. If donors attempt to refute these actions, they delegitimise their own involvements in Africa. As a result, the US created a legal framework and lobbied neighbouring African governments into cooperation arrangements for legitimising and facilitating Uganda's cross-border pursuits in the region. Western governments also facilitated an agreement between Uganda and DRC, enabling the former's military to legally enter the DRC territory (Atkinson, 2009: 13-16).

Other countries also employ similar strategies to justify their regional interventions and destruction of regime rivals. For instance, Ethiopia justified intervening in Somalia as part of AMISOM by constructing ICU (their regime rival in Somalia) as the 'Taliban of Africa'. Former Ethiopian Prime minister Zenawi also frequently highlighted that the 'US and Ethiopian interests converge...due to the *global* threat posed by Islamists' (The Washington Post, 2006). Meanwhile, Deby, the president of Chad, recently said that 'Chad is a small country...[and] it is the duty of those who have more means to help it'. By converging with donor discourses that encourage the notion of state weakness, Deby was able to crush rebellions in 2006 and 2008 with the direct assistance of French troops (BBC News, 2008).

Using the logic 'our enemy is your enemy', African regimes have, therefore, become successful in framing certain organisations hostile to their regime as 'international' security threats, thus prompting donors to believe that defeating these groups is somehow in their direct security interest. This plan, when successful, has brought with it large quantities of military resources, equipment and cooperation, resulting in the entrenchment of illiberal state-building policies and the long-term hegemony over the securitization agenda by African elites. Ultimately, this demonstrates that African states are not as weak or fragile as they are made out to be.

DISCUSSION

As observed, Kampala's efforts to ensure that foreign sponsors view their country through the lens of 'state fragility' is primarily motivated by reasons for preserving the regime—to sustain Museveni's authoritarian and neo-patrimonial rule and to eliminate local rivals and rebellions. This problematises existing notions of agency that rely solely on state institutions' capacity for action. Indeed, this case study demonstrates a calculated attempt on the part of African state actors to subtly secure agency in their interactions with international actors through particular acts of self-constitution in compliance with existing perception of Africa. Indeed, it is not the case that Ugandan state elites are simply refraining from contesting the failed state label. Instead, they actively participate in its articulation and amplification. The Ugandan case also calls into question analyses of fragile states that portray the discourse entirely as a foreign intrusion upon African states. It becomes evident that both western and African actors mutually utilise discourses on failed states to operate and further their individual agendas (reception of resources for African states and justification for intervention for western donors).

More importantly, it is not true anymore that western actors are the only legitimate speakers, whose discourses African elites then hijack. In recent times, for defending their actions, western donors have utilised

narratives that *commenced* in Africa, indicating that African elites also have the authority to speak (and be heard) now. Indeed, soon after Museveni described local insurgents as 'terrorists', US officials repeatedly made reference to 'home-grown terrorism' in their discussions about Uganda and the rest of Africa. They cited Museveni's speeches as evidence for furthering the 'securitization' of Africa from their part (United States Congress, 2005). In the end, both sides have constantly worked to reinforce discourses of state failure in Africa, making it a vicious cycle that is hard to break away from.

It would, however, be erroneous to conclude that every country in Africa employs these strategies of securitisation and extraversion. Therefore, generalisability over many cases is not the intent of my singular case study. The aim is instead to observe discontinuity and breaks within naturalised discourses. Discourses that construct and normalise the social world are 'themselves also open, inherently unstable, and always in the process of being articulated' (Doty, 1996: 6). Often the mechanism and means of dominant discourses and the actions they enable can only be seen clearly in instances of disruption or fracture. This case study is one such instance of breakage. By putting forth evidence from Uganda that the prevailing 'truth' fails to acknowledge, the contingent nature of the failed state discourses is revealed, thereby opening the actions and activities it facilitates to scrutiny.

Material reality

African elites continue to require external help (in the form of aid and military assistance) to sustain neo-patrimonial links and suppress local rivals. Thus, there is certainly an undeniable difference in material capacities between African and western states. However, this is not to mean that African elites are agency-less and weak. Although existing discourses were established by western actors (perhaps due to their material strength), knowledge, once constructed, becomes somewhat autonomous, thereby *impartially* providing the context for further actions from *all* actors to transpire. Therefore, neither African elites nor western actors are now capable of functioning and furthering their preferences outside the influence of these discourses. Indeed, the extent to which western governments are able to intervene in Africa relies on the extent to which they can effectively portray the image of a failed Africa as an objective reality. That is, regardless of their material capacities to intervene, they are still required to legitimise it through discourses.

Therefore, although I am not denying the presence of what is usually thought of as a 'material reality', such a reality remains inseparable from the construction of social reality through discourses. As Foucault (in Hall, 1997, p.45) wrote 'nothing has any meaning outside of discourse'. Discourses substantiate the otherwise inert material realm (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 105). Even

though African actors did not previously have the agency to securitize matters they wanted, once influential international actors stabilised a certain understanding of Africa, elites found their own ways and voices for profiting from this situation. This means that African governments do not have to depend on hard power, such as military strength or economic might, to achieve their goals (of regime maintenance), but can instead draw on discourses to gain from their interactions with western governments.

Mutual constitution of structure and agency

So far, in my accounts of African (elite) agency, I have been careful to mind that these elites are also bearers of the pre-existing structural setting in which they act. At every point in time agents meet with already given social contexts that are the outcome of actions undertaken in the past (Hay, 1995, pp. 198–200). In the case of African elites, they confront (and draw upon) the ready-made discourses that categorise Africa as a failed state. However, it is not the case that these structures determine actions. They, while constraining agents, also enable certain actions (Sibeon, 1999: 141-142). Here, the context still enables African elites to comply with and utilise existing discourses for their own purposes. Therefore, through compliance with dominant understandings about Africa and statehood, elites have, over time, amassed more agency and managed to negotiate, influence and even drive their engagements with western donors. In other words, we have seen the role of structures in influencing actions undertaken by African elites.

Another detail that seems to emerge from the case study is the subsequent impact on structures made by ensuing actions. Indeed, actions taken by Ugandan elites re-produce and strengthen the ideational structures that they initially rely on. In other words, agents also exert influence on existing structures and play a part in assembling the context for the next set of actions to occur (Sibeon, 1999: 143). In the case of Uganda, agents will have to continually articulate the African fragility as long as they rely on them, thereby renewing the weak state narrative time and again. What becomes evident here is that the events from Uganda occur due to the dialectical interplay between structure and agents. That is, while the failed state narrative provided a pre-existing context within which elites could act, in acting, agents subsequently re-produced these structures, thereby once again becoming constrained by the discourses on fragile states in their future actions. Therefore, the relationship between agency and structure can be interpreted as an inherently historical affair 'in which structures and actors stand in temporal relations of priority and posteriority towards one another' (Lewis, 2002: 19).

Conclusion

As this paper has demonstrated, the fragile state label is a normative tool that is co-produced by African and western agents for legitimising their objectives in foreign policy. On the donor side, the concept is primarily used to justify interventionist policies. Indeed, providing aid and military assistance is rarely an act of generosity, but instead presents sponsors with economic and political advantages. Meanwhile, actors in these 'fragile states' have not stayed inert during the foreign dissemination of this discourse. Although there are instances where this framing is opposed, it is also usually allowed, made use of and reproduced in occasions where there is a potential for profit.

The case study of Uganda demonstrates how seemingly fragile and aid-dependent states are able to obtain important foreign assistance to maintain the regime by positioning themselves inside western devised discourses. By drawing on the popular understanding of what a state is, and by emphasising (and sometimes exaggerating) its failure in Uganda, officials have managed to convince western governments that it remains worthy of their support. Military support obtained in this manner has served to strengthen the coercive capacity of the state, which is then instrumentalised to repress insurgencies and perceived threats to the regime, thus allowing tyrannical rulers to remain in power. This approach has enabled Ugandan state-based actors to carve out agency at various levels in their involvement with western actors, whose material capacities would otherwise render African states subordinate.

The most self-evident deficiency of the concept of state failure is the ahistoricity and rigidity surrounding the understanding of state, combined with its inability to accept alternative modes of governance. The fact that this label can be so easily manipulated casts doubt upon its usefulness and integrity. Therefore, following Call (2008: 1491) and Nay (2013: 330), who reprimanded the 'incoherent' and 'imprecise' character of the fragile state theory, this paper also calls for the abandonment of this concept due to its lack of any true analytical use. It should be clarified that this paper is not aimed as a defence for 'fragile' states to continue functioning as it is. Such states could very well, in some cases, threaten international stability and allow terrorist networks to operate due to its poor security apparatuses. However, the point here is that providing aid and securitising Africa is not the answer. Unfortunately, these solutions only work to shield illiberal states and maximise the political position of Africa's ruling elites while leaving the welfare of the citizens seriously compromised.

Lastly, following the constructivist logic, the social world is relativistic, making the evidence generated by this discourse analysis at best one possible perception of the social world that competes with other dominant understandings (Seidman and Wagner, 1992: 173).

However, as a discourse produced in an academic context- which is a main site for the production of knowledge that lends to the common senses of this world (George, 1994: 35); this dissertation contributes to the articulation of an alternative Africa, one which is a site for the emergence of African agency rather than fragility.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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